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Who are carers?

Carers provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition, terminal illness or who are frail aged.

Australia has almost 2.6 million carers, and nearly 500,000 of these are primary carers – the people who provide the most care ([ABS 2004](#)).

Carers are sometimes referred to as ‘family carers’ to distinguish their role from other caring roles in our society such as paid care providers.

Many carers are termed ‘sandwich carers’ or ‘the sandwich generation’ because they care for more than one person – a frail parent, a partner or a child with a disability or chronic condition. The majority of these carers are women.

Nearly 2 million carers are of workforce age, but many have had to leave the workforce, reduce the hours they work, or work below their skill capacity because of their caring responsibility ([ABS, 2004](#)).

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Carers have been found to have the lowest health and wellbeing of any group yet discovered ([Deakin University, 2007](#)).

It has been found that on average, carers spend around 40 hours a week providing care ([ABS, 2004](#)). For carers of someone with a mental illness the average time spent providing care is around 104 hours per week (Mental Health Council of Australia and Carers Australia, 2000).

Carers are from all walks of Australian society and come into the caring journey at various stages throughout their life. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has identified:

- 350,000 Australians under the age of 25 provide care to a family member who has a disability, or a mental or chronic illness
—with 170,000 carers under the age of 18 ([ABS, 2005](#))
- 454,000 carers over the age of 65 ([ABS, 2004](#))
- nearly 2 million carers of prime working age (15-64) ([ABS, 2004](#))
- 31,600 Indigenous carers over the age of 15 ([ABS, 2008](#))
- 620,000 of Australia’s carers born outside Australia
—with 366,700 born in other than main English-speaking countries. ([ABS, 2003](#))