The business case for a carer-friendly workplace

carers+employers

a program of Carers NSW

In collaboration with Carers SA

1 in 8 Australians are carers.[1]



Caring will affect every one of your employees at some stage. They are either caring now, will care for someone in the future, or will need care themselves.

Creating a carer-friendly workplace is good employment practice and makes excellent business sense. Research shows that carer-friendly workplaces benefit from:

- Improved staff retention
- Reduced recruitment and training costs
- Reduced stress, sick leave and absenteeism
- Improved staff morale and engagement
- Increased productivity[2]

Workforce management

Advances in medical technology mean that people with disability are living longer, while Australians are retiring later and choosing to age at home. In the coming years, more people than ever before will need to take on caring responsibilities. Creating a carer-friendly workplace will be essential to manage the growing impact of caring on an aging workforce.

Productivity and performance

Work-life strain



Juggling work and care can be challenging. Without adequate support, carers report higher stress and work-life strain that impacts their health and wellbeing, and their productivity at work[3]. Many carers reduce their working hours, relinquish opportunities, or leave the workforce altogether.

By providing real options to balance work and care, workplaces can reduce stress and absenteeism, while increasing employee engagement, loyalty and productivity at work.

Staff retention and cost savings

Although caring affects all age groups, most working carers are aged between 45-64 years. People in this age bracket usually hold substantial skills, experience and corporate knowledge – and they can be costly to replace. Some estimates suggest that replacing a competent staff member can equal nearly a year of that employee's salary[4].

By focusing on retaining skilled workers rather than recruiting and training new staff, employers stand to make substantial savings.

Attracting talent

A flexible, carer-friendly workplace also contributes to an organisation's reputation as an 'employer of choice' for the growing numbers of skilled job seekers who want greater flexibility at work.

Corporate social responsibility

2.2 Billion unpaid hours



Supporting staff to balance work and care has wider benefits for the community and the economy. Each year, carers contribute an estimated $77.9 billion of unpaid labour to the Australian economy– the equivalent of 2.2 billion hours of unpaid care a year[5]. Enabling staff to balance work and care contributes to the wellbeing of individual carers and their families, and demonstrates a commitment to good corporate citizenship.

[1] **Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024 Survey of Ageing, Disability and Carers 2022**

[2] Supporting Working Carers: The Benefits to Families, Business and the Economy, Final Report of the Carers in Employment Task and Finish Group, HM Government, Employers for Carers and Carers UK (2013). Evidence was based on research with 200+ employers in the UK.

[3] Duxbury, L., Higgins, C. and Shroeder, B. (2009), Balancing paid work and caregiving responsibilities: A closer look at family caregivers in Canada. A report submitted to the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

[4] Lynn, L and Phelps R, PwC (2010). Failure to retain competent employees costing UK businesses £42bn a year. Accessed from http://pwc.blogs.com/press_room/2010/10/failure-to-retain-competent-employees-costing-uk-businesses-42bn-a-year.html

[5] Deloitte Access Economics (2020) The value of informal care in 2020.

10 tips for a carer-friendly workplace



There are many ways that an organisation can better support carers in their workforce. These strategies do not have to be costly, or require a major change in how an organisation operates. Even a small, simple adjustment can make a significant difference.

Raise awareness

Promote a clear definition of what it means to be a 'carer'. Many people may not identify with this term – they may simply consider they are just 'looking after' a family member orfriend. Enable staff with caring responsibilities to self-identify.

Recognise carers

Recognise carers as a distinct group within HR policies and procedures. Make it easy for carers to find out what support is available, and how it can be accessed.

Foster a culture

Develop a supportive culture in which carers feel comfortable disclosing their caring responsibilities and discussing their needs for flexibility. Managers play a key role in embedding a culture of support. Management should communicate an ongoing commitment to supporting staff with caring responsibilities, and disclose their own caring responsibilities where appropriate.

Consult

Understand the 'carer population' in your workforce. Consider using staff surveys to monitor the number, nature and needs of carers across the organisation.



Provide practical support

Ask carers what workplace support might be helpful. Options such as providing a quiet room for carers to take personal calls, a car space, a peer support group, online forum or "lunch and learn" education session can be useful.

Expand leave provisions

Promote carer's leave entitlements. Where possible, offer carer's leave provisions above the minimum legislated requirements, and explore flexible leave options such as matched leave or purchased leave.



Promote flexible working arrangements

Flexible working arrangements can make a big difference to carers – enabling them to balance the demands of work and caring, without having to take time off. Ensure staff are aware of carers' rights to request flexible working arrangements under the Fair Work Act. Consider making flexibility the norm, rather than the exception, for all job roles.

Deliver training

Policies are only as good as their implementation. To ensure that support is offered consistently, provide training so line managers understand the challenges faced by carers, and the policies available.

Monitor progress

Unlike most other diversity groups, staff can acquire and shed the role of 'carer' throughout their career. Consider monitoring changes in the carer population, uptake of workplace supports, and employee sickness, absence and turnover rates – and adjusting support as necessary.

Explore opportunities

Explore creative approaches to support staff such as paying superannuation for unpaid carer's leave, offering career breaks, or promoting carer-specific return to work programs.

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