Carer Friendly Workplaces
FAQ for Commonwealth Home Support Programme Providers and Aged Care Providers

This resource provides advice on attracting and retaining carers in the aged care workforce. Because of their unique personal experience, carers have many skills and a depth of understanding that can make them an asset in an aged care service setting.

Who are carers?

Carers are people who provide support to a family member, friend or even a neighbour, with a disability, mental health issue including substance overuse, chronic illness, or an older person requiring support.

Do carers get paid for what they do?

No, carers' work is unpaid. While some may get assistance from Centrelink, a carer usually provides many hours of unpaid work across months and years. Sometimes, they may even have to give up paid employment to be a full-time carer. Interestingly, support workers are sometimes called carers, but they are paid for the services they provide as they are employees.

How many carers are there in the community?

In Victoria alone there are over 700,000 carers, and very likely more as carers often go unrecognised or don't self-identify as carers.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018) Disability, Ageing and Carers, Victoria: Summary of Findings, 2018 (cat. no. 4430.0).

What positive attributes do carers bring to a workplace?

In Australia roughly one in eight people employed is a carer. This is a significant number. www.carersaustralia.com.au/parliamentary-friends-of-carers-focus-on-work-and-care

Carers come from all walks of life and working backgrounds. They have many skills and much knowledge to offer an employer. Carers are typically hardworking, organised and have good time management skills.

A carer's lived experience often provides them with a unique perspective that will add value to contemporary workplaces. For instance, they have developed clear communication skills, an ability to liaise with a range of organisations, and a tenacity to get things done.

What does it mean to be 'carer friendly'?

Being carer friendly means an organisation is inclusive of, and responsive to their staff who are also carers. It means getting the best possible outcomes for your organisation and its employees, which includes carers.

How can an organisation become 'carer friendly'?

There are several initiatives an organisation can undertake to support existing staff who are carers, and appeal to carers who are looking for paid work.

1. **Become carer aware** i.e., keep up to date with modern practices as it relates to carers, making sure this is clearly visible in all organisational policy and documentation. Visit the peak body for carers in your state to find out more.

At a minimum, employers can promote a clear understanding of the concept of being a 'carer' to staff across the organisation. This will help carers to self-identify and elicit hidden carers, while all staff will benefit from a shared understanding.

2. **Create a carer aware workforce**
   Provide training to line managers so they understand the needs of carers, as a component of their workforce, and the relevant policies so carers can realise their potential within the organisation. Consider training about carers as part of induction and onboarding for all staff.

Carers Victoria, the leading body for Victorian carers, can provide training and resources in this area.

What about flexible work arrangements?

Employers should consider making flexibility the standard rather than the exception, for all job roles. Flexible work arrangements can significantly assist carers in balancing work with their caring role without requiring extended time off. Ensure that staff are aware of carers' rights to request flexible working arrangements under the Fair Work Act.

How can organisations support carers?

Recognise carers as a distinct group within HR policies and procedures. Ensure that carers can easily access information about available support and access provisions such as flexible work arrangements.

How can organisations create an inclusive culture for carers?

1. Consult with carers

Provide open channels of communication which enable carers to express their needs and wants with their line managers or HR, if they are comfortable.

2. Provide carer's leave

Offer carer's leave entitlements. Where possible, offer leave provisions for carers that exceed the minimum legal requirements and explore flexible leave options like purchased leave.

3. Monitor needs

Carers may transition in and out of the role of 'carer' during their careers. Be responsive to an employee's changing needs and adjust support measures as necessary.

4. Be mindful

Keep in mind that since we have an ageing population, some of your employees who are carers, may well be caring for a parent or family member who has age related needs. Typically, these carers are juggling many things — their paid work, their immediate family's needs and their caring responsibilities. Employers who are carer friendly can ease some of the stress of employees in this position with the provisions we have discussed.

Where to from here?

The Carer Inclusive Workplace program is an Australian Government initiative in conjunction with Carers Australia. The initiative provides detailed information and help for organisations to be carer friendly, including online learning modules and resources for employers. This program contains a self-assessment that an organisation can undertake to check to what extent they are carer inclusive. The content is free and can be accessed at Carer-Inclusive Workplace Initiative www.carerinclusive.com.au.

How can organisations learn more about carers?

› If you would like to know more about carers, please visit our website www.carersvictoria.org.au

› If you have a specific question, please email the Sector Development team at Carers Victoria sectorengagement@carersvictoria.org.au

› To stay informed about information, tools and research relating to carers for providers, sign up to our mailing list www.carersvictoria.org.au/Organisations

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