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Supporting Carers in the State Service

Carers Toolkit

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Carers Toolkit

The Tasmanian State Service (TSS) is committed to supporting employees and officers in the TSS who are carers. Carers are a diverse group, but most formal definitions recognise that caring involves assisting a person who has a disability, mental illness, chronic disease or illness, ageing related condition, or a life limiting or palliative condition.

The TSS supports workforce diversity by providing inclusive workplaces where all our employees feel welcomed, safe and supported.¹ As part of this, we want to ensure that we support employees who balance work and care. Benefits to the workplace that flow from supporting carers include:²

- Reduced costs of employee turnover
- Increased productivity
- Improved service delivery
- Reducing employee stress and absenteeism
- Attracting quality workers
- Increased staff morale
- Building a resilient workforce

While there is a lot of support available to carers, employees sometimes report having reservations about discussing their caring responsibilities with their manager or team leader. They are concerned about the impact that requesting supportive arrangements will have on their career and the judgements their manager or team leader will make. Employees who have caring responsibilities can also feel isolated in the workplace, and concerned about how their colleagues will perceive their situation. Carers may experience stigma associated with disability and mental illness. The result can be that carers leave their jobs or take lower paid roles, impacting on their financial stability.

How to use this Toolkit:

This resource provides information on 'who are carers' and the supports available to carers both within the TSS and externally. Additional information is also provided in stand-alone documents specifically for:

- Employees with caring responsibilities on accessing the support available;
- Managers and team leaders on supporting carers and fostering an inclusive work environment; and
- Work colleagues on supporting peers with caring responsibilities.

¹ This is a commitment of the TSS under the TSS Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Framework:

http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/329874/FINAL_-_Diversity_and_Inclusion_Framework_2017-2020_-_March_2017.pdf

² Carers Australia, *Guide for Employers: Combining Work and Care*, 2016 <https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/storage/workandcare-guideforemployers-2016-logo.pdf>

Who are carers?

The *Tasmanian Carer Policy* defines a carer as:

“A person who provides, in a non-contractual and unpaid capacity, ongoing care or assistance to another person who, because of disability, ageing conditions such as frailty, mental illness, chronic illness or pain, requires assistance with everyday tasks.”

Carers come from a range of linguistic, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, and are represented across all genders. Carers can commence or end their caring role at various stages of their life. They may care for their parents, children or other relatives.

Carers provide a range of support, from personal care involving assistance with mobility, communication, dressing and showering, to other support such as behaviour management, emotional support, supervision, or assistance with accessing health care and other services.

The pattern and intensity of caring varies for each carer. Caring can be temporary or long-term, episodic, predictable or unpredictable, and can change over time, demanding more or less of the carer. Not only are carers undertaking caring, but many are also involved in studying or volunteering (in addition to other roles within their families and communities).³



Employees with caring responsibilities in the TSS

In March 2019, there were 31,022 employees and officers in the TSS. In the four quarters to March 2019, 9.34 per cent of the workforce accessed paid carers leave. This does not reflect the number of employees with caring responsibilities because employees may use other leave (such as recreation leave), workplace flexibility arrangements (such as flex time) or alter their work pattern or take leave without pay to meet their caring responsibilities. These numbers may also include employees accessing carers leave for parental responsibilities.

It is difficult to know exactly how many employees in the TSS have caring responsibilities. This is because they may use a range of different leave options to help address their caring need. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that 42 per cent of the TSS workforce are over the age of 50 years, which is the age demographic most likely to be caring for an elderly parent.

³ <https://www.mentalhealthcarerstas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2.-Caringajobahalf.pdf>

CHALLENGES FACING CARERS

While combining work and care can be rewarding, it can also have a number of challenges for carers.

- Carers are time poor. Almost 40 per cent of primary carers spend more than 40 hours caring each week.⁴ In one study, 52 per cent of carers reported having less than one hour to themselves each day.⁵
- The weekly median income of a primary carer was \$520 in 2015, which was 42 per cent lower than non-carers.⁶

Carers may experience stress, absenteeism and health issues which can reduce their and their team's wellbeing and productivity. Sometimes combining work with care is not an option, and carers need to change to part-time work or leave paid employment, which can lead to other challenges for the workplace that need to be actively managed.

Although combining work and care can pose challenges both for the employee and the workplace, there is already a range of support available to employees who have caring responsibilities. This Toolkit does not ask workplaces to introduce new policies to support carers. Instead, it provides guidance, resources and information to raise awareness about the existing support available to carers. Please read this information alongside your agency's policies and other instruments such as Awards and Agreements.



⁴ Tasmanian Carer Policy 2016 http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/360819/Tasmanian_Carers_Action_Plan_14_Dec_2017.pdf

⁵ <http://www.theworkfoundation.com/wf-reports/?helping-employers-support-their-working-carers/>

⁶ <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4430.0main+features602015>

Support for carers

There are a number of supports available to assist employees balance their work and care responsibilities.

Carers may regularly need to respond to urgent situations involving the person they care for that cannot be planned and which may fall during their hours of work. There are multiple options for employees to assist them in responding to caring responsibilities during work hours.

PERSONAL LEAVE

TSS employees may be entitled to use up to 10 days of their personal leave each year to provide care or support for a member of their immediate family or household who is ill or injured. Personal leave for caring purposes may be used for meeting caring responsibilities like tending to urgent or critical situations.

There are requirements that may need to be satisfied to access personal leave for caring purposes. It is important to check the relevant Award or Agreement to determine the eligibility to paid personal leave for caring purposes. Managers and team leaders should also familiarise themselves with what leave arrangements are available, so they can respond appropriately to a team member's request for support.

Leave arrangements vary across Awards, Agreements and agencies. Managers and team leaders can find information about the specific arrangements by:

- speaking with their Human Resources team about their agency's leave and workplace flexibility arrangement policies (where applicable); and
- checking the relevant Award or Agreement for details about entitlements to personal leave for caring purposes and workplace flexibility arrangements.



Carer facts:

- In 2015, there were just under 2.7 million carers in Australia, which means that around one in eight Australians have caring responsibilities.
- In Tasmania, there were 84,000 carers equalling around one in six Tasmanians with caring responsibilities.
- Females and males make up a similar percentage of all carers in Australia, with females representing 55.5 per cent and males 44.5 per cent.

ABS 4430.0 - Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2015

WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY ARRANGEMENTS

Workplace flexibility arrangements are another way for employees to balance their work and care commitments. These arrangements are useful for meeting ongoing responsibilities, such as accompanying care recipients to medical appointments.

Workplace flexibility arrangements can be useful for addressing situations that require immediate attention or for planning longer term support. In considering requests from team members who have caring responsibilities, managers and team leaders will take into account whether there is a short or long-term need. This will also include whether the caring role may vary over a period of time. Workplace flexibility arrangements can also allow for a full-time employee to adjust their hours to work part-time.

Some agencies have policies in place that provide for workplace flexibility arrangements to support employees. For more information on what arrangements may be available, contact the Human Resources team within your agency, or speak to your manager or team leader.

Examples of alternative work arrangements to support carers

Arrangements ⁷	Description
Altered start and finish times	Employees start or finish earlier or later than their normal times, but still work the same amount of hours overall.
Flex time	Employees on flex time record their start, finish and lunch times each day, and by working extra on some days, can build up extra hours to be taken as time off later in that settlement period.
Working from home	Involves working from home on an occasional or regular basis – availability of this arrangement depends on the nature of the employee's roles and responsibilities.
Job rotation	Moving from one job to another for a specific period to reduce work commitments during a period of care.
Compressed working hours	Completing hours of work in a shorter period than normal. For example, a nine day fortnight.
Other arrangements	Manager or team leader and the employee may agree to other arrangements or workplace policies, Awards and Agreements may provide for other work arrangements to be used.

When setting up flexible working arrangements or taking personal leave, it is important to ensure that carers also have adequate leave to look after their own health and wellbeing, which would be compromised if all personal leave is used for the employee's caring responsibilities.

⁷ This table lists examples of possible working arrangements. The specific entitlement to these arrangements will depend on the relevant Award, Agreement, workplace policies, and the individual's work type. Table adapted from Carers Australia Guide for Employers: Combining Work and Care.

Support in the workplace

In addition to leave and workplace flexibility arrangements, there is also a range of other supports available to employees to balance the complexities of caring and work.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Each agency has a Human Resources team that can provide guidance about entitlements to carers and to carers' managers or team leaders. They can provide advice on relevant Awards and Agreements, and about any other support available through the agency. They can also assist employees with advice on how to have conversations about their caring role with their manager or team leader.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)

Carers may feel isolated in the workplace and unsure about who they can talk to for support.⁸ The EAP, which is available to all TSS employees, is a free and confidential service that provides employees with counselling, coaching and support for workplace and personal issues, including issues involved with being a carer. The counselling services can be provided face-to-face or over the phone and can also be used by family members.

To arrange a counselling appointment with the EAP, call 1 300 687 327. More information on the EAP is available from your agency's Human Resources team.



WORKPLACE ADJUSTMENTS

Another key support for employees with caring responsibilities is Workplace adjustments, which can be made under the Workplace Adjustment Policy Template (WAPT).

Sometimes it can be difficult for managers and employees to find existing support arrangements that address specific concerns or challenges. The WAPT allows managers and employees to implement more personalised support arrangements for employees with a long-term adjustment need. Workplace adjustments for an employee with caring responsibilities may include changes to the way particular duties are undertaken, including restructuring of their role, changing the working hours, using workplace flexibility arrangements and leave options. Where workplace adjustments are necessary, reasonable and achievable, adjustments can enable employees to perform their job efficiently together with their caring responsibilities, and also meet business needs of the organisation.

⁸ <http://www.theworkfoundation.com/wf-reports/?helping-employers-support-their-working-carers/>

Workplace adjustment example

An employee regularly needs to attend a number of their parent's medical appointments every Thursday afternoon. The employee and their manager or team leader makes an arrangement to provide the employee with the time to keep these appointments and adjust their working pattern to make up the time they are away from the workplace. This arrangement considers the individual's needs and the workplace's operational requirements, so that there is no need to reallocate the person's work to others. The arrangement provides the employee with the assurance that their needs are being supported.

WORKPLACE SUPPORT/CONTACT OFFICER

Sometimes conflicts can arise in the workplace that are associated with caring responsibilities. Workplace Support/Contact Officers can be an important resource when these issues arise, as these employees are trained to provide confidential information and support to address workplace issues. Details for your agency's Workplace Support/Contact Officers should be available on your agency's intranet. Your agency's Human Resources team can provide similar support.

SUPPORT FOR THE OTHER CHALLENGES OF CARING

Individual care situations and the types of support carers require can vary greatly depending on the circumstances. It is therefore difficult to ensure that available support addresses the needs of all carers. Some of the challenges of caring that are not necessarily addressed by existing support options include:

- being unable to participate in training and development because of the unpredictability of caring responsibilities; or
- neglect of the care-giver's own health and wellbeing due to time pressures and other factors.

By their nature, these challenges are difficult to address within workplace policies or support options, but positive outcomes can be negotiated if managers, employees and work colleagues work together to address these issues.



External support, services and resources

There are a number of external organisations that provide services, support and referral information for carers. Some of the key organisations and the support and services they provide are outlined in this section.



Carers Tasmania

Carers Tasmania is an organisation dedicated to representing the interests of, and providing support to, Tasmania's 85,500 carers. They provide services and support including:

- Carer Support Plan: helps carers to gain a holistic understanding of the caring situation and its impact and to identify changes needed to improve quality of life and wellbeing. Carers are also supported to create and achieve goals in a carer action plan.
- Carer Education and Training: This includes workshops and information sessions designed to equip carers with the skills and understanding relevant to their caring role and to improve confidence.
- Carer Social Support Groups: Carers Tasmania administers several carer support groups across Tasmania. These groups provide an opportunity for carers to meet and get support from other carers, and to share information and experiences in a friendly environment.
- Talking it over: Caring for Carers provides emotional support with counselling staff who are trained to listen and offer encouragement and support. They can provide ideas and techniques for coping and bringing about change.

From April 2020, Carers Tasmania is being funded by the Australian Government under the Carer Gateway to roll out additional services for eligible carers, including tailored financial packages, one on one support with a professional counsellor, in person peer support, emergency respite and navigating support to help find other service providers specific to their needs. For the most up to date information on services available, find out more at: www.carerstas.org

Carer Gateway

The Carer Gateway is a national online and phone service that provides practical information and resources to support carers. It is a new national service funded by the Australian Government.

Find out more: www.carergateway.gov.au

Council of the Ageing (COTA)

COTA is the primary organisation representing the rights of older Tasmanians. COTA offers a number of services and support including Aged Care Know How, which assists older Tasmanians and their carers to navigate the Commonwealth Home Support Program.

Find out more: cotatas.org.au

Mental Health Families and Friends Tasmania (MHFFT)

MHFFT (previously Mental Health Carers Tasmania) provides support and advocacy for families and friends of people with mental health issues and mental illness. MHFFT promotes wellbeing and self-care, ensures access to personal support, peer support and knowledge, and provides training, education and information for mental health carers.

Find out more at: mentalhealthcarerstas.org.au

National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA)

The NDIA recognises that the role of families and carers is often essential in supporting people with disability to realise their goals, and includes them in discussions about supports. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provides information, referral and links to ensure families and carers can access supports in the community to assist them in their role.

Find out more: www.ndis.gov.au/families-carers

Department of Communities Tasmania (Communities Tasmania)

Communities, Sport and Recreation (CSR), a division of Communities Tasmania, is responsible for the implementation of the [Tasmanian Carer Policy 2016](#) and the [Tasmanian Carer Action Plan 2017-2020](#). This work outlines the Tasmanian Government's commitments to carers in the State. These documents can give you more information about the support available to Tasmanian carers.

Find out more: <https://www.communities.tas.gov.au/communities-sport-recreation>



Carers Australia Work and Care Toolkits

Carers Australia is the national peak body representing Australia's carers. This organisation has developed a series of useful documents on combining work and care. These provide further information about the support available to carers, and guidance for workplaces on how to support carers.

This document series includes the following:

- Carers Australia Guide for Employers;
- Carers Australia Guide for Employees;
- Combining Work and Care: The Benefits to Carers and the Economy; and
- Combining Work and Care: The Business Case for Care-Friendly Workplaces.

Find out more: www.carersaustralia.com.au

General Practitioner (GP)

Caring can impact on the health and wellbeing of carers, and so it is important that carers have regular health checks with their preferred GP who can provide advice on self-care as well as referrals to access other support.

Lifeline

Lifeline provides 24/7 crisis support services. The crisis support services can be accessed by calling 132 717.

Further information

The resource is designed to be read alongside specific information and resources for:

- Employees with caring responsibilities on accessing the support available;
- Managers and team leaders on supporting carers and fostering an inclusive work environment; and
- Work colleagues on supporting peers with caring responsibilities,

which provide additional information on areas specifically relevant to these groups of employees.

These additional documents can be found on [the SSMO Diversity and Inclusion website](#).

Any questions about this resource kit or the corresponding guides can be directed to the State Service Management Office at ssmo@dpac.tas.gov.au or 6232 7040



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