

POLICY STATEMENT



Male carers

A large number of Australian men care for their spouse, child, parent, sibling or other family member or friend. However, male carers are often not recognised, and therefore receive less support. Carers NSW aims to increase awareness and recognition of male carers within families, communities, workplaces and service systems.

Profile

Nearly half (44%) of all carers in New South Wales (NSW) are male. Men also represent around one third of all primary carers (the individuals in NSW who provide the majority of care to a person). Male carers tend to be older than female carers, and more likely to be caring for a spouse. For example, 83% of male primary carers aged 65 and over care for a spouse, compared to 70% of female primary carers in the same age group.ⁱ

The second most common caring arrangement among male carers is caring for a parent. Men caring for an ageing parent are less likely to have families of their own than female carers in the same situation.ⁱⁱ

Male carers are more likely to be employed than female carers. They are also more likely to have a disability themselves.ⁱⁱⁱ One possible explanation is their higher average age. However, it may indicate a greater need for formal support.

John* cares for his elderly mother who has dementia. He is an only child and has no other relatives to help out. In order to provide the care that his mother requires John had to leave his job.

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Policy and legislation

Public sector agencies in NSW are obliged under the NSW *Carers (Recognition) Act 2010* to ensure their staff and agents are aware of the principles of the NSW Carers Charter (Schedule 1 of the Act) and reflect the Charter in their HR policies. Human service agencies are additionally required to ensure their staff and agents enact the principles of the Charter. The Charter lists a range of best practice principles for working with carers, including a principle stating that *'The diverse needs of carers should be acknowledged...taking into consideration...gender identity...'*

The Commonwealth *Carer Recognition Act 2010* also refers to diversity and carers of different sexes in its Statement for Australia's Carers (Schedule 1 of the Act). Public service agencies must raise awareness of, and reflect, these principles.

'All carers should have the same rights, choices and opportunities as other Australians, regardless of...sex...'

Statement for Australia's Carers

The NSW *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* prohibits discrimination by services against any person on the basis of sex. Similarly, the Commonwealth *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* specifically prohibits conditions, requirements or practices that are likely to disadvantage persons of a particular sex, either directly or indirectly. While male carers are less likely to access services overall, services working with carers should keep these principles in mind to prevent the unintentional exclusion of men.

Key issues

Recognition

Historically, informal care has been primarily a female domain. However, the growing workforce participation of women and increasing overall life expectancies have resulted in more men taking on informal caring responsibilities.^{iv} In spite of this, stereotypes of the 'male breadwinner, female carer' persist, and are often reflected in the labour market.

Male carers are also less likely to self-identify as carers, and often see themselves as simply a 'father', 'husband' or 'son'.^v Even when men do recognise themselves as carers, anecdotal evidence has shown that male carers often feel overlooked or ignored by GPs in their caring role when compared to female carers.^{vi}



Alan* has tried to build a support network but cannot find any carer groups or activities where there are other men, or which cater to the needs and interests of male carers.

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Social support

Research indicates that male carers often seek practical support to assist them with the tasks of their caring role,^{vii} however they often have less access to social and emotional support than female carers. Many are reluctant to participate in support groups and carer programs, which tend to cater better to women. Male carers tell us that they wish more activity and task based networks were available for peer support.^{viii}

Employment

The *Fair Work Act 2009* gives all working carers the right to request flexible working arrangements from their employer. Awareness of this entitlement among men is increasing, however there is still relatively low take-up.^{ix} Gender conventions and stereotypes often mean that workplaces look less kindly on requests for non-standard hours from male employees than female employees.^x As a result, balancing work and care can be more difficult for male carers, and can result in penalties adversely affecting their career advancement and income potential.^{xi}

Key recommendations

To improve outcomes for male carers, Carers NSW, in partnership with other organisations, will work towards and advocate for:

1. **Greater recognition** of carer gender diversity in policy and legislation, to ensure services and programs are inclusively designed.



2. **Research and consultation** to find out more about male carers, their caring situations and their support needs.
3. **Targeted outreach** to male carers, using language, images, information sources and communication channels that appeal to men.
4. **Tailored support services** that account for gender differences in service use and preferences.
5. **Increased workplace flexibility and support** for carers of all genders.

ⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017), *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: New South Wales, 2015*, Canberra

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Deloitte Access Economics (2015) *The economic value of informal care in Australia in 2015*, Carers Australia, June 2015.

^v McDonnell, E. and Ryan, A. (2011), 'Male caregiving in dementia: A review and commentary', *Dementia*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 238-250; Macdonald, J., Brown, A. and Gethin, A. (2009), *Older men and Home and Community Care Services: Barriers to access and effective models of care*, Men's Health and Information Resource Centre, University of Western Sydney.

^{vi} Carers Trust (2014), *Husband, Partner, Dad, Son, Carer? A survey of the experiences and needs of male carers*, Carers Trust and Men's Health Forum, London.

^{vii} Sampson, M. and Clark, A. (2015), "Deferred or chickened out?" Decision making among male carers of people with dementia', *Dementia*, vol. 0, no. 0, pp. 1-17.

^{viii} McDonnell and Ryan (2011).

^{ix} Skinner, N., Pocock, B. (2014), *The Persistent Challenge: Living, Working and Caring in Australia in 2014. The Australian Work and Life Index 2014*. Centre for Work and Life, University of South Australia: Adelaide.

^x Wright, A., Crettenden, A., Skinner, N. (2016), 'Dads care too! Participation in paid employment and experiences of workplace flexibility for Australian fathers caring for children and young adults with disabilities', *Community, Work and Family*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 340-361.

^{xi} Ibid.