

carers and work

Often when people think of caring responsibilities, they think of parents with young children. However, under new anti-discrimination legislation, caring responsibilities extend further to immediate family, guardians and those with parental responsibility for a child. For example it includes caring for a parent, a child, a foster child, spouse, defacto partner, same-sex partner, grandchild, grandparent, sibling or other family member in need of the particular person's care and support.*

In many cases, family members need care and support because they are frail, or have a disability, chronic illness or mental illness. People who provide these supports are referred to here as 'carers'.

In NSW, 13% of the population, or almost 800,000 people, are carers. In fact, most people will either need care or provide care at some stage in their lives.

Carers help family members with personal care, health care, communication, housework, meal preparation, mobility, paperwork, property maintenance, social needs and transport.

Most carers (59%) combine their caring role with paid work, and the majority of employed carers work full time (63%).

The proportion of employees with care responsibilities has grown, and will continue to do so, due to a number of factors. These include the ageing of the population, the growing preference of women to be in paid work, and government policies that support people to live in the community.

Employers can respond to these trends by supporting employees with caring responsibilities. In addition, the NSW Government has introduced legislation that makes it unlawful to discriminate against such employees. Employers should reasonably accommodate the caring responsibilities of employees.

Juggling the competing demands of work and caring can be stressful for employees, but there is good evidence that the right supports in the workplace can make a real difference for the employee, and have benefits for the employer as well.

For employers, apart from fulfilling their legal responsibilities, the benefits of supporting carers include:

- Reduced costs through less employee turnover, lower absenteeism and sickness, and higher rates of return on investment in trained and experienced employees;

- Improved labour flexibility through the availability of a larger, more diverse labour pool, improved access to scarce skills, and a better ability to meet peaks in workload;

- Enhanced motivation of workers, including improved morale, greater staff loyalty and reduced levels of employee stress;

- Improved business performance; and

- Good corporate citizenship and enhanced corporate image.

Every caring situation is different. The kinds of assistance that carers provide to their family member will vary depending on factors such as the age of the person receiving care, the nature of their disability or illness, the length of time they have needed support, whether or not they live in the same household, cultural background and the community supports that they receive.

Carers' needs may be very simple, such as the ability to leave work on time, or access to a telephone so that they can check on the person they support. Some carers will benefit from ongoing flexible arrangements, while others will need them on a temporary or sporadic basis. Also, people's circumstances and needs may change over time.

* A full definition of who is covered by this law is available from the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board.



Ageing &
Disability
Department



NEW SOUTH WALES
DIR

NSW Department
of Industrial Relations

creating a carer-friendly workplace

It is vital that employers are aware of their obligations to carers and other people with family responsibilities under the Anti-Discrimination (Carers' Responsibilities) Act 2000 (NSW). This information is available from the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board (see key contacts below).

There is a wide range of practical strategies that employers can use to support their employees with caring responsibilities.

When planning how your workplace can better support these employees, start by asking them what they think would help them, and involve them in making decisions about what provisions would be most helpful.

Provisions work best when they are built into the organisation's broader activities and goals.

The following strategies have been shown to be effective in helping employees balance their work and care responsibilities:

Build a supportive culture that recognises that employees have care responsibilities and seeks to accommodate them.

Implement flexible work arrangements, such as flexitime, part time work, job-sharing, flexible rostering, and making time up later.

Implement leave provisions such as paid family, personal or carers' leave, allow flexible use of recreation leave and offer unpaid leave for single days or block periods.

Allow working from home on a temporary or long-term basis.

Inform employees of their entitlements and options.

Inform supervisors of employees' entitlements and options, and encourage them to promote flexibility.

Provide information on community services that can assist carers and the person they support. This could be done through an identified contact person, a lunchtime seminar, staff newsletters and/or a bulletin board.

Arrange access to free or subsidised counselling services.

Assist employees with the cost of community services.

Provide access to facilities such as a room where carers can leave the person they support in between attending an appointment and finishing work.

Ensure that carers have access to a telephone so that they can check that all is well at home.

What some people say . . .

My boss and the other staff are very supportive. I am able to arrive late or leave early when necessary with their full support. They know I'll make up the time later.

Ann, Office Assistant

I thought I'd have to leave my job, but when I explained my situation to my supervisor he was great. Together we worked out the flexible arrangements I need. It's working really well.

Trish, Bank Officer

Balancing Work and Life is one of our corporate values. Helping our employees to meet their caring responsibilities fosters commitment to the organisation and helps us to retain and attract valued employees.

David Smith, General Manager
Human Resources
NRMA Insurance Group

Key contacts

NSW Anti-Discrimination Board

for information on the legal obligations of employers towards workers with care responsibilities, Ph (02) 9268 5544, Website www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/adb

Carers NSW

for information, support and resources for carers, Ph (02) 9280 4744, Carers Line 1800 242 636