

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



SUPPORTING CARERS

A Toolkit for Staff and Supervisors

INTRODUCTION

In the context of the workplace, carers generally refer to individuals who provide unpaid care and support to family members, friends, or relatives with a disability, illness, mental health condition, or age-related needs. Carers play a crucial role in supporting our communities, and it is important that we recognise and support carers in the workplace.

Supporting carers in the workplace not only benefits individuals directly involved but also contributes to a more compassionate and inclusive work culture, boosting staff morale, retention and productivity and attracting quality staff. Supervisors are encouraged to foster resilience and wellbeing in the workplace by being aware of and responsive to the needs of carers, and recognising and accommodating their dual roles as caregivers and staff.

As a nationally recognised Employer of Choice for Gender Equality, Western Sydney University continues to proactively provide supports for carers in the workplace. The University understands that the impact of carers' responsibilities tends to be gendered and is committed to creating equal opportunities for staff and our wider community. Western proactively promotes and encourages staff with carers responsibilities to request and access the support arrangements available.

This toolkit is designed to assist staff and supervisors in meeting the needs of carers and the workplace. The information included is informed by and should be read in conjunction with:

- WSU Enterprise Agreements
- Disability Discrimination Act (1992)
- Fair Work Act 2009
- The Carer Recognition Act (2010) NSW

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“ It's important to celebrate our parents and carers at Western because they are a key part of our workforce...they need to see themselves reflected in the organisation. We need to visibilise parents and carers so that they're not stigmatised, they are not marginalised, they don't feel like they need to hide their responsibilities. ”

Kate – Academic Staff Member and Parent

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

With respect to Aboriginal culture and protocols, and out of respect that its campuses occupy their traditional lands, Western Sydney University acknowledges the Bundjalung, Darug, Gundungurra, Tharawal (also historically referred to as D'harawal) and Wiradjuri Peoples and thanks them for their support of its work in their lands (Greater Western Sydney and beyond)

WHO ARE WSU CARERS?

Carers are defined under the **Carers (Recognition) Act 2010 NSW** (the 'Act') as individuals of any gender who provide informal personal care, support and assistance to another person because the other person has:

- a disability
- a medical condition, including chronic or terminal illnesses
- a mental illness, or
- is frail and aged.

If you are employed to look after someone, are a volunteer with an organisation or undertake a caring role as part of work experience you are not considered a carer for the purpose of this Act.

Carers responsibilities are individual to their situation, and often reflect tasks such as housework, shopping, banking, attending medical appointments, providing guidance with diet, or in more intensive cases providing personal care such as bathing, dressing or feeding.

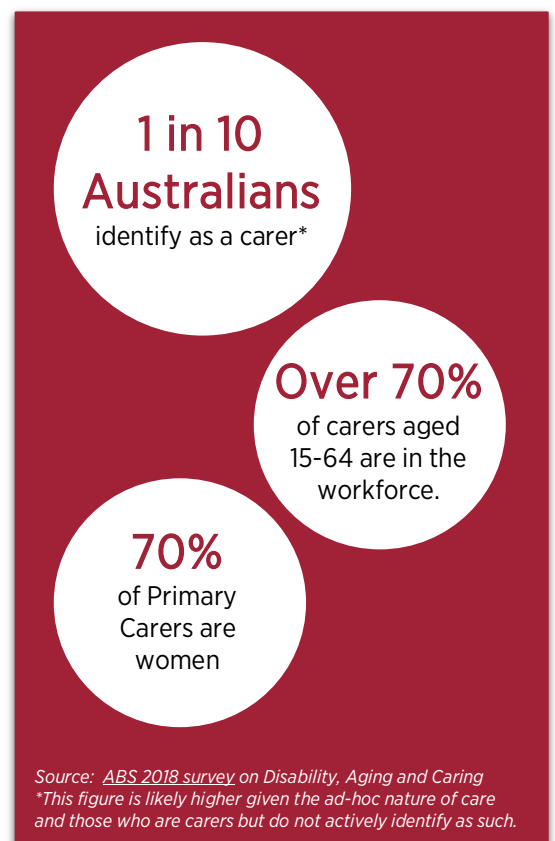
Some people become carers gradually over time, as they start providing more help to someone whose health or ability declines. Others become carers suddenly, when a family member or friend has a major accident, terminal medical diagnosis or health crisis. Caring responsibilities may last for weeks, months or years depending on individual circumstances.

Recognising that carer roles come and go at various points in our lives is a point of difference when considering most other diversity groups. Continuing to raise awareness of services, benefits and options available to staff who are carers allows information to be readily accessible when needed and encourages staff to discuss their needs with a supervisor.

It is important to recognise that many individuals do not identify with the term 'carer' or use it to describe themselves, because the term can be seen to mean different things to different people. Sometimes a carer might see themselves as simply playing a supportive role to a family member or friend.

Carers also come from a diverse range of communities, and some carers may have layered caring responsibilities related to their cultural, social or locational backgrounds, for example those who are from:

- First Nations communities
- Carers who are also living with a disability
- Culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- LGBTQI+ communities
- Metropolitan, regional and remote communities, and
- Young carers, parents who are also carers and the elderly.





CARER SUPPORTS @ WESTERN

Western Sydney University strives to provide a flexible, supportive and inclusive working environment which encourages staff to have a balanced lifestyle combining work and personal responsibilities. Provisions for carers are included in the University's Enterprise Agreement to support this commitment.

Eligibility

Permanent or Fixed-Term staff members who have been employed for at least 12 months on a full time or part time basis are eligible to request adjustments to their standard working arrangements through flexible work or leave provisions. In certain circumstances the University provides consideration of waiving the eligibility period. In addition, long-term casual staff (employed on a regular and systemic basis for at least 12 months) who have a reasonable expectation of ongoing employment are eligible to request flexible working arrangements.

Informal or Formal Arrangements

Sometimes the needs of a carer may be ad hoc or short term and these types of informal arrangements

include temporarily working remotely or occasionally working at an alternate location, adjusting starting or finishing times, days worked or other pattern of work.

Sometimes carers' needs may be of a more regular or longer-term nature. A more formal arrangement may be more appropriate in these circumstances, including for example remote or alternate location working arrangements and/or ongoing adjustments to working hours, including working part time and/or job share options.

Flexible Work Options

Under the [Fair Work Act 2009](#) carers are entitled to request a flexible work arrangement. Western Sydney University provides flexible work options that benefit both the staff and the University and seek to enable a carer (as defined within the Carers (Recognition) Act 2010 NSW) full participation in the workplace. On occasion the inherent requirements of a role may require more detailed discussion to identify options that will support the carer and meet organisational responsibilities.

Find out more about flexible work at Western and how to apply for a flexible work arrangement in [Flexibly Matters – A toolkit for Supervisors and Staff](#).

Leave Options

Both paid and unpaid leave is provided at Western to support carers who are employed on a permanent or fixed term basis. Carers may apply for **Personal Leave** to manage their caring responsibilities. If their entitlement to paid personal leave is exhausted they may also apply for **Sick Leave** in consultation with their supervisor. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may also be eligible to access **Cultural or Ceremonial Leave** for any community caring responsibilities.

Leave without pay is also available for those who have completed 18 months service, and the University provides consideration for waiving the 18-month requirement for pressing personal reasons or domestic hardship.

Casual staff are eligible for unpaid personal leave and will not be disadvantaged in relation to future opportunities if they need to leave work or are unavailable for work due to caring responsibilities.

Equity in Career Progression Opportunities

Career breaks to attend to carer responsibilities may limit opportunities to engage in activities relevant to career progression. Staff applying for promotion under the [Academic Promotions Process](#), or the [Academic Development Program](#) may include an equity statement outlining the impact their caring responsibilities may have had on their career trajectory or opportunities.

Staff applying for a Vice-Chancellor's [Professional Development Scholarship](#) can also include an equity statement for consideration by the application selection panel.

Scan the code below to watch a short Supporting Parents and Carers video from the SAGE team at Western:



“

I have used flexible work provisions and personal leave to balance work around my caring obligations. I believe that being a carer has made me a better colleague for my role as I have an understanding that sometimes there are outside forces that impact people. And in my role, I can help give them a bit of extra space and support.

”

Kim – Carer and Professional Staff Member

DISCLOSURE AND SUPPORTIVE DISCUSSIONS - STAFF

It can be daunting for a staff member to discuss their caring role and responsibilities with their supervisor, and not all people are comfortable with disclosing this type of personal information. Staff are encouraged but not obligated to disclose their carers responsibilities so that appropriate supports can be identified to assist them with these responsibilities. Each work unit is unique and only a staff member can decide if they feel comfortable sharing personal information.

Staff are encouraged to disclose their caring responsibilities to their supervisor so they can be supported to access the appropriate support and benefits. It may help to consider the following steps before setting up a meeting with a supervisor:

- Think about your caring role. Note down the challenges you are facing in balancing your responsibilities so you can clearly explain your situation and your needs.
- Research what benefits are available to support you at **Western**.
- Consider what sort of benefits or flexible options may work for you in navigating your caring and work responsibilities. Are the options likely to be ad hoc, short term or long term? Are they reasonable? How do they impact your work and that of other team members? Are there other options you might consider?
- If you are concerned that your supervisor may not understand you can ask for advice from your HR Advisor or you can reach out to an Equity and Diversity team member.

Once you have arranged to meet with your supervisor:

- Clearly outline your requirements. How much detail you disclose about your caring responsibilities is entirely up to you, but it may be helpful to share important details with your supervisor so they can fully understand your requirements.
- Document your discussion and share summary notes with your supervisor including any agreed arrangements for final approval.
- Determine a start (and finish date if relevant) for any arrangements which change your working conditions. Any plan will need to be reviewed on a regular basis to make sure it is working for the staff member and the work unit.
- Be prepared to discuss alternative options if what is proposed is not seen as possible within the work unit.

Student Disclosure of Carer Responsibilities to Staff

Staff may be approached by students who are carers seeking support and advice. Students should be directed to speak to the [Welfare Team](#) for advice about available provisions. Staff can also reach out to the Welfare team for advice as required.



SUPPORTING DISCLOSURE - SUPERVISORS

Supervisors should ask and encourage staff to discuss caring responsibilities, taking into account **privacy and confidentiality** obligations. It is essential that if a staff member discloses caring responsibilities, you can provide an appropriate response. Sometimes this can be difficult if you are unable to identify with the situation, but in these circumstances your role is to support and guide the staff member to explore options, make choices and to say yes when you can. It may help to consider the following tips when supporting staff who have identified caring responsibilities:

- Remember staff are encouraged but not obligated to disclose their carers responsibilities.
- Providing support to carers in a timely manner will prevent escalation of potential issues or impact for the individual and across the work unit and team.
- Allow the staff member to guide what they wish to say and listen without interruption or judgement, empathetically validate what is being said.
- Discuss the inherent requirements of their role and how these tasks will be managed whilst adjusted arrangements are in place to supports the carers needs.
- Support the staff member to make choices by:
 - Providing information on carers' supports, benefits and flexible work options at Western.
 - Offer information on the Employees Assistance Program (EAP) which can provide free counselling support and advice for carers and their family members.
 - Refer the staff member to information on the list of support services in this toolkit (refer page 8).
 - Schedule catch up meetings to discuss workload, and to keep communication channels open. These meetings do not need to be long but should provide the opportunity to discuss any changes that have arisen or identify issues with the arrangement.
- Be clear and transparent about the limits of confidentiality (if applicable) and provide information on what you will do in response to the disclosure.
- Contact your **HR Advisor** to discuss and consider any arrangements.
- Review any significant changes which impact the work unit with other team members.

Supervisors should consider ongoing ways to provide an inclusive environment and raise awareness within the team around caring roles and responsibilities. Strategies to achieve this may include:

- Communicating available support arrangements with the team. This should include advising of the University's obligations and policies and highlighting the benefits and supports available at Western.
 - Celebrating **Carers Week** and other inclusive events within your team.
 - Having respectful and empathetic conversations with all team members.
 - Providing ongoing support and reviewing any arrangements regularly and revising as needed, with consideration of any impact on both the carer and any other members of the team.

“ I think the role of a manager in assisting with flexible work arrangements is to meet all of their staff where they're at, to really understand those barriers and enablers to participation in the workforce, and to be open to negotiation in the best interest of the business and the team but also to allow staff to be able to meet their caring and parental responsibilities. ”

Kelly – Staff Member and Supervisor



WHERE TO GET SUPPORT @ WESTERN

Useful Contacts @ Western

Human Resources – email or call your **HR Advisor**.

Equity and Diversity - email equityanddiversity@westernsydney.edu.au to speak to one of the team.

Employee Assistance Program @ Western

Western provides a professional, confidential **Employee Assistance Program**. The provider used by Western, **AccessEAP**, includes a service designed for carers that can help them process, handle and cope with the challenging situations that they may encounter as part of their role. Staff members are eligible for a total of 6 free sessions per person or family each year with additional sessions possible in extenuating circumstances on request. The cost associated with this support service is covered by the University. Managers can also seek advice and support on navigating conversations and arrangements with carers via the **EAP Manager Support Service**.

STAFF RESOURCES

- Equity and Diversity Carers page provides details of helpful supports for staff and students:
www.westernsydney.edu.au/equity-and-diversity/equality/family_support/carers
- WSU: Enterprise Agreements webpage:
www.westernsydney.edu.au/human_resources/ohr/wsu_enterprise_agreements
- Flexible Work @ Western:
www.westernsydney.edu.au/equity-and-diversity/rights_and_protections/flexible_working_arrangements
- Fair Work - Flexible Working Arrangements webpage:
www.fairwork.gov.au/employment-conditions/flexibility-in-the-workplace

SUPERVISOR RESOURCES

- **Carers Australia – Carers in the Workplace** – outlines the benefits of investing in carers at work.
- **NSW Government Carers+Employers** – provides resources to help support carers in the workplace including this *Business Case for Supporting Carers in the Workplace* – <https://vimeo.com/386881264>
- The **Australian Human Rights Commission** provides guidance for carers in the workplace and information on employer obligations. Further information can be found at <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/quick-guide/11999>

OTHER EXTERNAL SUPPORTS

- **Carers Australia** – has further valuable resources for carers.
- **Carers NSW** – provides information, education and training, resources and referrals services.
- **Carer Gateway** – provides a range of information that can help carers in their role, from practical advice and resources, to help finding support services.

Contact information

Equity and Diversity

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Penrith NSW 2751 Australia

