

COVID-19 Carer Survey

Summary of Results

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The Caring Fairly Coalition conducted a survey to capture unpaid carers' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey, which ran from 21 April - 5 May 2020, aimed to assess the impact of the pandemic on carers' work and income, expenses, health and wellbeing and access to services and supports. The findings draw on 471 responses, collected from carers across Australia. Overall the results demonstrate the considerable impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on unpaid carers across all dimensions.

COVID-19 impact on support services and time spent on unpaid care tasks

A majority (60%) of carers surveyed said they had lost some or all of the supports for the person they care for and almost half (47%) reported losing supports for themselves. Only 10 per cent said they had received extra support for either themselves or the person they care for since COVID-19.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak almost half (44%) of carers said they had increased the amount of time spent providing unpaid care support. Additionally, the number of carers who provide over 46 hours of care each week also increased, from 27 per cent of carers before the outbreak to 50 per cent of carers since the outbreak.

Many carers cited a reduction of services for the person they care for as a reason for their increasing care responsibilities.

"My daughter's days during the week were full with various groups and work. So she was supported or at work for a total of 35 hours a week. Now due to COVID-19 she has only 6 hours of support a week and the rest is left to myself and my husband."

The impact of the pandemic on the wellbeing of the people carers support had also led to increased care responsibilities.

"Mum's getting more depressed cause she's too scared to go anywhere in case she catches the virus, so I've got to get the food while mum stays home, she won't even go for a walk, she just sits in her chair. So I study, shop, cook, clean, give mum food, try to encourage her to eat, shower, shop or exercise but she just wants to stay home, which is very hard for me to keep thinking of ways to motivate her to move around."

In addition to an increase in the number of hours of care provided, carers also said they were needing to take on different types of support than before.

"I used to get a couple of hours of respite two days per week when my son was at school, and my mother would also care for my son for a few hours every couple of weeks to allow my husband and I to have an outing together. This has all stopped due to COVID-19. I have also taken on the role of not only parent and carer, but teacher, speech pathologist, [occupational therapist] etc."



60%

Lost supports for the person they care for

47%

Lost supports for themselves



44%

Increased time spent on unpaid care



Increase in carers who provide over 46 hours of care

Impact of COVID-19 on carers' health and wellbeing

For the majority of carers who responded to the survey, the pandemic has had a considerable negative impact on their health and wellbeing.

The vast majority (81%) of carers said their mental health had deteriorated since the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost all carers (88%) had experienced increased stress in their role as a carer, with over half (52%) responding that their stress had increased by 'a lot' or 'an extreme amount.'

An increase in caring responsibilities since the outbreak and a lack of respite and supports was a common reason carers gave for the decline in their wellbeing.

"I have had not one second child free in 7 weeks. I have no family, friends, or support workers. I can only shower at 11pm when the children finally go to sleep because they can't be left unsupervised but the shower often wakes them so I'm going days without showering. I used to go to the gym for respite but also to keep strong enough to carry my children and protect myself. I also usually see a psychologist for support and strategies; this is no longer possible. We tried Telehealth but because my children need constant supervision it wasn't suitable. I am in every sense of the word alone."

"Having to be physically distant from my work colleagues and friends and family, as well as the person I care for relying on me more than before the pandemic, leaves me feeling overwhelmed sometimes and like I have no break to look after myself!"

Another common reason people provided for their deteriorating mental health and increased stress was concern for the people they care for.

"Concern about how COVID-19 will affect my daughters and my husband's health were they to get COVID-19 and concern about how my daughter will cope with the isolation because she isn't having the same face to face support."

"I am not able to provide the level of support my partner needs due to the restrictions on visits. I feel guilty, distraught, tearful, anxious. I fear his health will deteriorate more rapidly due to the lack of support he is receiving from me."

The financial impacts of the pandemic have also taken a toll on carers' wellbeing.

"I cannot sleep because I am concerned about money, going over and over numbers to make sure I can cover everything and hold it all together. I also feel stressed because I now have no help or support at home and feel like I am pulled in many directions."

"I'm exhausted and worried about increased costs. I'm not able to go back to work part time as planned."

"Expenses have gone up, [I'm] unable to go to shops with my immunocompromised kid, so having to pay extra charges on delivery at home. So a lot of financial stress."

81%



Mental health deteriorated



88%
of carers

Experienced increased stress in their caring role



52%
of carers'

Stress increased by a lot or an extreme amount

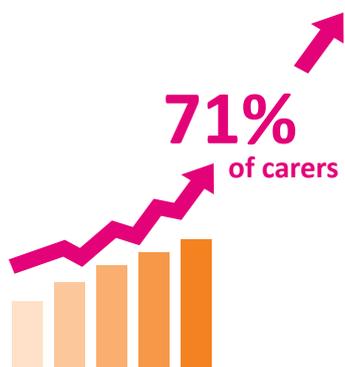
COVID-19 impacts on carers' work, income and costs of living

Over a third (37%) of unpaid carers had lost some or all of their regular income as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. 37 per cent of carers have worked fewer hours because they have had to provide extra support to the person/people they care for. For 22 per cent of carers they had worked fewer hours because their employer didn't have enough work for them. A further 10 per cent of carers had lost their jobs entirely.

"Due to coronavirus my respite carers could not care for the children as they had to isolate. I have had to resign from my job as I had no care for the children who are both disabled. It's very isolating. I am unable to sleep as I worry about how I'm going to provide for the children. Due to being on carers payments I am not eligible for the \$550 supplement payment. This leaves my single parent family \$400 worse off per week compared to other single parent families with children without disabilities. I have had to delay assessments recommended for my son as I can't afford them. It's very stressful and isolating."

"I have voluntarily stopped working because of the risk to my husband if he contracts the coronavirus. I worked in retail, so impossible not to have contact with customers. I have worked for the same company for 3 years, but as I was made casual last year, I have no sick pay or holiday pay. Because I get the Carer Payment, I am not eligible for the JobSeeker payment, and because my employer is still quite busy, they have not claimed the JobKeeper payment, so I have no way of replacing my lost income."

In addition to losing income, a significant majority of carers had increased costs, with 71 per cent experiencing increased living costs and 58 per cent having to spend more money on support for the person they care for. Groceries, cleaning, healthcare and medications were the top categories where carers reported increased costs.



Experienced increased living costs



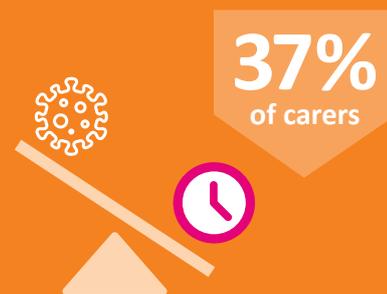
Spent more money supporting the person they care for

Demographics

The majority of survey respondents were adults caring for other adults and most responses came from people who identify as female (89%). Almost half (40%) the people surveyed care for two or more people and 47 per cent of carers identify as having a disability, mental health issue or both.



Lost some or all of their regular income



Worked fewer hours to provide extra support for the person they care for



Worked fewer hours because their employer didn't have enough work



Lost their job

About Caring Fairly

Caring Fairly is a national campaigning coalition seeking recognition, reform, and a greater respect for the rights of Australia's unpaid carers. We are led by a coalition of over 30 carer support organisations, NGOs, peak bodies, and carers themselves, spanning all states and territories of Australia. Caring Fairly is coordinated by Mind Australia, one of the country's leading and largest community managed mental health organisations.

Full survey report forthcoming.

For more information:

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