

Caring for carers

The Health Column

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Sometimes we all need a break from our daily chores. But none are more deserving of a break than carers – dedicated, tireless, and often unpaid. During national Carers Week, from October 12–18, we are urged to recognise and celebrate the outstanding contribution of carers and help them take a break. This year's theme is 'Take a break, raise your voice and support our carers'.

According to the latest 2012 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, there are 2.7 million family and friend carers over the age of 15 in Australia – 12% of the population.



Carers are a vital part of Australia's health system, as the foundation of our aged, disability, and community care systems. In 2010 Access Economics estimated that carers provide 1.32 billion hours of unpaid care each year, and that it would cost the Australian economy \$40.9 billion to replace their work with formal care services. On average, 40% of primary carers provide 40 or more hours per week of unpaid care.

Some 770,000 of Australia's carers are primary carers. Primary carers provide the majority of informal assistance with the activities of daily living to a person with disability, plus one or more of the core support activities of mobility, self-care and communication. Of these primary carers, 51% provide care to a person over the age of 65.

But carers are unsung heroes and often face serious challenges:

- In the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index Survey carers were shown to have the lowest collective wellbeing of any population group investigated.
- Carers have an average stress rating that is classified as moderate depression.
- Carers are more likely to experience chronic pain.
- According to 2012 ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers data, primary carers were significantly more likely to have a disability themselves – 37% of primary carers have a disability, compared with 16% of people not in a carer's role.

- Carers are more socially isolated. In 2012 only 47% of carers who provided care for 40 hours per week or more reported participation in at least one cultural or physical activity, away from home.
- Almost two-thirds (65%) of primary carers reside in a household with gross household income in the lowest two quintiles, compared with 36% of non-carers.
- The median gross personal income per week for a primary carer is \$400, and for a non-carer is \$600.
- Some 55% of primary carers are on a Government pension or allowance and 54% of primary carers have difficulty meeting everyday costs as a result of a caring role.

Many carers are young men and women. There are more than 150,000 of Australia's carers who are under the age of 18. These young people may be providing care for a parent, partner, sibling, their own child, relative or friend. Many of these young carers indicate that caring is a positive experience for them. However, research clearly indicates that when inadequately supported, their own health, mental health and wellbeing can be seriously affected by their roles.

For more information about how we can take care of carers, the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA), with assistance from Centrelink and the Carers Association, has developed a Self Care Fact Card titled *Carer Support*. The *Wise use of Medicines* Fact Card is another useful resource for carers. Both of these Fact Cards are available from pharmacies providing PSA's Self Care health information.

For the location of your nearest Self Care pharmacy phone PSA on 1300 369 772, or go to www.psa.org.au 'Supporting practice' then 'Self Care', and then 'Find a Self Care pharmacy'.