

Let's show we care

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. National Carers Week, 16-22 October 2016, is about recognising and celebrating the outstanding contribution that unpaid carers make to our nation.

Carers make an enormous contribution to our communities as well as our national economy. National Carers Week provides you with a chance to show your appreciation and to learn about carers and caring in Australia.

This year, National Carers Week is asking you to offer your thanks to carers and help build a carer-friendly Australia by showing carers how much they count. Anyone at any time can become a carer, and National Carers Week is an opportunity to educate and raise awareness among all Australians about the diversity of carers and their caring roles.

According to the Carers Australia website, in 2015 there were over 2.8 million unpaid carers in Australia. Over 28% (770,000 carers) are primary carers, which are those who provide the most informal assistance to another individual.

Carers are a vital part of Australia's health system, and are the foundation of our aged, disability, palliative and community care systems. The estimated replacement value of unpaid care provided in 2015 was \$60.3 billion, which is more than \$1 billion each week. It is estimated that in 2015 carers provided 1.9 billion hours of care.

Females make up the majority of carers, and represent 69.7% of primary carers and 56.1% of all carers. In 2012, 38.9% of primary carers reported spending an average of 40 hours per week or more caring, while 19.5% of carers spend between 20 and 40 hours. Carers are unsung heroes, and contribute so much to our collective communities. However, they often face serious challenges. In the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index Survey which was conducted in 2007, carers were shown to:

- have the lowest collective wellbeing of any population group investigated
- have an average stress rating that is classified as moderate depression



- be more likely to experience chronic pain than is normal, and are highly likely to be carrying an injury.

According to a 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, primary carers were significantly more likely to have a disability themselves – 37% of primary carers have a disability, compared with 16% of people who are not in a carer's role. Carers are also very 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 in 2012 resided in a household with a low gross household income. The median gross personal income for a primary carer was \$400 per week, and for a non-carer was \$600 per week. 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. In Australia, 150,000 carers are young carers who are under the age of 18 years. 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 not adequately supported, their own health and wellbeing can be seriously affected.

A carer-friendly Australia is one where unpaid carers are recognised and supported during and after their caring role, across all spectrums of society. It is our job to ensure that we have a carer-friendly Australia where everyone, including carers, has a fair go. You can make a difference by offering your thanks today to carers on the National Carers Week website (<http://www.carersweek.com.au/make-a-pledge/>). This will only take 1 minute and is easy to do online. The National Carers Week website provides details and suggestions for other ways that you can also get involved this National Carers Week (<http://www.carersweek.com.au/getinvolved/>).

You can get more detailed information on Carers from the Self Care Fact Card titled Carer Support available from pharmacies providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Self Care health information. Other Self Care Fact Cards and information sources may also be useful depending on individual circumstances – ask your pharmacist.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to www.psa.org.au/selfcare, then click 'Find a *Self Care pharmacy* near you'.