



11 September 2024

Via website: [National Carer Strategy – Submit an electronic written submission | engage.dss.gov.au](https://engage.dss.gov.au)

DCA submission in response to Discussion Paper: National Carer Strategy

Dear Secretary, Department of Social Services, Ray Griggs

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on your Discussion paper: *National Carer Strategy*.

Diversity Council Australia (DCA) is the independent not-for-profit peak body leading diversity and inclusion in the workplace. We have over 1,300 member organisations, reaching approximately 20% of the Australian labour market.

DCA welcomes the process undertaken by Minister Rishworth to appoint a lived experience Carer Advisory Committee to guide and work with the government to develop this strategy. We also strongly support the focus on complexities and intersectionalities in this process which will help to ensure all carers are considered in the strategy.

Our comments below relate to issues facing carers in the workplace such as carers who are balancing (unpaid) carer responsibilities and paid work, and/or returning to the workforce after a period of full time unpaid caring.

It is not surprising that the majority (67.7%) of unpaid primary carers are womenⁱ. DCA's comments will also relate to the impacts of unpaid caring on progression towards gender equality at work and the economic security of women. We also note discussion points relating to First Nations carers, culturally and linguistically diverse carers, young carers, LGBTIQ+ carers and provide some comments below.


A note on language:

DCA recognises that a diversity of terms is used to describe people's lived experience. We recognise and respect individuals' right to identify with terms that they feel most comfortable with. We also recognise the limitations of binary language. However, sometimes binary categories have very real effects on peoples' experiences and may be necessary to convey the gendered nature and dynamics of our society.

DCA recognises that language is socially constructed and constantly evolving and our intention is always to be inclusive and to be open to change.

A note on intersectionality:

DCA notes and commends the consideration of intersectionality and lived experience in the Discussion Paper and process thus far. We always recommend an intersectional approach when developing and implementing policy and programs. We define intersectionality as how some people experience compounded discrimination due to multiple marginalising and interlinked characteristics.ⁱⁱ An intersectional lens on the lived experience of carers will add significant value



to inform the National Carer Strategy.

Comments:

Principles of the Strategy:

DCA strongly supports the new *National Carer Strategy (the Strategy)* guiding principles that are carer focused, respectful and attentive to the lived experience of the diversity of carers in Australia, centring their voices, and in consideration of the intersectionalities of carers. DCA's researchⁱⁱⁱ and engagement with carers in paid work, and/or returning to paid work, highlight the importance of considering the impacts of caring on their paid employment experience, transition to paid work, recruitment experience, and/or promotion.

DCA recommends a number of DCA resources designed to assist organisations centre the voices of marginalised people:

- [Centring Marginalised Voices at Work](#): Lessons from DCA's Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CARM) Women in Leadership Research, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2024^{iv}.
- [Culturally and Racially Marginalised Women in Leadership: Intersectionality Infographic \(dca.org.au\)](#)

Experience of discrimination:

DCA research – [Mapping the State of Flex in the Australian Workforce](#)^v - found that carers (caring for children and caring for adults) are significantly more likely to experience discrimination and/or harassment at work compared to those without caring responsibilities. Carers using flexible work options, according to our most recent data - [Inclusion@Work Index 2023-2024](#)^{vi} – continue to experience more exclusion at work than non-flex workers. (The use of flex remains higher for marginalised workers, especially for carers and women.) One in four flex workers reported experiencing discrimination and/or harassment at work. This is significantly higher than that experienced by workers not accessing flexible options.

It also seems that the more you care, the more exclusion you will face at work. Those who care for both children and adults experience significantly more exclusion at work with close to half reporting personal experience of discrimination and/or harassment at work^{vii}. A similar trend was evident in the data for the experience of witnessing harassment with those caring for children and adults being twice as likely to report witnessing harassment compared to those with no caring responsibilities^{viii}.

DCA strongly supports initiatives such as the [Carer-inclusive workplace initiative](#) run by Carers Australia. Initiatives such as these challenge the systemic barriers and discrimination facing carers in paid employment and help to build more inclusive and safer workplaces.

DCA recommends that the *Strategy* considers the research on exclusion, discrimination and harassment experienced by carers in paid employment.

DCA recommends that the *Strategy* supports more initiatives such as the Carer-Inclusive Workplace to create more diverse and inclusive workplaces across Australia.

Impacts on women and gender equality:

As pointed out by the Discussion Paper, despite some progress in relation to flexibility at work and improvements in paid parental leave and access to childcare, women still make up the vast



majority (67.7%) of primary carers in Australia^{ix}.

Our latest research also confirms that the use of flex remains heavily gendered.

“Flexible work options were also significantly more likely to be used by women. This is unsurprising given that caring responsibilities are still largely undertaken by women.”^x

DCA has long advocated for ‘sharing the care at home and work’. Our 2019 report^{xi} called on action to end the gender pay gap by enabling women and men in Australian families to share the care more equitably. We identified that women’s disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, lack of workplace flexibility and time out of the workforce are key contributors to the gender pay gap.

DCA recommends that the *Strategy* considers the short and longer term economic and social consequences for women carers, potentially linking in with other government policies and strategies aimed at advancing women’s economic equality.

The stigma of flexible work:

DCA’s research points to the ongoing stigma associated with the use of flexible work^{xii}. The use of flexible work options is predominantly by carers with three in four reporting using one or more flexible working options^{xiii}.

Despite our data showing there is no difference between team performance of flex workers and non-flex workers, the most common misconception held is that flexible work harms team productivity. This stigma fuels the experience of exclusion, discrimination and/or harassment for carers who are juggling caring responsibilities and flexible paid work.

Our research also points to the stigma associated with male carers accessing flexible work options. They report the highest levels of exclusion compared to other flex workers with almost one in two male carers accessing flex witnessing and/or experiencing discrimination and/or harassment compared to only 28% of male workers accessing flex without caring responsibilities^{xiv}. This reflects the strength of the stereotype that only women are carers. And points to the need to address the stigma surrounding men accessing flexible work in order to undertake caring responsibilities.

However, post COVID-19 and with technological advancements, the stigma associated with flexible work is changing. A recent report^{xv} on the changing nature of part-time work in Australia showed that flexibility in hours and location is becoming more mainstream. It called on employers to promote and support flexible work arrangements to advance pay equity, particularly for women in management.

DCA recommends that the *Strategy* responds to misconceptions about flexible work and promotes flexible work options for carers who stay in paid employment whilst caring and/or who return to paid employment.

Impacts on First Nations people:

The Discussion Paper^{xvi} points out that First Nations people are 1.3 times more likely to engage in unpaid caregiving compared to non-Indigenous people and they take on caregiving at a younger age.

We know from our own research^{xvii} that First Nations people experience discrimination and/or harassment at work at much higher rates: 59% compared to 22% of non-Indigenous workers. Add the stigma of being a carer, and potentially accessing flexible work options, this experience will be amplified.



The entrenched inequality facing so many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders in this country is well established. Given such high rates of caring amongst First Nations peoples, including those as young as 15 years of age, the economic and social consequences must be significantly more pronounced than for non-Indigenous carers.

Our own research in 2021^{xviii} revealed a ‘triple jeopardy’ experience for Indigenous women carers. Their experience of discrimination and exclusion at work was amplified by the three aspects of their identity: being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, a woman and a carer. They were more likely to feel unsafe at work and less supported when they encountered racism and unfair treatment.

DCA recommends that the *Strategy* addresses the complexity of experience of First Nations carers including the experience of exclusion, discrimination and/or harassment in the workplace.

Impacts on other diverse groups:

DCA’s research^{xix} Shows that in addition to First Nations people, workers with disability, those from non-Christian religious backgrounds and LGBTIQ+ workers report much higher experiences of discrimination and/or harassment at work. This experience may be exacerbated when people from these groups access flexible work options due to their caring responsibilities.

Understanding the cultural contexts of each of these diverse communities can only enhance the *Strategy’s* effectiveness in providing guidance and support for carers from these communities.

Based on our research on culturally and racially marginalised women in leadership^{xx}, DCA developed a term to refer to people who experience racial marginalisation. Culturally and Racially Marginalised – CARM – people are Black, Brown, Asian or any other non-white group who face marginalisation due to their race. They may also face discrimination due to their cultural background. It may be helpful to focus attention on CARM people who are carers in the *Strategy* as they will, no doubt, experience particular forms of exclusion or discrimination.

It is also critical that accurate data on the composition and diversity of these populations of carers is collected. Recently the issue of ‘counting in’ LGBTIQ+ people into the 2026 Census received a great deal of media attention and highlighted the importance of accurate data on diverse population groups.

DCA recommends that the *Strategy* addresses the complexity of experience of carers from other diverse groups such as people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse and CARM carers, LGBTIQ+ carers, including the experience of exclusion, discrimination and/or harassment in the workplace.

Please feel free to contact myself or Jacqueline Braw, Senior Advocacy and Government Relations Manager, on jacqueline@dca.org.au should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely



Lisa Annese
Chief Executive Officer

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- ⁱ Australian Government, Department of Social Services. Discussion Paper National Carer Strategy.
- ⁱⁱ Diversity Council Australia (V. Mapedzahama, F. Laffernis, A. Barhoum, and J. O’Leary). *Culturally and Racially Marginalised Women in Leadership: A framework for (intersectional) organisational action*, Diversity Council Australia, 2023. [CARM women in leadership - Diversity Council Australia \(dca.org.au\)](https://dca.org.au)
- ⁱⁱⁱ [DCA Research - Diversity Council Australia](https://dca.org.au)
- ^{iv} Diversity Council Australia (Mapedzahama, V., Ojinnaka, A., Deo, S. and O’Leary, J.) *Centring Marginalised Voices at Work: Lessons from DCA’s Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CARM) Women in Leadership Research*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2024.
- ^v Diversity Council Australia, *Inclusion@Work Index: Mapping the State of Flex in the Australian Workforce*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2021.
- ^{vi} Diversity Council Australia (R. D’Almada-Remedios), *Inclusion@Work. Index 2023–2024: Mapping the State of Inclusion in the Australian Workforce Synopsis Report*, Diversity Council Australia, 2024.
- ^{vii} Diversity Council Australia, *Inclusion@Work Index: Mapping the State of Flex in the Australian Workforce*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2021.
- ^{viii} Diversity Council Australia, *Inclusion@Work Index: Mapping the State of Flex in the Australian Workforce*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2021.
- ^{ix} Australian Government, Department of Social Services. Discussion Paper National Carer Strategy.
- ^x Diversity Council Australia (R. D’Almada-Remedios), *Inclusion@Work Index 2023–2024: Mapping the State of Inclusion in the Australian Workforce*, Diversity Council Australia, 2024. Page 35.
- ^{xi} DCA, *Let’s Share the Care at Home and Work: A Call to Action to Reduce the Gender Pay Gap*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2019. [Let's Share the Care - Diversity Council Australia \(dca.org.au\)](https://dca.org.au)
- ^{xii} Diversity Council Australia, *Inclusion@Work Index: Mapping the State of Flex in the Australian Workforce*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2021.
- ^{xiii} Diversity Council Australia (D’Almada-Remedios, R.) *DCA Inclusion@Work Index 2023-2024: Mapping the State of Inclusion in the Australian Workforce*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2024.
- ^{xiv} Diversity Council Australia, *Inclusion@Work Index: Mapping the State of Flex in the Australian Workforce*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2021.
- ^{xv} BCEC/WGEA Gender Equity Series. *The Changing Nature of Part-time Work in Australia. Gender Equity Insights 2024*.
- ^{xvi} Australian Government, Department of Social Services. Discussion Paper National Carer Strategy.
- ^{xvii} Diversity Council Australia (D’Almada-Remedios, R.) *DCA Inclusion@Work Index 2023-2024: Mapping the State of Inclusion in the Australian Workforce*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2024.
- ^{xviii} :Evans, Olivia (2021). Gari Yala (Speak the Truth): gendered insights, WGEA Commissioned Research Report in partnership with the Jumbunna Institute of Education and Research and Diversity Council Australia, Sydney, Australia
- ^{xix} Diversity Council Australia (D’Almada-Remedios, R.) *DCA Inclusion@Work Index 2023-2024: Mapping the State of Inclusion in the Australian Workforce*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2024.
- ^{xx} Diversity Council Australia (V. Mapedzahama, F. Laffernis, A. Barhoum, and J. O’Leary). *Culturally and racially marginalised women in leadership: A framework for (intersectional) organisational action*, Diversity Council Australia, 2023.