



# Carers



## Main findings

- 12.1% of Queenslanders provide ongoing care and support to another, due to ageing or disability.
- Women make up 75.8% of the primary carers for people with disability.
- 56.9% of primary carers rely on government pensions and allowances for their primary source of cash income.

*Photo courtesy of Disability Services Queensland*



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Carers save the economy much,  
but at a great cost to themselves  
in terms of health  
and life opportunities.

## Introduction

This chapter focuses on people who are caring for another who has an ongoing need for support because of a long-term medical condition, a disability, or frailty, or who requires palliative care. Carers can be parents, partners, children, other relatives, or friends. Women take the primary responsibility for caring for other people with support needs.

Providing informal care for people with support needs is often long-term, unlike providing care for small children, or for children who are ill.

Carers save the economy much, but at a cost to themselves. A 1999 national survey found 58% of carers were in worse physical health themselves and one-third had been physically injured as a result of their caring role. Nearly 60% reported experiencing a major or dramatic effect on their life opportunities, such as for travel, pastimes, and paid work.<sup>1</sup>

As the population deals with structural ageing, women are likely to be pressured to have a stronger workforce presence, and for longer. This is good for the economy but reduces women's availability to care for dependants; a growing group as Queensland ages.

## Who are carers?

Queensland data on carers is limited. In 1998, 413,500 Queenslanders provided care for other people who were ageing or had a disability. This represented 12.1% of all Queenslanders.

Of an estimated 83,600 primary carers (informal carers, mainly partners, parents, children and friends) in Queensland in 1998, 75.8% were women. Nearly half (48.4%) of these women were 35 to 54 years, with a further 24.4% aged 55 to 74.

Parents (69.7%) were the most common providers of informal care for people with a disability under the age of 35. For people with a disability aged between 35 and 64, it was a partner (66.2%) and for those aged 65 years or more, informal care was most commonly provided by an adult child (48.6%).

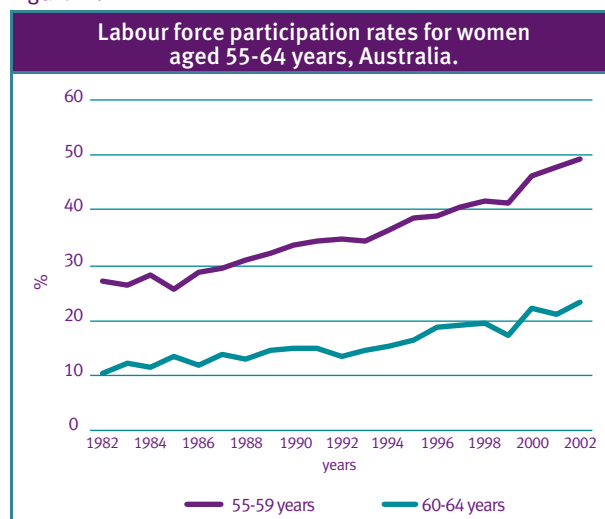
Informal care networks of friends and family provide most of the assistance to older people in the Australian community. Older people themselves provide care: 39% of the primary carers of older people in 1998 were themselves aged 65 years or more. This key role of helping older people remain in the community is expected to increase in future years.

Primary carers report taking on the caring role mostly because of “family responsibility” (61.3%), because they believed they “could provide better care” (39.2%) or due to “emotional obligation” (34.3%).<sup>2</sup>

## Carers, work and income

Women are increasingly staying in the workforce for longer, as the following chart illustrates:

Figure 14



Source: ABS Labour Force Australia series, 1982–2002.<sup>3</sup>

As discussed in the chapter “Work”, women’s participation in the workforce has increased steadily since 1971 when the national female workforce participation rate was 37.1%.<sup>4</sup> The workforce participation rate<sup>i</sup> for all Queensland women in June 2004 was 57.7%: much of this is part-time work.<sup>5</sup>

In 1998, 55.3% of primary carers were not in the workforce, another 25.5% worked part-time, and 14.9% worked full-time. The incomes of most primary carers (74.8%) are in the lowest 60% of income earners: 56.9% of primary carers rely on government pensions or allowances as their principal income source.

In Queensland, 38.1% of primary carers in 1998 had no fall-back carer, in case they were unavailable for any reason. Only 8.5% had received respite care in the three months leading up to the survey.<sup>6</sup>

A 2003 Australian study put the care provided by families and carers of people with dementia alone as being a \$1.71 billion service, if paid for. The associated tax forgone was \$489.7 million.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Seasonally adjusted



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## References

- <sup>1</sup> Carers Association of Australia, 1999. *Warning: Caring is a Health Hazard: Results of the 1999 survey of Carer's Health and Wellbeing.*
- <sup>2</sup> AIHW, 2002. *Older Australia at a Glance.*
- <sup>3</sup> In Hazlehurst, D. 2003. *Family and Work: Issues and Risks Across the Life Course.* Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra.
- <sup>4</sup> ABS, 2003. *Cat. No. 4102.0. Australian Social Trends.*
- <sup>5</sup> ABS, June 2004. *Cat. No. 6202.0. Labour Force, Australia.*
- <sup>6</sup> ABS, 1999. *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Summary Tables, Queensland 1998.*
- <sup>7</sup> Access Economics, 2003. *The Dementia Epidemic: Economic Impact and Positive Solutions for Australia.* Canberra.