

Main findings



- 9.5% of Queenslanders reported providing unpaid assistance to a person with a disability in 2006, and 62.4% of these were female.
- Of Australian parents who are primary carers of people with a disability in 2003, 91% were female. Children (including adult children) who cared for their parents were also more likely to be female, with females comprising 72% of these carers.
- Caring can take a heavy toll on carer wellbeing: 37.2% of female Australian carers in 2003 reported feeling weary or lacking in energy and 11.4% had been diagnosed with a stress related disorder due to their caring role.
- Caring impacts on carers' earning capacity and income: in 2003, 63.5% of Queensland primary carers relied on government pensions or allowances as their principal income source.
- Australia-wide, if all hours of informal care were replaced with formal care services, paid for and provided in the home, the replacement value would be \$30.5 billion.

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Introduction

Disability Services Queensland defines a carer as:

A person of any age who, without being paid, cares for another person who needs ongoing support because of a long-term medical condition, a mental illness, a disability, frailty or the need for palliative care. A carer may or may not be a family member and may or may not live with the person. Volunteers under the auspices of a voluntary organisation are not included.¹

Carers can be parents, partners, children, other relatives or friends. Some carers live with the person they are caring for while others live elsewhere; some may fulfil caring responsibilities for a few hours a week, whilst others undertake these roles all day, every day. Some carers receive financial assistance from the government, whilst others rely on private income. Providing informal care for people who are in need of support is often a long-term commitment, and is different to providing care for small children or for children who are temporarily ill. Women continue to take the primary responsibility for caring for other people with support needs in the community.

Carers often have a limited income earning capacity, and may not have any opportunity to save or contribute to superannuation for their retirement. Their caring role may incur costs such as increased utility, telephone and transport bills, medication and/or special equipment to assist with care.

Accurate information regarding the number of carers and types of roles carers perform is difficult to source due to the hidden nature of caring and that many people who perform the function of a carer do not think of themselves as a carer, or do not wish to classify themselves as one. There is limited published data available for Queensland specifically, and broken down on a gendered basis. A small amount of recent information about carers can be gleaned from 2006 Census data. A less recent but major source of information on carers is the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Survey of Disability, Aging and Carers, the latest of which was completed in 2003. The tentative release date for the next disability, ageing and carers survey is 2010. The references cited in this chapter mostly rely on data from these two sources.

Who are carers?

In the 2006 Census 293,723 Queenslanders (9.5%) reported that they had given unpaid assistance to a person with a disability. Of these carers, 183,290 (62.4%) were female.² Approximately 25.1% of these females were aged 45-54 years, 22.0% were 55-64 years, 20.1% were 35-44 years and 12.3% were 25-34 years. There were 5,380 (2.9%) female carers in Queensland aged 15-19 years, and 8,532 (4.7%) aged 75 and over.³

Primary carers are defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as those carers who provide ongoing assistance for at least 6 months in one of the core activities of communication, mobility or self-care.⁴ Australia-wide, in 2003, 19% or 475,000 of all carers were primary carers, and 71% of all primary carers were female.⁵

As demonstrated in Table 7.1, parents were the most common providers of care for people with a disability under the age of 35 in Australia in 2003. Females made up the majority of parental carers: 93% of parents who were primary carers for people with a disability under the age of 35 were female, and 91% of all parents who were primary carers of people with a disability were female. As the age of people with a disability increased, their carers were more likely to be their partners or children. For people with a disability aged 65 years and over, the majority were cared for by a partner; the proportion of male partner carers compared to female partner carers was much greater in this age group than other age groups.⁶ One reason for this may be that most older men are living with a spouse whereas more older women have been widowed, a result of the fact that women are on average slightly younger than their husbands, and the lower life expectancy of men (see Chapter 7 – Demographics.)⁷

Children (including adult children) who cared for their parents were much more likely to be female than male, with females comprising 72% of all carers of a parent. Women provided the majority of care for all people with a disability in Queensland in each age group, see Table 7.1.⁸

Table 7.1
Primary carers^(a) ('000) by gender, by relationship to main recipient of care, by care recipient age, Australia, 2003

Carer		Age of Care Recipient			
Gender	Relationship to care recipient	15-34 years	35-64 years	65 + years	All ages
Male	Partner	2.6	35.2	43.9	81.7
	Child	6.6	27.7	0.6	34.9
	Parent	1.5	7.2	1	9.7
	Other	2.8	4.9	2.2	9.8
	Total	13.5	74.7	47.7	136.2
Female	Partner	9.9	55.7	49.7	115.3
	Child	15.6	68.5	3.6	87.6
	Parent	21.3	74.2	5.4	100.8
	Other	2.5	25.4	6.8	34.7
	Total	49.2	223.8	65.4	338.4
Persons	Partner	12.5	90.9	93.7	197.0
	Child	22.1	96.2	4.2	122.5
	Parent	22.8	81.4	6.4	110.5
	Other	5.3	30.3	8.9	44.6
	Total	62.7	298.7	113.2	474.6

^(a) Primary carers include persons aged 15 years and over, living in households, for whom a personal interview was conducted. Persons aged 15 to 17 were only interviewed personally if parental permission was granted.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Caring in the Community*, 'Table 19: Primary Carers (a)(b), Relationship to Main Recipient of Care', data cube: Excel spreadsheet, Cat. no. 4430.0.55.004, viewed 22 January 2009, [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/o/CA2568A90021A807CA25701100783039/\\$File/4430055004_may05.xls](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/o/CA2568A90021A807CA25701100783039/$File/4430055004_may05.xls)

The main reasons given by primary carers aged 15 and over in Queensland in 2003 for taking on the caring role were: 'family responsibility' (58.7%), because they believed they 'could provide better care' (41.3%) or due to 'emotional obligation' (33.8%).⁹

Carers' wellbeing

Caring for another person who is unable to care for themselves can be a very positive and rewarding experience, but it can also have significant impacts on the quality of life of the carer. Of Australian females who were primary carers in 2003, just 22.9% reported feeling satisfied in the role. Many females reported experiencing a range of negative effects resulting from their caring role, with responses ranging from feeling weary or lacking in energy (37.2% of responses) to those who had been diagnosed with a stress related disorder due to the role (11.4% of responses).¹⁰ In Queensland, 42.3% of primary carers (of both genders) also reported having a disability themselves in 2003.¹¹

Caring also impacted on primary carers' relationships with others. Of Australian female primary carers in 2003, 36.9% reported that their relationship with their partner or spouse had become strained or they lacked time together as a result of the caring role, and 37.3% reported this same impact on their relationship with other co-resident family members. Nonetheless, some found that the caring role had improved their relationships, with 12.4% reporting it had brought them closer together with their partner or spouse and 7.6% saying it had brought them closer together with other co-resident family members.¹²

Carers, work and income

According to Productivity Commission forecasts, in the next 40 years demographic changes due to an aging population will result in a quarter of all Australians being aged 65 years or over by 2044-45, an almost two-fold increase.¹³ It is expected that this will increase the number of infirm elderly people requiring care in the community. Current trends show increasing numbers of women participating in the workforce, and spending more years working (see Chapter 4 – Work). If these trends continue, there may be a shift in the rates of informal, voluntary care available in the community.

In Queensland in 2003, 64.8% (72,100) of primary carers aged 15 and over were not in the workforce, another 18.8% (20,900) worked part time, and 14.3% (15,900) worked full time. Of those Queensland primary carers who provided details of their income, 71.1% had incomes within the lowest two income quintiles, compared with 37.6% of non-carers. In 2003, 63.5% of Queensland primary carers relied on government pensions or allowances as their principal income source.¹⁴ Of all female Australian primary carers in 2003, 34.2% reported having left their paid work in order to commence or increase caring roles.¹⁵

Many carers allocate much time to fulfilling their caring role. In 2003, 45.6% of Queensland's primary carers aged 15 and over spent an average of 40 hours or more per week providing care and 18.4% spent an average of 20 to 39 hours per week.¹⁶ In 2006, an Australian Bureau of Statistics Time Use Survey found that, across Australia, primary carers spent 1.6 times the amount of time on domestic duties and nearly three times the amount of time on voluntary work and care activities as non-carers. Primary carers also spent less than two thirds as much

time as non-carers on employment-related activities and spent an average of 21 fewer minutes each day sleeping or trying to sleep.¹⁷

The value of carers to the Australian economy is extremely large. A 2005 Access Economics study found that if all hours of informal care were replaced with formal care services, paid for and provided in the home, the replacement value would be \$30.5 billion. This was the equivalent of 3.5% of the forecast Gross Domestic Product and 62.2% of the cost of other formal health care in Australia at that time.¹⁸

- ¹ Disability Services Queensland, 2007, *Queensland Government Carer Recognition Policy February 2007*, DSQ, Queensland.
- ² Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, 'Queensland, Unpaid Assistance to a Person with a Disability (a), by Age, by Sex', viewed 22 January 2009, <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au>
- ³ *ibid.*
- ⁴ *id.*, 2008, *A Profile of Carers in Australia*, Cat. no. 4448.o, viewed 22 January 2009, [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/o/4DoA63D991E01ED3CA2574E1000DF871/\\$File/final%20p df%204448.o.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/o/4DoA63D991E01ED3CA2574E1000DF871/$File/final%20p df%204448.o.pdf)
- ⁵ *ibid.*
- ⁶ *id.*, 2005, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Caring in the Community*, 'Table 19 Primary Carers (a)(b), Relationship to Main Recipient of Care', data cube: Excel spreadsheet, Cat. no. 4430.o.55.004, viewed 22 January 2009, [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/o/CA2568A90021A807CA25701100783039/\\$File/4430055004_may05.xls](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/o/CA2568A90021A807CA25701100783039/$File/4430055004_may05.xls)
- ⁷ *id.*, 2008, *A Profile of Carers in Australia*, loc. cit.
- ⁸ *id.*, 2005, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Caring in the Community*, 'Table 19 Primary Carers (a)(b), Relationship to Main Recipient of Care', data cube: Excel spreadsheet, Cat. no. 4430.o.55.004, viewed 22 January 2009, [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/o/CA2568A90021A807CA25701100783039/\\$File/4430055004_may05.xls](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/o/CA2568A90021A807CA25701100783039/$File/4430055004_may05.xls)
- ⁹ *id.*, 2005, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Caring in the Community*, 'Table 33 Primary Carers Aged 15 and Over, Reasons for taking on caring role - Queensland - 2003', data cube: Excel spreadsheet, Cat. No. 4430.o.55.004, viewed 22 January 2009, [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/o/CA2568A90021A807CA25701100783039/\\$File/4430055004_may05.xls](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/o/CA2568A90021A807CA25701100783039/$File/4430055004_may05.xls)
- ¹⁰ *id.*, 2008, *A Profile of Carers in Australia*, loc. cit.
- ¹¹ *id.*, 2005, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Caring in the Community*, 'Table 29 Persons Aged 15 and Over, Living in Households, Selected characteristics by carer status - Queensland - 2003', data cube: Excel spreadsheet, Cat. No. 4430.o.55.004, viewed 22 January 2009, [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/o/CA2568A90021A807CA25701100783039/\\$File/4430055004_may05.xls](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/o/CA2568A90021A807CA25701100783039/$File/4430055004_may05.xls)
- ¹² *id.*, 2008, *A Profile of Carers in Australia*, loc. cit.
- ¹³ Productivity Commission, 2005, *Economic Implications of an Ageing Australia: Productivity Commission Research Report*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.
- ¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Caring in the Community*, 'Table 29 Persons Aged 15 and Over, Living in Households, Selected characteristics by carer status - Queensland - 2003', data cube: Excel spreadsheet, Cat. No. 4430.o.55.004, viewed 22 January 2009, [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/o/CA2568A90021A807CA25701100783039/\\$File/4430055004_may05.xls](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/o/CA2568A90021A807CA25701100783039/$File/4430055004_may05.xls)
- ¹⁵ *id.*, 2008, *A Profile of Carers in Australia*, loc. cit.
- ¹⁶ *id.*, 2005, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Caring in the Community*, 'Table 32 Primary Carers Aged 15 and Over (a), Time currently spent caring for main recipient of care with reported disability - Queensland - 2003', data cube: Excel spreadsheet, Cat. No. 4430.o.55.004, viewed 22 January 2009, [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/o/CA2568A90021A807CA25701100783039/\\$File/4430055004_may05.xls](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/o/CA2568A90021A807CA25701100783039/$File/4430055004_may05.xls)
- ¹⁷ *id.*, 2008, *A Profile of Carers in Australia*, loc. cit.
- ¹⁸ Access Economics, 2005, *The Economic Value of Informal Care: Report by Access Economic Pty Ltd for Carers Australia*, Access Economics, Australia.