

FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS ELDER CARE



Government of South Australia
SafeWork SA

Work Life Balance

INFORMATION SHEET

November 2011

#4

People are living longer than ever before and of all the states, South Australia's population is ageing the most rapidly. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports that in 2006, South Australia had 233,127 people aged 65 and over, which is 15.4% of the total population. By 2031 this is expected to rise to 22.5%.¹

CARING FOR THE ELDERLY

In the past twenty years, caring for the elderly has moved away from institutionalisation. Elderly people now often choose to stay at home with help from family, friends and professional care services.

The ABS reports that in 2003, 92% of the elderly and people with disabilities received informal care from family members. The report also found that 78% of carers most often lived with and cared for their partner.

THE SANDWICH GENERATION

The deinstitutionalisation of health and welfare services that started in the 1980s has given added significance to the role and contribution of carers in Australia.²

Families and close friends are playing an increasingly important role in supporting the elderly to stay at home. These same carers may also be responsible for caring for children.

This 'sandwich generation' usually divides time between paid work, elder care and child care.

Employees who provide elder care may need to take time off occasionally to fulfil that role.

Time off may be required to:

- accompany an elderly parent to the doctor
- assist with will preparation and arrange power of attorney
- help with day-to-day tasks.

When these responsibilities are regular and ongoing, carers may need more than the occasional day off. Finding alternatives to traditional work patterns can provide the flexibility to meet job requirements and manage caring responsibilities.

WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY

By providing workplace flexibility, employers can keep a skilled and loyal workforce while avoiding the high cost of staff turnover. This is vital to South Australia where the skills shortage and rapidly ageing workforce are causing a loss of trained workers.

Employers may allow informal arrangements for staff members who need time off to care for an elderly friend or relative. This time could be made up at a later date, or on a particular project. Many employers are going even further by embedding work life balance into their business culture and incorporating flexible work arrangements into policy.

Managing the competing demands of work, family and social life is an issue that affects many South Australians. By promoting a work life balance culture and environment in the workplace, employers can improve their ability to attract and retain employees, in turn enriching our health and wellbeing and building stronger communities.

The South Australian Government is committed to work life balance through South Australia's Strategic Plan Target 13 'Improve the quality of life for all South Australians through the maintenance of a healthy work-life balance.'

SafeWork SA is the lead agency for the target through the Work Life Balance Strategy.

www.safework.sa.gov.au/worklifebalance

'I'm 85 and I'd like to live independently as long as I can, but lately I've needed my daughter to help me with banking and getting my medication. In my day, you couldn't take time off to help with these things but, luckily for me, employers are now thinking differently.

My daughter Kath works in local government and they don't want to lose her, so they've been happy to make her hours more flexible. Now she can help me early in the morning, then go to work and finish at a later time. It suits them because the people in Kath's team all like to start early, so now they have someone to cover until 6 pm.'

Audrey



¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2008b. Population Projections, Australia 2006 to 2011, Catalogue No. 3222.0, ABS, Canberra

² Australian Government: House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth: Inquiry into better support for carers (May 2009)

ASSISTING CARERS TO REMAIN IN THE WORKFORCE

Your business can build on industrial relations laws that allow workers to occasionally use part of sick leave as carer's leave. For more information on carer's leave and private sector legislation and policy that supports work life balance, go to www.safework.sa.gov.au/wlb (look under 'Legislation').

Flexible workplace arrangements such as this will allow employees with regular and ongoing caring responsibilities to continue with their normal paid work.

Here are some simple, easy to introduce options for creating a flexible workplace that supports workers caring for the elderly³:

- working from home
- part time and job sharing
- compressed working hours
- reducing workloads
- work redesign (splitting tasks to allow jobs to be more flexible)
- flexible start/finish times and the ability to accrue and take flexitime.

Employers could provide some extra help by providing:

- time and assistance (phone, email etc) for staff in finding care-giving resources
- employee information sessions by agencies in the aged care sector, which may include:
 - ACAT (Aged Care Assistance Teams)
 - HACC (Home and Community Care)
 - Centrelink (age pension and other social security payments)
 - Public Trustee (will preparation, power of attorney, estate and probate law)

- health and wellness options to help workers caring for the elderly to maintain their personal wellbeing while balancing work and caring
- grief and loss counselling
- paid leave above and beyond legislated minimum standards when a break from work is needed.

WORKPLACE AGREEMENTS

An Elder Care policy and flexible work arrangements can form part of human resource policies or workplace agreements negotiated under state or federal workplace relations laws. This can provide for more generous entitlements or added flexibility.

For example, a separate paid carer's leave entitlement may be provided, in addition to the legislated minimum, so that employees do not have to draw on their sick leave for caring.

Some organisations have further increased flexibility by making all personal leave (sick leave and carer's leave) uncapped on the condition that proof is provided.

Any flexible work arrangement (part-time, job share, work from home, compressed working hours) agreed by the employer and employees can be included in a formalised workplace agreement.

BUSINESS BENEFITS

Your business can reduce absenteeism by providing a framework for dealing with personal and family responsibilities.

This moves away from a rigid leave culture of entitlement and eligibility, and the narrow view of working hours based on attendance rather than work outcomes.

The introduction of flexibilities that build on minimum standards can be an important factor in:

- recruitment and retention – positioning your business as an employer of choice to get and keep the best people
- retaining older workers while attracting younger workers for a better intergenerational mix
- reducing absenteeism
- increasing staff morale and productivity
- increasing employees' respect for the employer and commitment to the job
- reinforcing a sense that employees are trusted, valued and an asset to the business.

PROTECTION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF CARER RESPONSIBILITIES

Employers need to be aware of the new carer provisions in the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984*, Part I (3).

It is unlawful to treat a person unfairly because he or she has caring responsibilities for an immediate family member who is in need of care and support (direct discrimination) or to set requirements that are especially difficult for carers to meet and are unreasonable (indirect discrimination).

Immediate family members include:

- a spouse or domestic partner (including exes)
- parents, grandparents, siblings, adult children or grandchildren
- corresponding relatives or one's spouse or domestic partner (in-laws).

Further information is available from the Equal Opportunity Commission of South Australia:

Telephone: (08) 8207 1977 or freecall 1800 188 163 for SA regional callers.

www.eoc.sa.gov.au

³ See Information Sheet #3 in this series for information on flexible work arrangements.

DISCLAIMER

This publication contains information regarding occupational health and safety. It includes some of your obligations under the occupational health and safety legislation that SafeWork SA administers. To ensure you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate Acts and Regulations. This publication may refer to legislation that has been amended or repealed. When reading this publication always refer to the latest laws.

SAFEWORK SA

www.safework.sa.gov.au

HELP CENTRE 1300 365 255

Email: help@safework.sa.gov.au
(the Help Centre closes at 4.15pm on Wednesdays)

LIBRARY AND BOOKSHOP

Ground floor, 100 Waymouth Street, Adelaide

LIBRARY

Telephone: (08) 8204 8877

BOOKSHOP

Telephone: (08) 8204 8881 or (08) 8204 8882

OFFICES

HEAD OFFICE

Level 4
33 Richmond Road, Keswick
GPO Box 465, Adelaide, SA 5001

REGIONAL OFFICES

located at Berri, Mount Gambier, Port Lincoln, Port Pirie, Whyalla