



Fact Sheet 22

# Carers in the bush

OCTOBER 2010

**This Fact Sheet was prepared in collaboration with Carers Australia and draws on the findings of a recent report, *The Tyranny of Distance? Carers in Regional and Remote Australia*, prepared for Carers Australia by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.**

## Geographic spread

According to the 2006 Census, unpaid carers make up 11.2 per cent of the population across Australia. Regional differences are not large (see Table).

### Regional proportion of carers and proportion of carers who were Indigenous

Region	% pop. who were carers	% carers who were Indigenous
Major Cities	11.0	1.0
Inner Regional	12.1	2.2
Outer Regional	11.2	4.6
Remote	9.0	2.5
Very Remote	9.1	46.8
Australia	11.2	

However, there are carer 'hot spots' in a number of Remote and Very Remote areas in NT, WA and SA associated with a high proportion of the caring population in certain statistical local areas being Indigenous.

In Very Remote areas a greater proportion of carers are aged 24 years or less and there are far fewer carers aged 65 years or more than in other regions.

### Regional proportion of carers by age group

Region	% carers by age group			
	15 – 24 years	25 – 44 years	45-64 years	65 years and over
Major Cities	7.7	31.6	43.8	16.5
Inner Regional	6.9	28.0	46.5	17.9
Outer Regional	7.2	29.7	46.0	16.5
Remote	8.3	34.4	43.9	13.0
Very Remote	15.7	40.7	34.7	8.8
Australia	7.6	30.8	44.5	16.7

## Carers' health and social inclusion

Wherever they live, carers are slightly more likely to self-report fair or poor health than people without caring responsibilities, rather than good, very good or excellent health. The gap is greatest for people living in Outer Regional and Remote areas of Australia where 22.1 per cent of carers report fair or poor health compared with 17.8 per cent of non-carers in the same regions and 18.0 per cent of carers in Major Cities.



PHOTO: CARERS AUSTRALIA

Carers living in Outer Regional and Remote areas experience higher rates of disability or a long term health condition (20%) compared with non-carers in the same regions (12.3%) and carers in Major Cities (14.3%).

Carers, particularly in non-Metropolitan areas, report having strong social networks for information and advice. Both carers and non-carers in Outer Regional and Remote areas are more likely to personally know someone they could ask for information and advice (84.2% and 72.6% respectively) than carers and non-carers in Major Cities (77.7% and 68.8% respectively).

Almost two million carers are of workforce age, but many leave the workforce, reduce the hours they work, or work below their skill capacity because of their caring responsibilities. Carers living in Outer Regional or Remote areas have significantly lower rates of employment (70.3%) than non-carers in the same areas (76.6%) or in Major Cities (77.9%)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The high levels of employment relate to the categories of labour force status used in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) General Social Survey (GSS) 2006: employed (usually works 1 or more hours per week); unemployed and not in the labour force.

In addition, carers living in all parts of Australia are more likely to be living in a jobless household which means they are more likely to experience financial hardship. The greatest differences are evident in Outer Regional and Remote areas where 21.4 percent of carers live in jobless households compared with 12.2 per cent of non-carers.



## Access to services and support for carers in rural and remote Australia

Overall, 30.4 per cent of carers in Australia report having problems accessing doctors or employment services, telecommunications services, Centrelink, banks, disability services, the Family Assistance Office or Medicare, compared with 25.3 per cent of those without caring responsibilities.

Outside Major Cities and Inner Regional areas both carers and non-carers are much more likely to report having difficulties in accessing services, with the proportion of carers higher.

Distance to or lack of adequate services in the area is the major difficulty reported. Affordability was a difficulty for 11.2 per cent of carers in Outer Regional and Remote areas compared with 7.3 per cent of carers in Major Cities and 7.8 per cent of non-carers in Outer Regional and Remote areas.

In addition, carers reported that difficulties in understanding or being understood by service providers contributed to the challenge of accessing services, particularly in Outer Regional and Remote areas.

Carers living outside Major Cities were slightly more likely to rely on health, legal or financial professionals in times of crisis than carers in Major Cities. This is problematic given the difficulties rural carers report in accessing such services.



## Young carers

There are 380,000 people under the age of 26 providing care to a family member in Australia, including 170,600 under the age of 18.

Young carers are at high risk of not participating in education or paid work. For this and other reasons they are at risk of socioeconomic disadvantage, isolation, low levels of health and wellbeing and impaired psychosocial development.

37 percent of young carers aged between 15 – 24 live in rural or remote Australia.

Visit [www.youngcarers.net.au](http://www.youngcarers.net.au) for information and support for young carers.

## Support for carers in rural and remote Australia

The contribution to society that carers in Australia give has now been formally recognised through the Carer Recognition Bill 2010 passed by Parliament in October 2010.

**Centrelink** provides financial assistance and services to carers in the community. Carer Payment is an income support payment for people who, because of the demands of caring for a relative or friend, are unable to support themselves through paid employment. Carer Payment has an income and assets test and is paid at the same rate as other social security pensions.

The Carer Allowance is a supplementary payment available to people who provide daily care and attention in a private home to a person who has a disability, severe medical condition or is frail and aged. It is not taxable or income and assets tested and it can be paid in addition to wages and income support payments such as the Age Pension and Carer Payment.

More information is available from Centrelink on 13 27 17 or [http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/individuals/carer\\_index.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/individuals/carer_index.htm).

**Respite care** includes a range of short-term care options to provide temporary relief for people caring for family members who might otherwise require permanent placement in a facility outside the home.

For example, Frontier Services provides aged care and respite services to outback Australia across 85 percent of the continent, including a mobile van (affectionately called 'Troopy') that moves from one community to another to provide local respite care sessions.

The National Respite for Carers Program supports carers of older people and those with disabilities to take time out from their caring role. Information about respite services in your local area can be obtained by phoning a Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre on Freecall™ 1800 052 222\* during business hours or, for emergency respite support outside standard business hours, Freecall™ 1800 059 059\*.

**Carers Australia** and the network of Carers' Associations in each State and Territory aim to improve the lives of carers. Carers also have access to short-term professional counselling and assistance to manage issues such as stress, loss and grief through the Carers Advisory and Counselling Service on the national Freecall™ number 1800 242 636\* or visit <http://www.carersaustralia.com.au/>

(\*calls from mobile phones are charged at applicable rates.)