

10 tips for a carer-friendly workplace

There are many ways that an organisation can better support carers in their workforce. These strategies do not have to be costly, or require a major change in how an organisation operates. Even a small, simple adjustment can make a significant difference.

Raise awareness

Promote a clear definition of what it means to be a 'carer'. Many people may not identify with this term – they may simply consider they are just 'looking after' a family member or friend. Enable staff with caring responsibilities to self-identify.

Recognise carers

Recognise carers as a distinct group within HR policies and procedures. Make it easy for carers to find out what support is available, and how it can be accessed.

Foster a culture

Develop a supportive culture in which carers feel comfortable disclosing their caring responsibilities and discussing their needs for flexibility. Managers play a key role in embedding a culture of support. Management should communicate an ongoing commitment to supporting staff with caring responsibilities, and disclose their own caring responsibilities where appropriate.

Consult

Understand the 'carer population' in your workforce. Consider using staff surveys to monitor the number, nature and needs of carers across the organisation.



Provide practical support

Ask carers what workplace support might be helpful. Options such as providing a quiet room for carers to take personal calls, a car space, a peer support group, online forum or "lunch and learn" education session can be useful.



Expand leave provisions

Promote carer's leave entitlements. Where possible, offer carer's leave provisions above the minimum legislated requirements, and explore flexible leave options such as matched leave or purchased leave.



Promote flexible working arrangements

Flexible working arrangements can make a big difference to carers – enabling them to balance the demands of work and caring, without having to take time off. Ensure staff are aware of carers' rights to request flexible working arrangements under the Fair Work Act. Consider making flexibility the norm, rather than the exception, for all job roles.

Deliver training

Policies are only as good as their implementation. To ensure that support is offered consistently, provide training so line managers understand the challenges faced by carers, and the policies available.

Monitor progress

Unlike most other diversity groups, staff can acquire and shed the role of 'carer' throughout their career. Consider monitoring changes in the carer population, uptake of workplace supports, and employee sickness, absence and turnover rates – and adjusting support as necessary.

Explore opportunities

Explore creative approaches to support staff such as paying superannuation for unpaid carer's leave, offering career breaks, or promoting carer-specific return to work programs.