



A Practical Guide to Supporting Carers in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises



An Australian Government Initiative



**Carer-Inclusive
Workplace
Initiative**

In Australia, carers make up nearly 12% of the population. This means it is highly likely that every business employs someone who either currently has, or will at some point have, caring responsibilities.

Caring situations vary significantly. For some employees, caring responsibilities may have little practical impact on their daytoday work but may still place a substantial emotional load on their wellbeing. For others, caring responsibilities may directly affect their working hours, availability, or location of work.

Most employers, many of whom are also carers themselves, want to support their employees and “do the right thing.” When employees feel understood and supported to balance work and personal responsibilities, they are often more engaged, productive, and likely to remain with the organisation. For small and mediumsized enterprises (SMEs), however, providing this support may be more challenging due to smaller teams and limited resources.

This guide provides practical actions SMEs can take to support carers in the workplace.



Creating a Supportive Workplace for Carers.

Caring responsibilities can develop gradually (e.g. supporting an ageing parent) or arise suddenly and unexpectedly (e.g. following an accident or illness). Establishing a basic framework in advance helps ensure the business is prepared to respond consistently and supportively when the need arises.

While a full suite of resources is available through the [Carer Inclusive Workplace Initiative](#), the following minimum actions are recommended for SMEs:

- Clearly state your organisational commitment to supporting carers in the workplace. This can be as simple as sharing the definition of a carer and inviting carers to disclose if they are a carer and would like to discuss the supports available to carers.
- [Foster a carer-inclusive culture](#), where employees feel safe to disclose caring responsibilities and teams assist one another where appropriate.
- Ensure employees understand their leave entitlements, including annual leave, personal/carer's leave, and compassionate leave.
- Have a clear process for employees to request flexible or remote working arrangements.
- Equip managers with an understanding of available support or flexible working arrangement options for carers, and the skills to hold effective, empathetic conversations.
- Undertake regular wellbeing checkins with all employees to enable early discussion of caring responsibilities and support needs.

When an Employee Requests

Support for Caring Responsibilities

Employees have the legal right to request leave at any time, and carers have the right to request flexible working arrangements after 12 months of employment. Some employers may be able to also offer enhanced entitlements beyond minimum legal requirements.

While employers will generally want to support these requests, there may be practical or operational limits on what the business can accommodate. A fair and reasonable decisionmaking process is essential.

Key steps to consider:

1. Understand the request

- Take time to fully understand what the employee is requesting
- Ask clarifying questions and explore possible options
- Seek to understand the nature, duration, and frequency of the impact (e.g. temporary vs ongoing, occasional vs daily).

A clear understanding of the employee's circumstances, within the bounds of what they are comfortable sharing, helps you assess appropriate support and may identify alternative solutions that work better for both parties.

Be transparent about the factors you are considering so the employee understands how decisions are made. Even where a request cannot be fully accommodated, a respectful and empathetic conversation helps employees feel heard and valued.

2. Confirm legal and policy requirements

- Be clear on your [minimum legal obligations](#), including leave entitlements and flexible work request processes.
- Review any relevant employment contracts, policies, or procedures to ensure compliance.

3. Explore all reasonable options

- Consider different types of [flexible working](#) (e.g. adjusted hours, remote work, temporary changes, role modifications).
- Avoid limiting consideration to a single solution.

4. Assess business impacts

When considering a request, assess the potential impact on:

- Financial costs (e.g. backfilling roles)
- Other team members (workload, role changes, team dynamics)
- Equity and consistency across the workforce
- Client or customer service
- Retention risks if the employee's needs cannot be supported

5. Document decisions

- Follow existing processes if they exist.
- At a minimum, document key discussions and confirm outcomes in writing.
- Ensure any agreed changes (e.g. hours or work patterns) are clearly recorded.

6. Use trial or review periods

- Where appropriate, agree to trial arrangements or set review dates.
- This allows both the business and the employee to assess whether the arrangement is effective.

7. Seek advice if needed

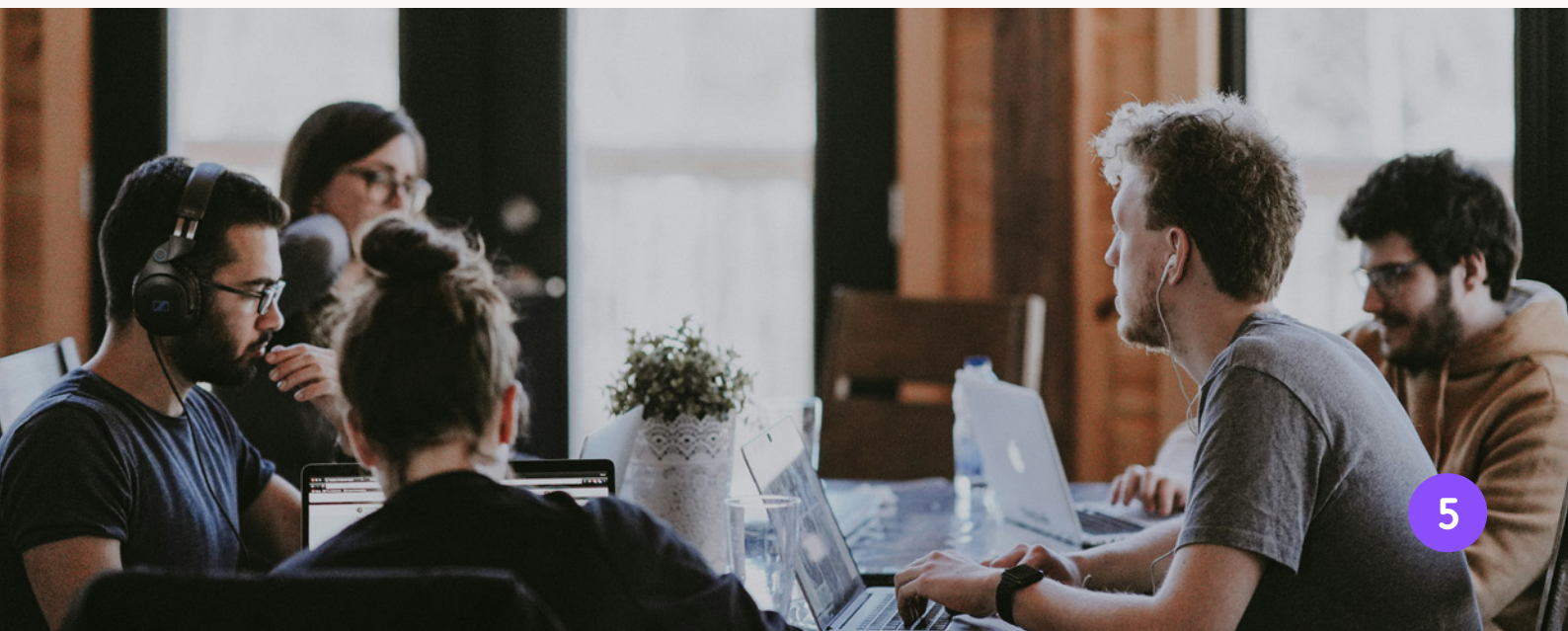
- Where possible, obtain HR or other independent advice to ensure all reasonable options have been considered.

8. Making a Reasonable Decision

When deciding on a request, employers must act reasonably, balancing:

- The employee's caring responsibilities and needs
- The needs of the wider team
- The operational requirements of the business

Employers may refuse a flexible working request on reasonable business grounds but must follow due process and clearly articulate the reasons for the decision. Further guidance is available [here](#).



Further Resources

Depending on the nature of the support requested, the following resources may provide additional support:

- [Job Crafting Conversations: adapting roles to suit individual requirements](#)
- [A conversation guide for supporting Carers](#)
- [Flexible Work Arrangements – Examples](#)
- [Wellbeing Checks](#)
- [Webinar on Carer-Inclusion in Small Businesses](#)



About us

The Carer-Inclusive Workplace Initiative is a collaboration between the Australian Government and Carers Australia.

The aim of the project is to recognise the valuable contributions of carers and create a more inclusive, supportive workplace for Australians who provide unpaid care in the community.

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