



**SDA SUBMISSION
TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE
ON WORK & CARE**

SDA members are workers and carers

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National Secretary-Treasurer



About the SDA



The Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association (the SDA) is one of Australia's largest trade unions with over 210,000 members. Our members work in retail, warehousing, fast food, hairdressing, beauty, pharmacy, online retailing, and modelling.

The majority of SDA members are women (60%, approximately 131,000), under 35 years (57%, approximately 120,000 workers), and low-income. Retail and food services are two of the three lowest industries for median weekly earnings.

The SDA has a long history of advocating on behalf of members with caring responsibilities, who are predominately our women members. We do this through enterprise bargaining; making submissions regarding Awards and the NES to provide a relevant safety net; and through numerous submissions made to parliamentary and government inquiries and other important reviews.

The SDA has 10 policy principles that guide our engagement in these reviews. For a list of these, see Appendix A.



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Executive Summary

The SDA welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Committee on Work & Care.

The SDA regularly advocates on behalf of members who are constantly battling to juggle their care responsibilities with punishing and inflexible work time arrangements and lack of workplace support. 'Flexible work' in the industries our members work in is one sided; it exists for employers, but not for workers.

SDA members make a significant contribution to our economy and society, not only through their paid work, but also through the unpaid labour they provide as carers. This valuable care contribution is unrecognised and undervalued in our workplaces, in our society and in our economy.

In 2021 the SDA partnered with the UNSW Social Policy Research Centre to undertake research into our members experience of managing their work and care responsibilities. This significant research resulted in a Report titled '*The challenges of work, family and care, for Australia's retail, online retail, warehousing and fast-food workers*'. (**The Report**).

The Report provides an insight into the daily lives of SDA members in managing their work and care responsibilities. The Report highlights the powerlessness workers experience; the lack of certainty and control they have over their working hours; the anxiety and stress this causes them, their children, and their families; and the intergenerational disadvantage current workplace practices entrench. Retail workers are not well supported by their workplaces to assist them in managing their care responsibilities. Unfortunately, this research also clearly highlights the widespread systemic discrimination that is occurring, as workers are regularly penalised at work because of their care responsibilities.

The Report found that SDA members provide care at higher rates than the general population and they do this while trying to manage work that is low paid, unpredictable and insecure. Over half of all SDA members regularly provide some form of care to another person, such as a child, grandchild, an older person, or person with a disability or long-term health condition. Caring for others can also include members of their household, other relatives, friends and neighbours. The care provided is often complex and often involves multiple forms of care to multiple people, for example caring for older parents whilst also caring for children.

The Report demonstrates that the needs of workers, including parents and carers is being unmet by employers, workplace laws and the childcare system.

Work time arrangements in the retail industry are characterised by short shifts, fluctuating hours, precarious shifts and rosters, for both casual and permanent workers. Workers are penalised for their caring responsibilities and experience repercussions in the form of lost hours and opportunities. This is impacting the labour supply of workers, and is creating a barrier to work which is impacting on the health, wellbeing and financial security of workers and their families.

Providing care is gendered. Our research demonstrates that women carry a higher burden of unpaid care and at all stages of the work life cycle. Unfortunately, carers face widespread systemic discrimination in their workplace because of their caring responsibilities. This places a significant penalty on women in relation to their ability to participate in paid work; which further impacts on their income, employment status, career progression and retirement savings.

The Report found that the lack of support for workers with caring responsibilities has a disproportionate impact on women as they shoulder a higher burden of care. This is creating a barrier for women's access to suitable and sufficient working times, and career opportunities and progression. This is having a negative impact on gender equality and unless this changes, it will continue to hold back any progress on gender equality in the retail and fast-food industries.

To improve gender equality in Australia, we need a broad range of legislative and workplace reforms to ensure that carers do not continue to be financially disadvantaged because they provide care to others. Reforms include:

- improvements to parental leave entitlements for all parents;
- stable, predictable, secure hours of work that provide a living wage;
- a legislated right to care instead of a right to 'ask' for flexible working arrangements;
- gender equality as an objective of the Fair Work Act;
- better Personal leave entitlements and protections;
- mechanisms to remedy the undervaluation of female dominated industries and occupations;
- accessible and affordable childcare.

The full report and fact sheets can be found at [Challenges of work, family and care for Australia's retail, online retail, warehousing and fast food workers | SDA Union](#) and the Executive Summary is attached to this submission at Appendix B. We will highlight some of the data further in this submission.

Fundamental changes are needed across a range of policy areas to ensure that workers are better protected and supported to work while providing care to those who need it.

Recommendations

1. Increase the paid quantum of the Personal (Carers) leave entitlement for carers under the NES.
2. Amend the National Employment Standards (NES) Personal Leave, to ensure the payment of Personal leave is paid at the employee's full rate of pay, worked out as if the employee had not taken the period of leave.
3. Introduce paid carer's leave for casuals.
4. Extend provisions for workers to access personal leave entitlements when caring for others outside of their immediate family or household, in line with the carer definition under the *Carer Recognition Act 2010* (Cth).
5. Amend the *Fair Work Act 2009* to enable an employee to provide evidence for absences that is recognised for an ongoing period rather than requiring evidence to be obtained separately for each absence, for example, letter from a medical practitioner.
6. Extend unpaid carers leave with the right to return to work under the NES for workers who need extended leave to care for an older person or someone with a disability or temporary or terminal illness.
7. Review the adequacy of the government payments for carers, including the amount paid and the addition of payment of the superannuation guarantee.
8. Amend S739 of the *Fair Work Act 2009* which prevents the Fair Work Commission from dealing with a dispute about reasonable business grounds which relate to S76(4) "Extending a period of parental leave for 12 months beyond the available parental leave".
9. Amend the *Fair Work Act 2009* to recognise periods of unpaid parental leave (and any paid parental leave) as active service, for the purposes of accruing entitlements related to annual salary increments, superannuation, personal/carers leave and Long Service Leave.
10. Immediate action to extend the Government Paid Parental Leave Scheme to provide universal access to at least a minimum of 26 weeks paid parental leave at full-replacement or national minimum wage whichever is greater, plus superannuation, for all employees, removing the distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' carer.
11. That Government commit to a timeframe to legislate to increase paid parental leave to 52 weeks for all employees at full-wage replacement or the national minimum wage, whichever is greater.
12. Superannuation Guarantee Legislation should be amended so that employers are obligated to make superannuation contributions during periods of paid and unpaid parental leave.
13. Paid Parental Leave should be available to every worker who needs it, including:
 - a. workers on casual, temporary or fixed term contracts
 - b. workers on any period of paid or unpaid leave (including employer directed stand down)
 - c. parents of children on permanent care orders

14. A new entitlement be introduced for Grandparental Leave which would provide for an eligible employee to access 52 weeks unpaid leave for each grandchild during the period up until the child's 5th birthday.
15. Amend the *Fair Work Act 2009* to provide improved rights for employees, and in particular carers, to:
 - Predictable and stable rosters with fixed times and days
 - Genuine consultation regarding rosters, and other changes to work arrangements
16. Amend S145A of the *Fair Work Act 2009* to require employers to genuinely consider employee views about the impact of proposed roster changes and to accommodate the needs of the employee.
17. Amend s65 or s84 of the *Fair Work Act 2009* to include a right for a full-time employee to return to work from parental leave on a part-time basis or a part-time employee to return on reduced hours, with a right to return to the pre-parental leave hours until the child is school age.
18. Amend the *Fair Work Act 2009* to include a right for permanent employees with caring responsibilities to reduce their existing hours for a period of up to two years, and the right to revert to the existing hours at the end of that period.
19. Amend the 'right to request' provisions under s65 of the *Fair Work Act 2009* by:
 - Removing the qualification requirements in section 65(2)(a) of the FWA (i.e. the requirement for 12 months' service)
 - Amending the grounds for employers to refuse flexible working arrangements from 'reasonable business grounds' to 'unjustifiable hardship' (similar to the Disability Discrimination Act 1992)
 - Introducing a positive duty on employers to reasonably accommodate flexible working arrangements (as in the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010)
 - Establish an appeal process through the Fair Work Commission for decisions related to s65 of the Fair Work Act the right to request flexible working arrangements, which is currently prohibited under S739 of the Act. This appeals process should not only address procedure but should include the ability for employees to appeal an employer's decision to refuse the request on reasonable business grounds.
20. Introduce protections and rights for workers in relation to the technology to ensure it does not result in direct or indirect discrimination.
21. Amend the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)* to include a positive duty on employers to eliminate discrimination as far as possible. (as in the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)*)
22. Ensure Awards provide a genuine safety net of terms and conditions of employment which particularly impacts women who are more award and minimum wage reliant.
23. Ensure that superannuation is paid on every dollar for every worker, including for those under 18 years and for all periods of leave including parental leave.
24. The government should make superannuation contributions on behalf of carers who are recipients of Parenting Payments, Carer Payments or Allowances, or Family payments.

25. Consider options to boost women's superannuation – for example: following a period of parental leave or extended carer's leave permit averaging of earnings for income tax purposes over 5 year periods, with any resultant tax benefit/refund being paid into the recipients superannuation account.
26. Strengthen the Workplace Gender Equality Act in line with the SDA recommendations to the Review of the Act.
27. Make childcare accessible and affordable
28. That the government ensure fair effective marginal tax rates for second-earners who are more likely to be women. This also needs to be assessed when making changes to tax benefits such as Family Tax Benefits.
29. Amend the *Fair Work Act 2009* to require the Fair Work Commission to proactively tackle gender inequity across all of its functions and establish an expert Gender Equity Panel to support this.

Terms of Reference

- a. *the extent and nature of the combination of work and care across Australia and the impact of changes in demographic and labour force patterns on work-care arrangements in recent decades***

Extent and nature of the combination of work and care

1. Last year, the SDA commissioned the University of NSW, Social Policy Research Centre to survey our members in relation to their experience in managing their work and care. In October 2021 the Challenges of work, family and care for Australia's retail, online retail, warehousing and fast food workers¹ report (The Report) was published.
2. The Report is based on survey responses of 6469 SDA members and provides a comprehensive analysis of the extent and nature of the combination of work and care for SDA members, predominately in the retail sector.
3. The survey size was large and a representative sample of our members, providing a reliable insight into the issues impacting workers in retail more broadly. Retail is the largest private sector employer in the country, employing over 10% of all working Australians. This research provides solid evidence as to the challenges workers who provide care to others, face on a daily basis. The Report very clearly demonstrates the detrimental impact the current system is having on workers and their families in terms of access to opportunity, financial well-being and long-term economic security, and mental health.
4. The Report found that SDA members make significant, unpaid contributions through the labour they provide as parents and carers to children and adults in their families and communities, which is beneficial to our society and our economy.
5. The Report found that 55% of survey respondents provide regular care to a child or an adult, however this was higher for women (60%) than men (43%)². The most common form of care was for a child under 18 years (39%) and 30% of all participants were parents of a child under 18. Older SDA members also provide care to grandchildren (17%) and young SDA members are providing regular care to siblings and adults with disability or long-term illness³.
6. SDA members regularly provide unpaid care or assistance to an adult, such as an older person, person with disability or health condition⁴:
 - 17% said they provided care to an older person,
 - 10% provided care to someone with a long-term illness or health condition, and
 - 9% provided care to a person with a disability.

Provision of eldercare is highest among SDA members aged in their early 50s, when around 27%

¹ Cortis, N., Blaxland, M., and Charlesworth, S. (2021). *Challenges of work, family and care for Australia's retail, online retail warehousing and fast food workers*. Sydney: UNSW Social Policy Research Centre.

² Ibid, page 20

³ Ibid, page 20

⁴ Ibid, page 22

of SDA members are involved in providing care⁵.

7. SDA members care for others at disproportionately high rates when compared to the national population:

	Australia (ABS)	SDA survey participants
Care for an older person or person with disability	11%	24%
Sole parents	14% of families	25% of parents
Parent of a child with a disability	7.7% (children <15 with a disability)	16% (children <18 with a disability)
Young carer's (<25, provide regular care to elderly, person with disability)	5.6%	13%

8. SDA members provide care to a range of adults⁶:
- 18% care for an elderly, ill or disabled parent or parent in-law
 - 4% care for a partner or spouse
 - 4% care for a grandparent
 - 3% care for a sibling
 - 2% care for an adult child
9. Many SDA members provide care to a child or children while also caring for an older person. 16% of parents with a child aged 18 and under, and 12% of parents with a child aged 5 or under, were also providing regular elder care⁷.
10. Young SDA members also provide care for older people and adults with a disability or long-term health condition. Thirteen percent of young SDA members up to age 25 provided regular unpaid care to an older person, person with disability or person with a long term health condition:
- 11% of those aged 20 or under, and
 - 15% of those aged 21 to 258.

These figures were similar to the proportions of SDA members in older age groups providing care.

11. Young SDA members also care for children. 'Among those aged 20 or under, 14% provided regular unpaid care for a younger sibling'⁹.
12. The proportion of young SDA members with care responsibilities is relatively high. The 2016 Census found that among people aged 15 to 24, 5.6% were young carers, providing care to an older person or adult with a disability or long-term health condition¹⁰.
13. The following graph shows the proportion of surveyed members who regularly provide care by age and the type of care they provide. This demonstrates the enormous amount of unpaid labour SDA

⁵ Ibid, page 23

⁶ Ibid, page 22

⁷ Ibid, page 22

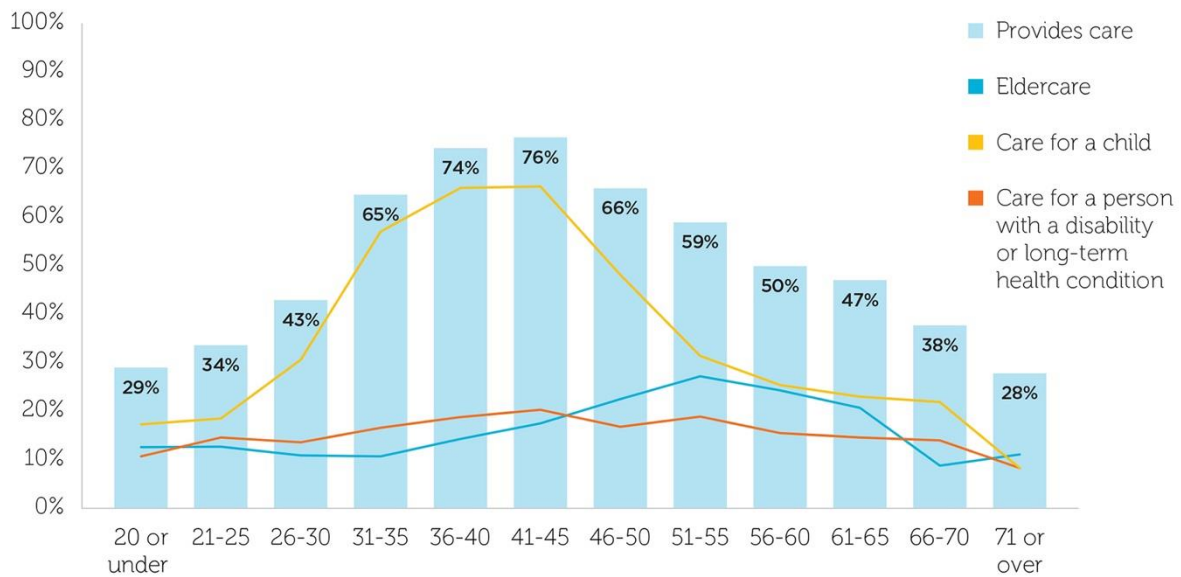
⁸ Ibid, page 23

⁹ Ibid, page 20

¹⁰ Ibid, page 23

members contribute to the care of others over their working lives.

Figure 4.2 Proportion of participants who regularly provide care by age and type of care provided



14. Care is gendered. More women (60%) surveyed than men (43%) provide regular care to a child or an adult¹¹. This is more pronounced when considering the care of children, especially when children are young, and mothers are in the 26-45 years age group¹²:

Figure 4.1 Proportion of men and women who regularly provide care to a child aged under 18 in or outside their household by employee age



¹¹ Ibid, page 20

¹² Ibid, page 21

15. The report found that the lack of support for workers with caring responsibilities has a disproportionate impact on women as they shoulder a higher burden of care, without the appropriate workplace supports. This is a barrier to women's workforce participation, as women are unable to access suitable and sufficient working times and career opportunities. This is having a negative impact on gender equality.
16. As demonstrated in the Report, poor workplace supports, coupled with insecure, unpredictable, and often punitive rostering practices, is having significant impact on their ability to participate in paid work, earn a relatively good level of income and save for retirement.
17. Respondents to the survey typically reside in low-income households. '52% of respondents live in households with post-tax income of less than \$1000 per week. This was the case for 32% of couple parents and 80% of sole parents, and 56% of workers who were not currently parenting a child aged under 18 (see Appendix Table A.10)'¹³.
18. The care provided by SDA members contributes an enormous amount to our society and economy, but often comes at great personal cost. The lack of workplace supports is significantly impacting the ability of carers to fully participate in paid work, which impacts living standards and retirement outcomes. It also significantly impacts health and wellbeing of workers and their families. Greater support, including better workplace rights and economic support, needs to be available to workers who provide unpaid care, to eliminate or at least minimize this economic cost to them.

Impact of changes in demographic and labour force patterns on work-care arrangements in recent decades

19. One of the biggest issues facing our members is insecure work. Insecure work is more than just casual work. Over the past decade or so we have seen a 'casualization' of permanent part-time workforce. It is common in the retail and fast-food industries to be offered permanent part time contracts which provide between 6-10 hours per week (low-base hours contracts) with fluctuating rosters and offers of additional hours. The additional hours are unpredictable and fluctuate in the number of hours offered and when the hours are to be worked.
20. The 'low base plus additional hours' permanent part-time model that we typically see is like the 'hunger games' of rostering where workers are purposefully kept on low base hours contracts with the promise of more. This model of rostering places workers under pressure to have to accept all shifts, regardless of the late notice and unpredictability; comply with all managers requests; and not ask for any support so that they don't lose the opportunity of being offered more shifts, because it's incredibly challenging to have to survive on 10 hours a week.
21. Our members experience very poor working time security with many members working non-standard hours, with unstable and unpredictable work times (and incomes) and a lack of control or consultation over their work times. While this affects everyone, these issues are exacerbated for workers who need to provide care.
22. Low base hour contracts and constantly changing rosters make providing care to others incredibly difficult and stressful for workers, but also those they care for. Insecure, unstable and unpredictable work time arrangements also impacts on our members ability to access other supports which should be available to assist them to manage care responsibilities such as formal childcare.
23. We will address the issues in relation to work-care arrangements and childcare further in our submission in response to c, d and e.

¹³ Ibid, page 82

b. the impact of combining various types of work and care (including of children, the aged, those with disability) upon the well-being of workers, carers and those they care for

24. This member story conveys the severe impact that combining work and care has on the well-being of workers and their families:

"My manager doesn't care that I'm a single mother and that my girls have to hang around outside the school for 1 hour and 10 minutes for me to pick them up. She also didn't care when she changed my roster and my daughters couldn't see their psychologist any more.... and she didn't care that my girls had to give up their sports. This has affected my and my girls' mental health and it affects our daily lives. Our lives are very stressful because of my work hours and my girls suffer because they only have me and they always miss out, and my boss couldn't care less."

Sole mother, permanent part-time

25. The Report found that the combination of caring for a child and working has significant impacts on the well-being of parents and children. However, the widespread discrimination, poor workplace cultures and lack of workplace supports is not just confined to parents; it's felt by all carers.
26. Combining work and care also impacts on the financial wellbeing of SDA members because it impacts on their ability to participate in paid work, leading to lower income and lower retirement outcomes. This is exacerbated by the lack of workplace support and the way in which work time is scheduled.

Impacts on the mental health and stress on workers and their families

27. Poor working time arrangements and rostering impacts on workers mental health and creates stress for their families, and these impacts are more severe for those also providing care;

Among all participants, 35% either agreed or strongly agreed that the way they are rostered impacts on their mental health. This was a little higher for parents. Of those with a child 12 or under, 36% of mothers and 41% of fathers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "The way I am rostered to work impacts on my mental health" (see Appendix data Table A.7). The proportion who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement was higher for those with more complex caring arrangements. For young carers, almost half agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (47%), as was the case for sole parents (46%), those caring for a person with a long-term illness (45%) and those caring for a person with disability (44%).¹⁴

My hours affect me and my family. I have an 11 year old to care for and my husband has terminal cancer. I need to be at home of a night time, but work don't seem to care about that.¹⁵

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

The roster resets affect my mental health as I am worried about having to explain my situation often. When my kids are home I worry about them being unsupervised.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

It is very hard and stressful being a long term casual and it very much affects my mental health.

Sole mother, carer, casual

¹⁴ Ibid, page 76

¹⁵ Ibid, page 70

Expectations from store management are appalling, staff shortages are making our shifts stressful, and it affects my mental health.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

It's very stressful and tiring to constantly be disappointed about the roster. My family feel the brunt of this constant unhappiness.

Grandparent with no regular workday

28. Rostering and working time arrangements are a health and safety issue that creates stress and a risk of workplace mental health injury.
29. The poor rostering time arrangements and lack of workplace supports not only directly impact workers, but it also has a ripple effect which is felt by many, including children, grandparents, neighbours, family and by anyone who relies on a retail worker for care.
30. 37% of respondents with caring responsibilities (whether for children or adults), either agreed or strongly agreed that their shifts and work schedule cause stress for them and their family (**Table 8.1**). This was higher for sole parents, half of whom either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "My shifts and work schedule causes stress for me and my family"¹⁶.
31. The report also found most parents surveyed worry about what goes on with their children while they are working. 68% of parents with a child under 5 agreed with the statement, as did 69% of those with a youngest child in the 6 to 12 age group. While worrying was lower among those whose youngest child was aged 13 to 17, most parents with a teenage child (56%) nonetheless agreed that they worry about what their child is doing while they work¹⁷.

A new rostering system is being demanded by higher powers so now I have to work an evening shift as well as a weekend shift. This leaves my 12 and 13 year old children having to get home from school and be alone till 8pm at night. Who is going to get them dinner? My 12 year old recently had an accident whilst attempting to make his own food using a microwave that resulted in an ambulance trip to hospital. I feel it doesn't matter how responsible they seem they still require supervision. My mum can't drive nights and my sister has her own children with activities etc. was not given a choice with new rostering system it's expected.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

I used to worry if my kids got to and home from school ok and would struggle with their extra activities because of my roster, but now I have changed it to school hours only, I get less hours, sometimes none, but at least I know I don't have to worry anymore about making it to things.

Partnered mother, casual

32. Unstable and unpredictable work time arrangements also impact families who need to manage care of children and others because it requires constant changes to family and caring arrangements so that the carer can maintain employment.
33. The Report found that *'Two in five participants, including **two in five parents (41%) said their shifts can change unexpectedly**. Those working on a casual basis were most likely to experience unexpected changes in shifts (65% agreed this was the case). However, 36% of permanent full or part-time workers also agreed their shifts can change unexpectedly (Table 8.1)*¹⁸. The constant roster changes, often occurring weekly or fortnightly, are having a severe impact on the ability of retail workers to care for others.

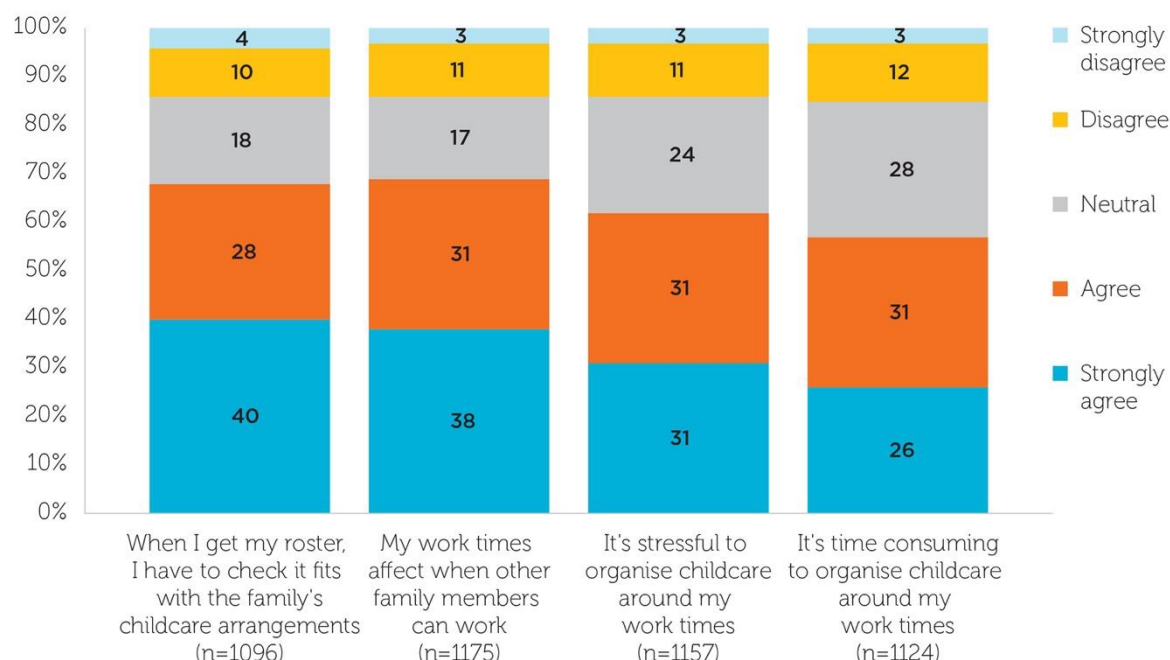
¹⁶ Ibid, page 77

¹⁷ Ibid, page 77

¹⁸ Ibid, page 67

34. The graph below shows the stress experienced by parents as they try to co-ordinate rosters and family arrangements. Among those with a child aged 12 or under, 68% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “When I get my roster, I have to check it fits with the family’s childcare arrangements”, and only 14% disagreed. Higher proportions of mothers agreed than fathers (70% compared with 61%). 69% of either agreed or strongly agreed that their work times affect when other family members can work. Most (62%) found it stressful to organise childcare around work times, and 57% of parents said it was time consuming to organise childcare around work times¹⁹.

Figure 8.2 Experiences of rostering and organising family life, parents with a child aged 12 or under



35. Many members surveyed indicated that because of their hours of work and the inability to access formal or informal care, they manage by working “opposhifts”; where one partner finishes work and the other starts, which means their family spends very little time together, which places them under enormous stress.

“I rarely see my husband, he works early morning until 5.00pm and I walk out the door to work until late. We struggle greatly.”

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

My partner works full-time Monday to Friday 5.00am to 1.30pm. I work part-time Wednesday to Sunday in the afternoons. I do school drop off and my partner does pickups. My mother-in-law does school holidays and anything we can't make due to appointments. This limits my availability for work and can cause issue during the holidays.

Partnered mother of child with disability, elder carer, permanent part-time

36. Stress and mental health impacts are being experienced by carers of adults, including older people and people with a disability or temporary or long-term illness. Like parents, carers of adults are ill-supported by their workplace to provide the care they need to adult members of their immediate and extended family, household and community. Having stable, predictable rosters would allow them to plan and provide care, like taking their parent to a medical appointment, or providing routine care such as shopping, and household chores.

¹⁹ Ibid, page 61

*I have repeatedly advised my manager that I am a carer and being given no notice on roster changes is very stressful.*²⁰

Woman, carer of person with long term illness, permanent part-time

*If [my hours] were consistent week to week I could plan doctor's appointments for my elderly mother. As they change often it's very hard to plan for outside your work life*²¹

Woman, elder carer, permanent part-time

37. Workers need legislative protections and improved rights that provide secure, predictable and stable rosters with genuine consultation regarding rosters and other changes to work arrangements and accommodation of caring responsibilities, without repercussion.

Impact on Children

38. The combination of work and care also has a significant negative impact on the lives of children of SDA members, including increased household stress, and missed opportunities for early education and important social and community activities. Retail workers are the parents to over a quarter of a million children under the age of 15.
39. The Report found that *'Working time arrangements, combined with low pay and rostering arrangements which are out of step with the routines of children and families, mean that many children of SDA members are missing out on the benefits of extra-curricular activities, and on quality early education to prepare them for school, with long-term implications for their futures'*²³. *Children's life chances should not suffer because of their parents' employment, and employers must ensure the arrangements they offer do not contribute to intergenerational disadvantage'*²².
40. Nationally, 95% of children participate in a preschool program for 15 hours per week before they start school. Among surveyed parents with a child starting school in 2022, only 72% said their child attended at least 15 hours of long day care, preschool, or kindergarten, where they might receive a preschool education. 10% said they attended but for less than 15 hours, 12% did not attend, and 5% were unsure about attendance or hours²³.
41. This can have a long-term impact on children. *'Research shows starting school without the skills that early education can provide, can leave children trailing further and further behind their peers throughout primary and high school'*^{18'24}.
42. Not only do work hours impact on access to early education, but also on children's participation in important activities outside of school such as sport, music, medical and well-being appointments, all of which contribute to important life experiences that build skills and confidence in children. 54% of parents surveyed agree or strongly agree that work hours make it difficult for children to attend extra activities, such as swimming, sport and music.

²⁰ Ibid page 70

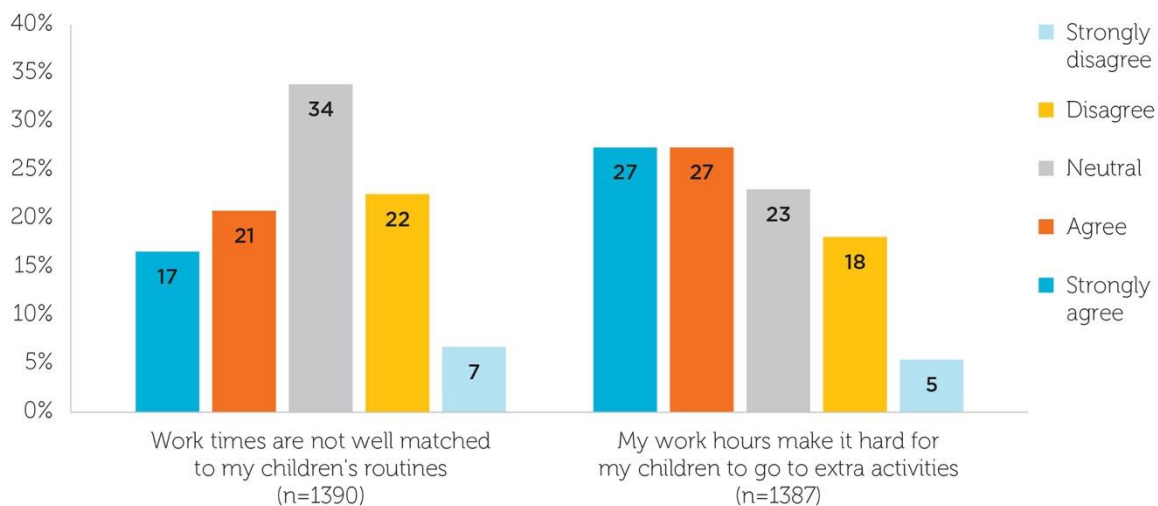
²¹ Ibid, page 72

²² Ibid, page 93

²³ Ibid, page 34

²⁴ Ibid page 34

Figure 9.2 Agreement with statements about children's activities and routines, parents with a child aged 12 or under (%)



As a single mother I am committed to working hard for my children. With consistent hours, I have been able to have stability. Now due to low hours of only 9 hours a week, all of a sudden I have found myself more stressed and losing sleep at night worrying about how I am going to survive. I've considered ...quitting their sports because me having to take them to training and their games doesn't suit my managers idea of rostering. [But] I know it can be done, as it was managed well once before with many hours without me having to stress.

Sole mother, casual

43. Children's access to education and opportunity should not be determined by their parents' employment. The children of SDA members have unequal access to early childhood education and important extra-curricular activities which impacts intergenerational disadvantage. Employers must ensure work and rostering practices are not exacerbating this. It is also important there are appropriate workplace laws which support work and care.

Financial Impacts

44. Our members, particularly those managing care with work are not only impacted in relation to their mental health, but also in terms of their financial wellbeing and the ability to participate in paid work, which results in lower incomes and retirement outcomes.
45. As previously stated, '52% of respondents live in households with post-tax income of less than \$1000 per week. This was the case for 32% of couple parents and 80% of sole parents, and 56% of workers who were not currently parenting a child aged under 18 (see Appendix Table A.10)²⁵.
46. Underemployment is a common theme of the Report, reflecting the predominance of unpredictable, insecure rosters and lack of workplace support for workers care responsibilities. A third (34%) of participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "If my hours were more predictable, I would be able to work more", while this was much higher among those employed casually (53%) of those employed on a permanent basis, 29% also agreed with the statement. This is critical when considering that only 36% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that "I work enough hours to make a living". This was lower for sole parents (25%) (Appendix **Error! Reference source not found.**). Women were also less likely to agree, and more likely to disagree, compared with men (Appendix **Error! Reference source not found.**).

²⁵ Ibid, page 82

47. Underemployment affects workers across the lifecycle. The Report found that substantial proportions in each age group do not agree that they work enough hours to make a living. Underemployment is not just an issue affecting casuals (20%), it also impacts permanent workers too. (57%)²⁶.

Shifts regularly get added or changed without any communication, meaning I have had to put my family out on several occasions, leaving them to fend for themselves. I've had to cancel medical appointments [without] notice because shifts have altered. On the rare occasion I'm actually asked to do extra shifts and I have to turn them down, I'm made to feel like a disappointment to the boss and then am asked less and less to do more hours. But my roster changes without notice more often. They force us into doing extra or different shifts. We are also only given access to the weeks roster (starting Monday) from the previous Thursday morning, giving us a very short amount of time to know the following weeks roster, which makes other commitments difficult to arrange.

Woman, elder carer, permanent part-time

No notice when needed for an extra shift. This morning I had 45mins notice & sometimes extra shifts are added without been asked.

Woman, carer, permanent part-time

Relying on being called in is a little stressful. With the lack of hours, I try to prepare my household's day so if I need to leave unexpectedly, everything is set & it will make everyone less anxious & prevent them contacting me when I'm working.

Woman aged 25 or under, carer, casual

I have repeatedly advised my manager that I am a carer and being given no notice on roster changes is very stressful.

Woman, carer of person with long term illness, permanent part-time

I work Sunday and Monday evenings so I can receive penalties this helps me be able to care for my mum and my children.

Partnered mother, elder carer, permanent part-time

It affects the family most when the roster changes cause my income to decrease

Partnered father, permanent full-time

48. Retailers and fast-food companies are currently claiming that labour shortages and lack of staff are impacting severely on business, yet the lack of workplace support provided to existing workers with caring responsibilities, including unpredictable rostering and denial of flexible work requests leaves workers who want more hours underemployed and under-utilised by their employer.
49. The survey also asked SDA members about their perception of their retirement savings. Only 23% of members surveyed agreed that "I expect to have enough superannuation when I retire", and around half (51%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. There is also a gendered outcome as shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**; mothers had particularly low expectations of their retirement savings, being least likely to agree with the statement (18%) and most likely to disagree (57%). Fathers were also less likely to agree and more likely to disagree they would have sufficient superannuation, compared with other men²⁷.

As a parent grandparent and care giver and full-time worker, and unfortunately divorced, I feel like I'm running on empty. But the bills have to be paid. I worry my super won't cover me enough in retirement, even though I pay extra into it. Stressful, and tiredness is never far away.

Grandmother, elder carer, permanent full-time

²⁶ Ibid, page 82

²⁷ Ibid, page 89

Am very concerned about the amount of superannuation & knowing that I will not be able to support myself when retired.

Woman, carer, permanent

50. A range of workplace policy areas need to be reformed to minimise the economic costs on carers, including better protections while at work, such as improved leave, more stable rostering and access to flexible work, to ensure workers are being supported to care while getting the hours they need to live. Improvements in government supports that supplement income while a worker provides care are also needed. Superannuation must also be improved to deliver better outcomes and to minimize the impact that caring has on a worker's long-term economic security.

e. consideration of the impact on work and care of different hours and conditions of work, job security, work flexibility and related workplace arrangements

51. The way in which employment and work time is arranged, and rosters are set, the growth in insecure work and non-standard hours, and the inability for workers to access changes to their working arrangements has an enormous impact on a worker's ability to manage their caring responsibilities.
52. The Report found that rostering and pay are shaped too strongly around employers' agendas of profitability and cost minimisation and do not accommodate the needs of workers²⁸.

Insecure work and the 'hunger games' model of rostering

53. One of the biggest issues facing our members is insecure work, not only for casuals but also permanent part-time workers who are engaged on low-base hour contracts but regularly work additional hours. The Report details, workers are routinely underemployed and are often in desperate need of more hours in order to financially survive. However, these additional hours are offered and rostered with little certainty or predictability, which significantly impacts on care arrangements which then need to be adjusted to allow the worker to access these additional hours. The current model of low base hour contracts, coupled with the promise of more hours has created a 'hunger games' model of rostering. Permanent employees should have access to better protections and rights under law to more regular patterns and hours of work.

Work time arrangements and rostering practices

54. When surveyed regarding this, 'SDA members described very poor working time security. Very high proportions of participants work non-standard hours, face challenges relating to unpredictable rosters (and income), and experience lack of consultation over changing work times. While affecting everyone, these factors exacerbate difficulties workers face in providing care'²⁹.
55. The report found that many workers, including those employed on a permanent basis don't have regular work times (Chapter 8 Working time and rostering practices):
- One in ten parents (10%) said they do not have a regular workday. (Figure 3.3)
 - Only two in five (40%) work the same shifts each week 'all of the time', (fathers 48% and mothers 37%). 17% only work the same shifts 'some or a little of the time' and 6% 'none of the time'.
 - Permanent employment is not always stable or predictable with 18% of part-time and 13% of full-time workers only working the same shifts 'sometimes', 'a little of the time' or 'never'.
 - 41% of parents said their shifts can change unexpectedly, including 36% of part-time and full-

²⁸ Ibid, page 2

²⁹ Ibid, page 60

time employees. (Table 8.2)

- Unpredictable hours of work impacts workers ability to meet their financial needs. 34% agreed or strongly agreed that 'if my hours were more predictable, I would be able to work more' (53% of casual workers and 29% of permanent workers). (Figure 8.6)
- SDA members have very limited control over their working times. Only 19% can adjust start/finish times and only 21% said they can change workdays.
- 1 in 3 workers have to closely monitor their phone or device to receive notice of shifts.

56. Below provides some of the comments members made in relation to how they are rostered and how their work times are set:

"No notice when needed for an extra shift. This morning I had 45 mins notice and sometimes extra shifts are added without being asked."

Woman, carer, permanent part-time

"It's all over the place. Shifts get changed last minute, I never get the same shifts every fortnight. You ask for extra contract hours and they give you the bare minimum but expect you to give up your weekends without notice."

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

[My employer] wants to have a model roster that would require me to work late at night but that's not possible as I am a solo parent. They do not understand that.

Sole mother, permanent full-time

57. Working hours in retail are highly variable, change frequently, unexpectedly and often at short notice, all of which making it difficult to plan stable care arrangements. 'Irregular work times increase the work of coordinating care, especially for mothers who tend to carry the responsibility for managing, reassessing and changing care arrangements, day to day and week to week'³⁰.
58. The impacts of these working time and rostering practices on workers, and in particular carers is evidenced by the following:

Among those with a child aged 12 or under:

- 68% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'When I get my roster, I have to check it fits with the family's childcare arrangements'.
- 69% agreed their work times affects when other family members can work.
- 62% said they find it stressful to organise childcare around work times.
- Close to half of respondents described making arrangements within the family to accommodate work schedules and childcare inflexibility as what works well for them.
 - 26% said they relied on informal care from family and friends
 - 22% said they coordinated work schedules to ensure a family member, usually a parent, was home with young children
 - 12% described using 'opposhifts' – parents coordinating work hours. These types of arrangements have impacts on families, reducing time spent together and creating stress to juggle the care of children while maintaining work arrangements.

59. Workers need better legislative rights and protections to ensure working time arrangements and

³⁰ Ibid, page 60

rostering is secure, stable and predictable and accommodate the needs of workers providing care. Workers should have a right to care, and this be reflected in the way their hours are arranged and rostered.

Flexibility – a one way street

60. As described in the Report rostering is used by employers to achieve flexibility for the business, prioritizing the profitability of the company over the care needs of employees. The intention of 'flexibility' was actually intended to benefit both employers and employees. However, that is not how it has turned out for employees. The Report demonstrates that flexibility is one-sided. Rosters are changed without consultation or genuine consideration of the needs of the employee and are also used to punish workers who have care responsibilities. The lack of genuine flexibility for workers is further evidenced by the volume of requests for flexible working arrangements which are denied by the employer with little or no genuine attempt to accommodate.
61. The ledger is one-sided because the legal rights sit with the employer and employees have little or no recourse. Balance must be restored to ensure workers have rights to secure, predictable rosters and hours of work which provide a living wage and accommodate workers' caring responsibilities.
62. Not only are employers inflexible in responding to employee needs but they often change rosters unilaterally.

They change rosters without consultation or even notice. We have to work crazy hours that are inflexible and inconvenient. If casuals knock one shift back their hours are cut. All this negatively impacts home life and energy levels when not at work.

Partnered father, elder carer, permanent full-time

Despite explaining I am a sole parent with primary care responsibilities my manager is very inflexible about my start and finish times. I have a set roster to start at 9 am but cannot get there at that time due to dropping my child at school. I have explained my situation but she acts disappointed that I am 'late' even though I fulfil my hours each week.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

I don't think it's fair that they can keep changing my start times. It makes it difficult to collect my grandchildren.

Grandmother, permanent part-time

63. Section 65 of the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth) is fundamentally flawed. Workers only have a right to ask a question, not a substantive right for a worker to have the flexible working arrangements they need to provide care, and there is no recourse to appeal a decision of an employer to refuse the request.
64. Workers providing care need a right to flexible working arrangements and a right to secure, predictable rostering.

Discrimination – Lucky or punished

65. One of the key issues highlighted by the report is the high levels of workplace discrimination (based on family and caring responsibilities), coupled with insecure and unpredictable work, is impacting workforce participation and career opportunities for carers within the industry.
66. 28% of members turn down work activities or opportunities because of caring responsibilities, this is higher for parents (47%) and even higher for parents of children with a disability of additional

needs (64%) and sole parents (53%).³¹

67. The Report highlights the gendered nature of the issues, with women being more likely to be providing care. Women undertake more unpaid work than men; are more likely to take breaks in employment to provide care; and more likely to work in part-time or casual roles to enable them to meet their caring responsibilities, all of which impacts gender equality outcomes.
68. Throughout the survey, participants regularly commented on the lack of recognition, care and support they receive in relation to their caring responsibilities from their employer and line managers.

Doing a close then an open shift, means I get very little sleep and won't see the family for some time. Having to work every public holiday and weekend, means we can never do anything as a family. My shifts change at short notice, which means I have to cancel appointments.

Female, elder carer, permanent part-time

I have an autistic child and my manager doesn't understand how hard it is for myself to work outside of a schedule that I have set for the fortnight.

Woman, carer of person with disability, permanent part-time

My workplace are often very inconsiderate to the personal needs to each of their employees. Often suddenly cancelling leave which was applied for and approved in the correct manner. They are extremely non-understanding when it comes to family emergencies. I have non-english speaking grandmother with Alzheimer-dementia who still lives at home and is often unpredictable. When extra care is needed I have been told to come to work and find someone else to deal with it.

Woman aged 25 years or less, carer for person with long term illness, permanent part-time

Have advised my department manager that I was unavailable after 5.30pm as I have a child with special needs and require routine at home, but they still roster me on once a fortnight after that time and regularly ask me to do shifts after that time as well.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

69. While affecting everyone, challenges with poor working time security and rostering practices is only exacerbated for workers who provide care. Where workers described their arrangements as suitable, they also highlighted feeling 'lucky', and frame their workplace arrangements as atypical and precarious.

I am very lucky with current dept manager. He understands my circumstances and works around me. This is not say if he left I would be this lucky.

Woman, elder carer, casual

I have great hours that suit my family, I am part-time and my hours always remain the same, I'm very lucky.

Woman aged 25+, permanent part-time

70. Despite the existence of flexible working policies and policies to support employees with family and caring responsibilities, many workers are punished and made to feel bad for communicating their availability, refusing unsuitable shifts, or taking leave, all of which have repercussions on access to hours and opportunities.
71. Members described repercussions and fear of being penalised, including loss of hours, when

³¹ Ibid, page 105

workers refuse shifts or seek to change them.

"In the month of February my daughter, at kinder, has caught croup, gastro and a virus which led to having a lot of time off, to the point where I had been flagged at work and was on a warning for dismissal."

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

"I have time limits as to when I can start and finish due to childcare opening hours, primary school drop off times, etc. These sometime threatens my role as a manager. You are made to feel you must be available 24/7 without the excuse of family (being a male would be so much easier)."

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

"I submit hours of availability and they are ignored then work get upset when I tell them I can't do those hours that are outside my availability. They also get upset that I can't work certain hours as I have no care for the kids to go too and it's close to costing me my job. I also find I get told there are no more hours during my availability but then I see newer staff members being rostered on for the hours I've been told don't exist."

Sole mother of child with disability, casual

If I knock back shifts I'm told I'm unreliable and henceforth may not get future shifts.

Woman, elder carer, casual

Managers still make you feel bad for calling in sick or taking personal leave, and sometimes ask for medical certificates which are really hard to get when you're caring for someone.

Woman, carer for person with disability, permanent part-time

[There is] no respect for carers even if you're a really good employee. It's big business, [we are] easily replaced. They look at staff as an expense not an asset.

Woman, carer for person with long term illness, casual

72. 'Flexible work policies' are failing to deliver the outcomes for workers that they were designed to do, that is, supporting a worker in work and care. Workers shouldn't have to be 'lucky' to get the roster they need to support their caring responsibilities and should not be penalised for trying to have a work and care balance. Laws must be strengthened to provide rights for carers to have suitable rosters and working arrangements that enable them to meet their caring responsibilities.

Discriminatory Rostering Policies

73. We regularly see systemic discrimination through rostering policies that mandate specific roster patterns, such as working at least one weekend in two and working a minimum number of evening shifts over a roster period. There is often little or no ability in these policies for workers with caring responsibilities to work a different pattern to accommodate caring needs. This impacts on a worker's ability to manage care and is a form of indirect discrimination against carers, which particularly impacts women.
74. It should also be noted that the rostering policies for retail store management (Store Manager, Assistant Store Manager and Department/Customer Service Managers) positions normally require more than 38 hours a week and rarely provide for part time management positions.
75. Employers often unilaterally change a permanent roster, with 7- or 14-days' notice, without proper consideration of how it impacts a worker's caring and family responsibilities. Employers also need to consider the potential for discrimination to be imbedded into online/ digital rostering systems which do not provide for individual circumstances to be taken into account when setting or changing a roster.

Discrimination during pregnancy and on return to work

76. Discrimination against SDA members while they are pregnant or returning to work from parental leave is all too common. Pregnant members have difficulties accessing reasonable adjustments to their work duties to accommodate medical and health needs and have access to flexible working arrangements and suitable rosters.
77. Unfortunately, women returning to work after a period of parental leave still experience concerning levels of discrimination, both in terms of returning to the same position or a trying to negotiate flexible work accommodations which meets their families' needs. Some expressed a sense of precarity in transitioning back to work.
78. Despite 'flexible work' policies many workers are unable to negotiate this on return to work. Most retail and fast food employers have policies that reflect the bare minimum legislative obligations, which are already flawed and even these are not systemically implemented in practice. The legal obligation is to provide the right for a worker to 'request' flexible work, not for a right to flexible work and very few employers provide anything more than this legislative minimum.
79. Legislation and policies in relation to flexible working arrangements are failing workers returning to work from parental leave.

"Finding it hard to agree on hours with my store with returning back to work... my previous hours aren't suitable anymore and I'm being told jobs I was doing before I left are now no longer available."

Partnered mother, elder carer, permanent part-time

"Initially after returning from maternity leave I was told there were no available hours and to wait till managers came back off leave a week later. I was then provided 3 roster options with nowhere near my entitled work hours. Shifts were too late or too early as childcare wouldn't be open, so was told I miss out on hours then. The transition has been extremely stressful for my family. I definitely thought I would have been more supported in my return to work."

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

80. The discrimination is all too prevailing as evidenced by the difficulties women face returning while breastfeeding, with some explicitly told they could not express breastmilk at work.

"I was told as a casual I wasn't allowed to express pump or I would get sacked."

Sole mother, casual

"I had to go to formula feeding as my workplace and shifts do not allow for me to express milk."

Partnered mother, carer for person with long-term illness, permanent part-time

81. Some expressed insufficient opportunity to change hours to accommodate breastfeeding or parenting.

"Returning to work was not a positive experience... My employer would not change my contract hours upon returning to work to reflect being a parent and still breastfeeding my baby. Not very flexible in terms of family and work balance."

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

82. The SDA made a submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission 'Supporting Working parents: Pregnancy and Returning to Work National Review' which described the nature and extent of the discrimination faced by our members. A copy of the submission, containing many

recommendations can be found [here](#)³².

Non-standard hours

83. A large proportion of SDA members work non-standard hours. With the widespread deregulation of shopping hours over the last two decades, and stores opening from early in the morning until late at night, and sometimes 24 hours, retail workers are increasingly being expected to work non-standard hours as part of their regular roster:
- Half work Saturdays
 - 43% work Sundays
 - 37% work evenings
 - 35% work early mornings
 - 5% work nights (night shift)
84. Many retailers have policies and in some cases model rosters that expect workers to work non-standard hours, whether it be a certain number of evening shifts and/or weekend work. For some, especially managers, this also includes a requirement to work public holidays. Arguably, these policies are a form of indirect discrimination against workers with family and caring responsibilities.
85. The expectation that all workers must work non-standard hours puts enormous pressure on carers. This is exacerbated by the fact that we have a formal childcare model in Australia based on standard work hours leaving many workers with no way to provide care to those who need it, particularly children, while they work non-standard hours. However, it should be noted that the SDA does not support the extension of ECEC into non-standard hours of work, as this would simply create similar issues in another feminized sector, without addressing the structural and systemic discrimination that is occurring in relation to working times and flexible work.
86. Many carers, especially sole parents commented on the difficulty working late nights or for closing or on weekends and public holidays when they can't arrange care for their child. Others commented on the fact that it has a significant impact on the time families can spend together.

Doing a close then an open shift, means I get very little sleep and won't see the family for some time. Having to work every public holiday and weekend, means we can never do anything as a family. My shifts change at short notice, which means I have to cancel appointments.

Female, elder carer, permanent part-time

Weekend work is hard for family life especially when trying to assist in caring for grandchildren and caring for elderly parents.

Man, elder carer, permanent full-time

Structure of work time – Length and spread of shifts

87. Rosters for permanent part-time and casuals also typically include short shifts, despite many workers preference for longer shifts. Short shifts are not well suited to formal care arrangements such as childcare. The rostering of short shifts also often results in workers being rostered over several days to meet their base hour contracts. Many members feel that their hours are spread

³² SDA submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission Supporting Working Parents: Pregnancy and Returning to Work National Review, February 2014 ([Submissions for Supporting Working Parents: Pregnancy and Return to Work National Review | Australian Human Rights Commission](#) – Submission 46.)

over too many days, also impacting on their ability to provide care.

88. The Report found that:

- 40% agreed (or strongly agreed) that “I would like to work more hours” and 34% disagreed (or strongly disagreed)
- 37% agreed or strongly agreed that “I would prefer if the shifts available were longer”, compared with 34% who disagreed
- While more disagreed or strongly disagreed (45%), a substantial minority (27%) felt their work hours were spread across too many days.³³

3 hour minimum shifts are frustrating. Apparently these are the new requirement and working 15 hours a week doesn't support my family.

Woman aged 25+, permanent part-time

Rostering sucks. It is bad now. A big company that made so much money last year cut our hours down. Instead of doing a 5 hour shift like we usually do it's cut down to 3 hours.

Man aged 25 years or less, permanent part-time

Computerised rostering systems

89. Over recent years we have seen a proliferation in the use of computerised rostering systems. The systems typically use a range of data including customer traffic, stock flows and task time analysis to determine the number of hours of labour needed at any time in the week. This then determines how many hours are needed to be rostered across the store or departments of a store. Rosters are often then electronically generated or generated by a manager using the information and communicated to workers via an app. The app is used for multiple purposes including to communicate rosters, get employee acceptance, for signing in and out of shifts and for communication and training purposes.
90. The Report found that there was a general preference for more personal communication around rostering and roster changes and while there is an acceptance of the use of apps as a tool it shouldn't substitute personal communication.
91. The use of apps or other electronic means for communicating rosters and roster changes doesn't provide for proper consultation with the employee and this, despite requirements to do so under legislation, Awards and many of the Enterprise Agreements that our members work under. Lack of consultation has a significant impact on a workers ability to raise family and caring responsibilities and obtain a roster that enables them to meet those responsibilities.
92. It has also led to workers being forced to constantly check the app, especially for casuals and those part timers on low base contracts who need additional shifts to survive. The use of computerization and apps also impinges on an employee's time outside of work putting more pressure on them while caring.

Nobody tells you it just appears on the computer sometimes you can't plan family events.

Male aged 25+, carer for person with disability, permanent part-time

I have to constantly check the roster because our roster app does not give notifications if a change is made.

Partnered mother of child with disability, casual

³³ Ibid, page 64

I would like more hours but unable to get them and dislike having to check online to see if I've been given an extra shift without asking me first.

Partnered mother, elder carer, permanent part-time

With the current arrangement in the app we can see our new roster 4 days prior to starting the next week. And if changes are made there is no sort of external notification from the app to inform us of those changes.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

93. Better protections and rights for workers in relation to the use of technology must be developed including compensation for time expected to use workplace technology outside of the workplace and for the use of the workers own device and data. Technology should not result in discriminatory outcomes.

c. the adequacy of workplace laws in relation to work and care and proposals for reform

Workplace laws are failing to support workers who provide care

94. As evidenced by the Report and our submissions above, workplace laws are not adequate and fail to support those who need to combine work and care. Workplace laws designed to protect and support carers are failing in almost every aspect and need to be reviewed.
95. Despite the valuable social and economic contribution workers make by providing unpaid care, it is poorly recognised and poorly supported in their working lives. The report found that 'For employers, policy makers and regulators, the findings serve as a reminder that as well as contributing to the economy and society through their paid work, employees make essential and valuable contributions of unpaid care work, which families and communities depend on, and which paid work must be organised to support. While large companies in Australia are required to have and report on their gender equality policies, such as flexible working arrangements and supports for workers with family responsibilities, our findings show these policies are not delivering benefits to low-paid workers and their families'³⁴
96. Reform is needed across a range of workplace laws and we make a number of recommendations below for reforms in relation to:
- Leave entitlements under the NES
 - Parental Leave – both unpaid and paid under the NES and Paid Parental Leave Act 2010
 - Right to secure employment and stable rosters that accommodate caring needs
 - Right to flexible working arrangements
 - Discrimination
 - Better safety net for the low-paid
 - Superannuation
 - Strengthened Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012

³⁴ Ibid, page 93

Proposals for reform

Leave under the NES

97. Throughout the Report issues were identified by members in relation to the inability to take carer leave, whether it was for the purpose of caring for a child or for an elderly, disabled or ill adult. For some it is because they are casual and have no access to leave, for others it is because they have exhausted their leave entitlements to care for others.

Both my parents work full-time, so when my children become sick I have no one to help me out. So therefore, I have to call in sick. In the month of February 2021, my daughter who attends kinder has caught croup, gastro and a virus, which led to me having a lot of time off - to the point where I had been flagged at work and was on warning for dismissal.

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

You can't drop them off [at child care] when they are sick, so I need to use all my personal leave to care for my child. When that runs out, I have to suffer the consequences of not being paid, but I still have to pay for childcare.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

With COVID restrictions you need to take much more time off work when your children are unwell, and I am running out of paid leave options.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

98. Carer's Leave forms part of the allocation of personal leave that a worker is entitled to, which is also for the purpose of taking time off in relation to the workers own health. As noted in our submission, many carers are in low-paid work and not well resourced to take periods of unpaid leave to care for others. Many workers, particularly women, who provide regular care also exhaust or significantly reduce their leave balances because of the care they provide to others and have little to support them if they need to take absences that should be available to them when they need it due to their own ill-health.
99. The SDA recommends that the paid leave entitlement under the NES be increased for the purpose of providing care.

Recommendation 1

Increase the paid quantum of Personal (Carers) leave entitlement for carers under the NES.

100. The Report found that SDA members who are also carers live in low- income households. This means that any financial detriment from taking personal leave to provide care for someone, can have a significant impact on their take home pay and their ability to meet their financial needs. This is particularly the case for workers in retail and fast food who rely on penalty rates to make ends meet.
101. The Report found that 'Low hourly rates make penalty rates particularly important to workers' financial security. For this reason, participants were asked how strongly they agreed with the statement "I rely on penalty rates to make a living". Half of participants (50%) agreed with the statement, but this was slightly higher among couple parents (54%) and among sole parents (57%) (Table A.16). Interestingly, while 48% of casuals agreed that they rely on penalty rates, this was the case for 53% of permanent part-time workers, and 50% of permanent full-time employees (see Appendix Table A.17)³⁵.

³⁵ Ibid, page 85

102. Given the strong reliance on penalty rates, any reduction in take home pay from taking personal leave, which is paid at the base rate of pay, exclusive of penalty rates, financially punishes those who provide care even though that care giving benefits not only the person being cared for but society and the economy more broadly.
103. No worker should be financially punished for providing care to others.

I have to work 3 weekends to make ends meet even though its my permanent roster if I am ill or have to care for family I lose my penalty rates when taking sick leave or personal leave. I don't think this is fair.

Woman, carer, permanent part-time, 45+ years

The reduction in take home pay on sick leave or long service leave deters me from utilising either of these to have a break from work to improve my mental wellbeing.

Woman, carer, permanent part-time, 55+ years

Recommendation 2

Amend the National Employment Standards (NES) Personal Leave, to ensure the payment of Personal Leave is paid at the employee's full rate of pay, worked out as if the employee had not taken the period of leave.

104. The Report also demonstrates that many SDA members employed as casual workers are providing high levels of care for others. This comes at a cost to their ability to participate in paid work and to their income.
105. The SDA believes that the casual workers should not be penalised financially for the care they provide to others and the economic benefit this contributes to our economy should be recognised. Paid carer's leave should be extended to casuals at the rate of pay they would have received had they worked.

Recommendation 3

Introduce paid carer's leave for casuals.

106. The entitlement to carers leave is restricted to only cover instances of caring for immediate family members or members of the household. This leaves a gap for those who provide care to others in the community, whether it be extended family, friends and neighbours. Without access to paid leave to provide this care it must be done at an economic cost to the carer.
107. Access to carers leave should be extended to caring for anyone the worker provides care to, regardless of whether they form part of the persons household or immediate family. Families are not singularly defined. People may have different 'family' structures that don't fall into the traditional definition of immediate family and the provision of care to people they recognise as part of their family or community should also be supported.
108. The definition of Carer in the *Carer Recognition Act 2010 (Cth)* is broader than the definition of immediate family under the NES which is what underpins the personal leave provision in the *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)*. The SDA recommends that the definition of who a worker can provide care to for the purpose of receiving paid and unpaid personal leave be broadened in line with the carer definition under the *Carer Recognition Act 2010 (Cth)*.

Recommendation 4

Extend provisions for workers to access personal leave entitlements when caring for others outside of their immediate family or household, in line with the carer definition under the Carer

Recognition Act 2010 (Cth).

109. Evidence requirements under the Fair Work Act 2009 are also quite prescriptive, with employers given the ability to request fresh evidence on each occasion of an absence which can be any evidence that satisfies a reasonable person. This is typically a medical certificate or statutory declaration and can be required for an absence for an employee's own ill health or when caring for someone. This is a burden on those who provide regular care, particularly to someone with a known, ongoing condition.
110. This can be especially difficult when the need for care does not require a medical appointment, but a worker needs to take the person they care for to the doctors just for the purpose of obtaining a certificate or find time to attend somewhere to get a statutory declaration signed. This creates a barrier for a worker to utilise their entitlements that support them to provide care. Getting a GP appointment at short notice is very difficult and is a high-cost burden. Most GPs have an out-of-pocket expense of at least \$38. This is an additional financial punishment for providing care which either falls to the person needing the care or the worker providing the care.

Managers still make you feel bad for calling in sick or taking personal leave, and sometimes ask for medical certificates which are really hard to get when you're caring for someone.

Woman, carer, permanent, 26-40 years

111. In cases where the person is known to have a medical condition or is elderly and frail and may need regular or emergency care from time to time, an employee should be able to provide enduring evidence to cover ad hoc absences over a period of time, instead of being required to provide fresh evidence on each occasion. For example, if someone's elderly parent is known to have dementia and requires planned or unplanned care from time to time, the employee shouldn't need to provide a new certificate or statutory declaration each time, an enduring doctor's certificate or letter should suffice.

Recommendation 5

Amend the *Fair Work Act 2009* to enable an employee to provide evidence for absences that is recognised for an ongoing period rather than requiring evidence to be obtained separately for each absence, for example, letter from a medical practitioner.

112. For some workers providing constant care to an older person, or someone with a disability or temporary or terminal illness a period of absence from work with the right to return to work following the period of care would be of great benefit. It would allow them the time to care, while maintaining their employment. This provision could give workers more choice when it comes to decisions about how they provide care. For some, the ability to return to their job at the end of the time needed to provide care would give them the freedom to make that choice as maintaining employment is a significant factor in the decision.
113. There are many countries that provide longer-term leave entitlements *'In many countries these longer-term entitlements provide a right to leave for somewhere between two and six months. In Germany, for example, workers can take up to six months to care for a dependent family member in need of long-term care. In some countries (e.g. France, Portugal) employees may in at least some circumstances take leave for up to three or four years. In Japan, the entitlement is set for the cared-for person – each individual has a personal entitlement to 93 days across their own lifetime,*

which is to be used by the individual's family members in case of serious illness'³⁶.

114. Whilst this may give employees more choice in relation to providing care, if it is unpaid it may have the unintended consequence of creating another unpaid interruption in work participation for women, who this entitlement will be most used by, and we know that interruptions in paid work have consequences on women's income, lifetime earnings and retirement savings.
115. To counter the impact, a review of government payments that subsidise periods of unpaid care should be conducted, including the level of payment, which should be closer to the national minimum wage, and the payment of superannuation guarantee on carers payments.

Recommendation 6

Extend unpaid carers leave with the right to return to work under the NES for workers who need extended leave to care for an older person or someone with a disability or temporary or terminal illness.

Recommendation 7

Review the adequacy of the government payments for carers, including the amount paid and the addition of payment of the superannuation guarantee.

Parental Leave – unfinished business

116. WGEA data shows that employers in the retail industry (24%) are much less likely to be providing paid primary carers leave to employees when compared to all industries (52.4%). This is similar for secondary carers leave (20.6% compared to 46.4%).³⁷ This is also a concerning statistic given that only large employers are reporting to WGEA.
117. Research comparing the SDA member survey to the main employers of the respondents, found that all except two provided paid parental leave for primary carers and most for secondary carers. Despite this, there are large gaps in the use of parental leave, paid or unpaid.
118. Only 72% of mothers and 34% of fathers have taken the governments Parental Leave Pay for the most recent birth or adoption of their child in last 5 years and **19% had not accessed any paid or unpaid leave for their last birth** (35% of mothers and 14% of fathers). Among parents with a child under 5, 19% of mothers and 47% of fathers had not received any paid leave to support their most recent birth. Only half (50%) of parents of young children accessed paid parental leave from their employer, (56% of mothers and 31% of fathers).³⁸
119. The report found that based on respondents to questions around parental leave taken, most would have been eligible for unpaid and paid parental leave according to their length of service. As the reasons these parents did not access paid leave, and in some cases unpaid leave, were not given, the researchers recommended that this question needs further exploration.³⁹
120. When looking at the quantity of parental leave taken, on average, mothers took 42.2 weeks and

³⁶ OECD Family Database <https://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm> OECD - Social Policy Division - Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs *PF2.3: Additional leave entitlements for working parents*, Updated: January 2020

³⁷ WGEA Data Explorer, extracted 19 November 2021

³⁸ Cortis, N., Blaxland, M., and Charlesworth, S. (2021). *Challenges of work, family and care for Australia's retail, online retail warehousing and fast food workers*. Sydney: UNSW Social Policy Research Centre, p 52

³⁹ Ibid, p 53

fathers took 4.6 weeks when their youngest child was born. However, the large majority said they would have preferred more time away from work (79% of mothers and 87% of fathers). The small minority of mothers who said they wouldn't prefer to have had more time off were away for a much longer period (average 75 weeks).

121. As referenced in the submission SDA members are typically from low-income households. As a result, the length of parental leave SDA members are able to take is inextricably linked to the availability and access to paid parental leave. Once paid parental leave ends, many are forced to return to work.
122. The Report also found that SDA members rely heavily on grandparents to provide care. Grandparents were the most common source of non-parental care. SDA members are also grandparents providing regular care (17%) to children. There needs to be more support available to grandparents to enable them to work and provide care to grandchildren. They make a valuable contribution to the informal care of children in Australia. Given that it is most often grandmothers, this form of care is again gendered and consideration must be given to the fact that women retire on almost half the retirement savings of men and this impact on workforce participation in later stages in life impacts on women's ability to save and contribute to their superannuation.
123. The SDA makes several recommendations to improve the access to and the quantum available for both unpaid and paid parental leave.

Recommendation 8

Amend S739 of the *Fair Work Act 2009* which prevents the Fair Work Commission from dealing with a dispute about reasonable business grounds which relate to S76(4) "Extending a period of parental leave for 12 months beyond the available parental leave".

Recommendation 9

Amend the *Fair Work Act 2009* to recognise periods of unpaid parental leave (and any paid parental leave) as active service, for the purposes of accruing entitlements related to annual salary increments, superannuation, personal/carers leave and LSL.

Recommendation 10

Immediate action to extend the Government Paid Parental Leave Scheme to provide universal access to at least a minimum of 26 weeks paid parental leave at full-replacement or national minimum wage whichever is greater, plus superannuation, for all employees, removing the distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' carer.

Recommendation 11

That Government commit to a timeframe to legislate to increase paid parental leave to 52 weeks for all employees at full-wage replacement or the national minimum wage, whichever is greater.

Recommendation 12

Superannuation Guarantee Legislation should be amended so that employers are obligated to make superannuation contributions during periods of paid and unpaid parental leave.

Recommendation 13

Paid Parental Leave should be available to every worker who needs it, including:

- a. workers on casual, temporary or fixed term contracts
- b. workers on any period of paid or unpaid leave (including employer directed stand down)
- c. parents of children on permanent care orders

Recommendation 14

A new entitlement be introduced to Grandparental Leave which would provide for an eligible employee to access 52 weeks unpaid leave for each grandchild during the period up until the child's 5th birthday.

Secure employment and stable rosters that accommodate caring needs

124. The Report demonstrated that a significant barrier to providing care is the insecure and unpredictable rostering practices utilized by retail and fast-food companies. Rosters are often subject to frequent change, often at short notice, and additional shifts, which members on low base contracts rely on to live are offered on an ad hoc basis and at short notice, all of which makes it nearly impossible for them to plan for their caring responsibilities.
125. The Report found that *'Only two in five (40%) of participants work the same shifts each week 'all of the time'*. This means that three in five (60%) do not. Given that the retail industry employs 10% of all working Australians, this represents an enormous number of workers trying to manage unstable, unpredictable and insecure rosters while managing their life outside of work, including providing care to others.

They've changed my roster so I have to work every weekday at 5 hours a time which makes it difficult to care for my father who I have to see quite a few times a week which leaves me no time to relax.

Woman, elder carer, permanent

Business needs I'm told is the reason for the roster...they don't take into consideration your family and health needs...very much a take it or leave attitude.

Woman, carer, permanent

My hours were changed from early mornings to now between 8 and 6 pm. I needed those early shifts to be home to care for my mum who has Alzheimer's. Unfortunately the umbrella term 'operational changes' now means that (my employer) can change people's hours to avoid penalties.

Woman, elder carer, permanent

126. Members surveyed commonly complained about the lack of consultation and consideration of caring needs when rosters are changed.
127. Workers need better protections which provide secure, predictable and stable hours of work. Employers should also be required to genuinely consult on and accommodate caring needs. This is most important for workers who need to manage care outside of their rostered work.

Recommendation 15

Amend the *Fair Work Act 2009* to provide improved rights for employees, and in particular carers, to:

- Predictable and stable rosters with fixed times and days

- **Genuine consultation regarding rosters, and other changes to work arrangements**

Recommendation 16

Amend S145A of the *Fair Work Act 2009* to require employers to genuinely consider employee views about the impact of proposed roster changes and to accommodate the needs of the employee.

Flexible Working Arrangements

128. While many members need to access either long term or ad hoc leave to support them to provide care to children, older people or people with a disability or temporary or terminal illness, most members need and choose to work while managing the care they provide.
129. SDA members attempt to do this by seeking rosters that allow them to provide care. They do this by giving employers availability outside of their caring responsibilities or by requesting flexible work arrangements, predominately a change to their regular pattern of work to support them to provide the care they need to give.
130. Section 65 of the Fair Work Act 2009 is the legislative support designed to assist workers to obtain flexible working arrangements for a range of purposes including to provide care. This is a fundamentally flawed provision. Workers have always had a right to ask their employer for a change to their working arrangements. What this provision does is to write this ability to ask a question into law. It does not provide any substantive right for a worker who provides care to have the flexible working arrangements they need and there is no mechanism available for workers to challenge an employer's decision to refuse a request.
131. It is also one of only two provisions in the Fair Work Act 2010 (Cth) that an employee has no ability to appeal to the Fair Work Commission if an employer refuses them the entitlement. Notably, the other provision in the Act that is not appealable is Section 76, extending unpaid parental leave to up to 104 weeks. Both are provisions which predominately apply to women.
132. The right for carers to request flexible working arrangements under the NES (Section 65) and the company policies that typically mirror this provision has not resulted in employees being supported with flexible working arrangements when they need them.
133. Employers are able to deny a request on 'reasonable business grounds' which is a very low bar for an employer to have to satisfy and as our Report demonstrates, employers don't genuinely consider how they can accommodate flexible working arrangements. There should be a stronger requirement that an employer must accommodate the flexible working arrangement unless it would place an unjustifiable hardship on a person or the organisation to do so. There is a similar provision in relation to unjustifiable hardship in the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA).
134. There also needs to be a better right in the NES for employees with caring responsibilities to be able to reduce hours for a period of time, while maintaining a right to return to their previous hours. This would greatly support a worker to manage through a period of increased caring responsibilities while continuing to work. This would also be of benefit to an employer who may lose the employee if they are not able to do this.
135. The most common occurrence that we see of an employer's refusal to accommodate a flexible working arrangement is when an employee returns from parental leave. Parents should have a right to return on reduced hours that accommodate their caring responsibilities until the child is school age.

Recommendation 17

Amend Section 65 or Section 84 of the *Fair Work Act 2009* to include a right for a full-time employee to return to work from parental leave on a part-time basis or a part-time employee to return on reduced hours, with a right to return to the pre-parental leave hours until the child is school age.

Recommendation 18

Amend the *Fair Work Act 2009* to include a right for permanent employees with caring responsibilities to reduce their existing hours for a period of up to two years, and the right to revert to the existing hours at the end of that period.

Recommendation 19

Amend the 'right to request' provisions under s65 of the *Fair Work Act 2009* by:

- Removing the qualification requirements in section 65(2)(a) of the FWA (i.e., the requirement for 12 months' service)
- Amending the grounds for employers to refuse flexible working arrangements from 'reasonable business grounds' to 'unjustifiable hardship' (similar to the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*)
- Introducing a positive duty on employers to reasonably accommodate flexible working arrangements (as in the *Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010*)
- Establish an appeal process through the Fair Work Commission for decisions related to s65 of the Fair Work Act, the right to request flexible working arrangements, which is currently prohibited under S739 of the Act. This appeals process should not only address procedure but should include the ability for employees to appeal an employer's decision to refuse the request on reasonable business grounds.

Technology impacts on rostering and out of hours work

136. Due to advances in technology and the use of personal electronic devices and the development of rostering systems that require workers to use workplace apps and other platforms, workers are commonly required to work outside of their rostered hours without appropriate compensation. This is having an impact on work life balance and adverse rostering outcomes.
137. Legislation has not kept pace with changes in technology. Workers need better protections, rights and entitlements in relation to the use of technology.

Recommendation 20

Introduce protections and rights for workers in relation to the technology to ensure it does not result in direct or indirect discrimination.

Discrimination

138. Carers need better protection from discrimination at work. The Report demonstrated that not only do employers fail to genuinely consider an employee's caring needs or seek to accommodate them, but instead actively discriminate against workers who provide care and punish them for it.
139. Carers need better protection against discrimination at work because of their caring responsibilities. The Sex Discrimination Act 1984 should be strengthened to provide a positive duty

on employers to eliminate discrimination against workers with caring responsibilities and to accommodate their needs, similar to the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic).

Recommendation 21

Amend the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)* to include a positive duty on employers to eliminate discrimination as far as possible. (as in the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)*)

Better safety net for the low-paid

140. Carers are more likely to live in low-income households and women who shoulder a disproportionate care are more likely to be Award wage reliant. Awards should provide a genuine safety net of terms and conditions of employment. This will have a positive impact on women and carers. Th safety net should include appropriate penalty rates to compensate for working non-standard hours.

Recommendation 22

Ensure Awards provide a genuine safety net of terms and conditions of employment which particularly impacts women who are more award and minimum wage reliant.

Superannuation

141. Carers, who are predominately women have poorer retirement outcomes than non-carers because they are not able to earn the same level of income over their working life and have interrupted periods where they earn no super at all.
142. Superannuation needs to be reformed to ensure that carers are not financially penalised for the unpaid care they provide that benefits our society and economy.
143. The SDA made a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Economics regarding Economic security for women in retirement in 2015 where we made numerous recommendations for reform. The submission can be found at [Submissions – Parliament of Australia \(aph.gov.au\)](https://aph.gov.au/submissions).

Recommendation 23

Ensure that superannuation is paid on every dollar for every worker, including for those under 18 years and for all periods of leave including parental leave.

Recommendation 24

The government should make superannuation contributions on behalf of carers who are recipients of Parenting Payments, Carer Payments or Allowances, or Family payments.

Recommendation 25

Consider options to boost women's superannuation – for example: following a period of parental leave or extended carer's leave permit averaging of earnings for income tax purposes over 5-year periods, with any resultant tax benefit/refund being paid into the recipients superannuation account.

Strengthening the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012

144. The SDA recently made a submission to the Review of the Workplace Gender Equality Act.⁴⁰ The submission provides a range of recommendations to strengthen the Workplace Gender Equality Act. The submission also provided information on a confidential companion report we commissioned by the University of NSW Social Policy Research Centre *Challenges of work, family and care: Employer Analysis – Data Report*⁴¹. The purpose of this report was to provide a breakdown of the survey data by employer and compare the data with the publicly available reports provided by the main retail and fast food companies to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) for the 2019-20 period.
145. The key finding of the companion report was that *‘Employers’ reports to WGEA about the supports they offer to employees with family and caring responsibilities are at odds with employees’ own accounts reported in the survey.*⁴²
146. When considering the survey responses and the company reports to WGEA, the companion report found that *‘Together, the material shows divergent accounts of work, family and care expressed by retail and fast-food companies, and the workforce. The ‘official’ picture provided to Australia’s regulatory authority for workplace gender equality shows organisations have in place a series of measures to promote gender equality and support workers to manage their work, family and caring lives. However, in the survey, SDA members provided accounts which suggest these measures are poorly attuned with their needs, and the needs of their families. Workers are involved in a range of caring relationships and report that the working time arrangements available to them do not accommodate their caring responsibilities*⁴³.
147. The SDA strongly supports the Workplace Gender Equality Act and the continued obligation on companies to provide public reports, however, the current framework is not robust or proactive enough to achieve improvements in gender equality within organisations or across the Australian economy. Our submission to the Review contained numerous recommendations for reforms to the Act.

Recommendation 26

Strengthen the Workplace Gender Equality Act in line with the SDA recommendations to the Review of the Act.

d. *the adequacy of current work and care supports, systems, legislation and other relevant policies across Australian workplaces and society*

148. The main care supports that our members access outside of the workplace are childcare and government payments for parents and carers. Both supports need to be reviewed and amended to better support workers who provide care.

⁴⁰ [SDA Submission to the Review of the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012](#), November 2021

⁴¹ Cortis, N. and Blaxland, M. (2021). *Challenges of work, family and care: Employer Analysis – Data Report*. Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Sydney

⁴² Ibid, page 5

⁴³ Ibid, page 5

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

149. Chapter 6 of the Report explores SDA members' use of formal early childhood education and care. The Report broadly found that 'Formal early education and care services, such as long day care, family day care, pre-school, kindergarten or occasional care, are an important support for SDA members and their families, although many lack access'⁴⁴
150. For parents of children under 12, Only 9% used formal care services only, half (49%) used informal care only, and 42% used a combination of both⁴⁵. Most relied heavily on informal care provided by immediate family or household members or extended family and friends, particularly grandparents.
151. The biggest difficulties our members faced when accessing ECEC for pre-school aged children was:
- Affording childcare (63%)
 - Coordinating work times with childcare (46%)
 - Finding childcare that fits work schedule (35%)
 - Finding childcare at short notice (35%)
152. The biggest difficulties when accessing ECEC for school aged children was:
- Coordinating work times with childcare (38%)
 - Cost (37%)
 - Finding school holiday care (36%)
153. The main issues they identified with ECEC services include:
- paying for unused care;
 - finding same childcare for siblings;
 - accessing extra days or swapping days when needed;
 - obtaining weekend or after normal hours care;
 - access to Child Care Subsidy (CCS) limited for families with short hour shifts;
 - when a child is sick, paying for childcare not used and not being able to work which jeopardises eligibility for CCS;
 - unpredictable shifts contribute to lack of access to CCS.
154. In chapter 9.2 SDA members also expressed the challenges they faced with access to childcare due to the way their work is arranged and rostered.
155. Access to suitable childcare is a barrier to workforce participation for SDA members, 43% of mothers and 35% of fathers said they want to work more hours but access to suitable childcare is a barrier⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ Ibid, page 34

⁴⁵ Ibid, page 26

⁴⁶ Ibid, page 39

156. The Report also found that the participation of the children of SDA members in the important early childhood education in the year before school was much lower than the national population which has long-term impacts on children and could lead to inter-generational disadvantage.
157. Significant structural reform is needed for the delivery of childcare in Australia to ensure it is providing the appropriate support to those who need it most and removes barriers to participation in work, particularly for women.
158. Childcare must be accessible and affordable.
159. The conclusion of the Report provides a range of recommendations for how childcare should be funded and charged to make it more accessible and affordable. The SDA supports these recommendations.

Recommendation 27

Make childcare accessible and affordable

Government payments to carers

160. Carers make a valuable contribution not only to their families, communities and society, but also to the economy, however, this vital economic contribution is not properly valued.
161. Many low-income carers rely on government payments to survive. The government must ensure that payments that support low-income families and carers are adequate for them to live a comfortable life with dignity and that they are not punished financially for providing care.
162. Superannuation should also be paid on government payments to parents and carers to lessen the long-term economic impact on them for providing care.
163. See Recommendation 7 Review the adequacy of the government payments for carers, including the amount paid and the addition of payment of the superannuation guarantee.
164. Taxation and government benefits should also be reviewed, particularly in relation to the effective marginal tax rates for second-earners who are more likely to be women providing care. Carers, who are typically either earning nothing, or a lower second income, should not be penalised through the tax system for providing care.

Recommendation 28

That the government ensure fair effective marginal tax rates for second-earners who are more likely to be women. This also needs to be assessed when making changes to tax benefits such as Family Tax Benefits.

f. the impact and lessons arising from the COVID-19 crisis for Australia's system of work and care

165. COVID-19 has shone a light and exacerbated many of the issues that workers who combine work and care experience but these issues long preceded COVID-19.
166. Some SDA members surveyed for the Report made comments about the increased stress on themselves and their families due to COVID-19, particularly the way it impacted on access to care arrangements for children.

It's different and sometimes a little more difficult for me as a single parent. Especially with COVID as well and that I miss work because my kid might have the tiniest cough but aren't allowed at school. This stuff has really messed with my mental health this year.

Sole mother, permanent part-time

With COVID restrictions you need to take much more time off work when your children are unwell, and I am running out of paid leave options.

Partnered mother of child with disability, permanent part-time

167. COVID-19 had a disproportionate impact on women, largely because of their role as unpaid carers, but there were also other impacts on women. The SDA wrote a paper on the gendered impact of COVID19 'A Pink Recession...so why the Blue Recovery Plan? COVID10 Impact on Women: The need for effective and equitable recovery policies and interventions'⁴⁷. The paper describes the gendered impacts of COVID19 and the need to ensure the recovery targeted those impacts. The paper contains a 10 Point Plan for Gender Equity in a COVID-19 recovery and beyond:

1. Gender analysis at the design stage as to the impact of policy decisions and interventions.
2. Gender impact statement in the Federal and State budgets.
3. Women at the table on all decision-making bodies and institutions.
4. Ensuring that tax and social security measures do not continue to disadvantage women.
5. A public policy response to ensure investment in modern work and workplaces.
6. Economic investment (both public and private) and job creation which targets the whole economy and particularly the female dominated industries such retail and the care sector (health, education, childcare, aged care, disability care), hospitality and tourism.
7. Industrial Relations framework which addresses the issues for working women including the historical undervaluation of work, pay equity, flexible work and discrimination.
8. Proactively address the gender retirement gap – super on every dollar for every worker.
9. Flexible work rights.
10. Access to training and skills development.

168. A copy of the paper is attached to our submission in **Appendix C**.

g. *consideration of gendered, regional and socio-economic differences in experience and in potential responses including for First Nations working carers, and potential workers*

169. When exploring the reforms needed to better support workers who need to combine work with care consideration should be given to the specific impacts on women; workers in regional areas; workers from low-income households and first nation workers to ensure that greater equality of outcomes are achieved.

⁴⁷ Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association, COVID19 'A Pink Recession...so why the Blue Recovery Plan? COVID10 Impact on Women: The need for effective and equitable recovery policies and interventions'

Care is gendered

170. We have addressed the gendered nature of combining work and care throughout our submission and made recommendations that not only aim to assist carers but also aim to improve gender equality in Australian workplaces and society more broadly.
171. The disproportionate burden of care carried by women and the discrimination faced by workers who combine work and care is a significant barrier to gender equality and urgent reform is needed to remedy this.
172. In addition to recommendations that address impacts arising from the combination of work and care, the SDA particularly calls for the Fair Work Act 2009 to be amended to require the Fair Work Commission to consider the impact on gender in all its decision making.

Recommendation 29

Amend the *Fair Work Act 2009* to require the Fair Work Commission to proactively tackle gender inequity across all of its functions and establish an expert Gender Equity Panel to support this.

The Regions

173. Last year the SDA commissioned Essential Media to undertake research into the differences in lifestyle, opportunities and challenges for people living in diverse communities within regional Australia, to understand how the pandemic has impacted them and to establish what is needed as we plan the recovery from the pandemic to build stronger, more vibrant communities. The research was published in the SDA: State of the Regions 2021 Report⁴⁸.
174. The State of the Regions Report makes findings in relation to the casualisation of work, and concerns about unemployment and lack of opportunity, particularly in rural Australia and the difficulty in finding well-paying, secure jobs. One in seven of those in employment are engaged on a casual or contract basis, with low or zero wage growth is entrenched in the system⁴⁹.
175. The research also found that only 61% of those surveyed in regional cities, 62% in country towns and 48% in rural areas rate childcare facilities as good. The research also found that there is strong support for universal childcare in regional communities⁵⁰.
176. Given that we know insecure work makes combining work and care difficult and access to childcare in the regions appears a challenge there may be even poorer outcomes for workers in regional areas when combining work and care.
177. The particular needs of workers in regional areas must be considered when exploring how problems associated combining work and care are resolved.
178. A copy of the SDA: State of the Regions 2021 Report is attached to this submission at **Appendix D**.

⁴⁸ Essential Media, *SDA: State of the Regions 2021*

⁴⁹ Ibid, page 11

⁵⁰ Ibid, page 16

Workers in low socio-economic households

179. We have addressed the issue that carers are more often from low-income households throughout the submission and made recommendations in relation to specific reforms to support those workers to work while providing care. It is vital that this be considered to ensure that these workers are not financially punished for providing vital unpaid care that contributes to our society and the economy and that we strive for more equal outcomes in relation to opportunity and incomes.
180. Our submission has also provided evidence of the unequal outcomes for children and this must also be addressed in the design of any reforms, whether they are to workplace laws or other supports such as affordable and accessible childcare.

First Nations carers

181. While our research doesn't address specific issues facing first nations who combine work and care, consideration must be given to the specific needs of first nations workers and families and how to best support them to work while providing care to members of their families and communities.

h. consideration of differences in experience of disabled people, workers who support them, and those who undertake informal caring roles

182. The Report found that 9% of SDA members provide care to an adult with a disability and 16% care for a child under 18 years with a disability compared to 7.7% of the national population who care for a child with a disability under 15 years of age⁵¹. Caring for someone with a disability can present particular challenges. Complex care often requires additional support as some of the common forms of care supports are not as appropriate or accessible.
183. The Report contains many examples of the challenges and is evidence of the considerations that must be given to better support those in our community with a disability and the people who care for them.

i. consideration of the policies, practices and support services that have been most effective in supporting the combination of work and care in Australia, and overseas

184. Chapter 6.6 of the Report explored the childcare and employment-based arrangements that work well for SDA members. Many expressed no positive answers to this describing that nothing works well. Others provided some insights into what works well including arrangements with the family to accommodate work schedules and inflexible childcare, relying on informal care from family and friends, and having predictability, or choice around shifts.
185. These comments point to the need for stable, predictable and regular work patterns that match the needs of the carer and accessible and affordable childcare that is available when workers need it.

⁵¹ Ibid, page 22

Appendix A: Rationale for SDA policy positions

SDA policy is driven by providing value to our members whose work is regulated by a broken industrial framework. We seek an economic system that supports, protects and advances the interests of working people in this country.

Our predecessors built the conciliation and arbitration system which provided the foundations to our nations prosperity over a century ago, it is now our responsibility to build a system for the next generation.

Since the introduction of the Fair Work Act 2009 and subsequent radical changes to the financial and digital context inequality has grown and economic and political power has concentrated in the hands of a few.

We believe that fundamental not incremental change is needed. In contributing to policy, we seek to drive a new system that acknowledges the change that has occurred and will withstand the emerging world of work.

We engage in topics that help us drive this agenda and are guided by ten principles that we believe will create value for our members. Those principles are:

- 1. Address Inequality & Enshrine Fairness**
Minimum expectations must be set and adhered to.
- 2. Equity & Empowerment**
All workers must be supported to progress so that no-one is left behind.
- 3. Mobility & Security**
A socially successful economy must provide opportunity for all, regardless of their background. Systems must be built in a way that support success and adaptation in a rapidly changing world of work.
- 4. Delivering Prosperity & Growth For All**
A foundation for prosperity and economic growth must be achieved.
- 5. Protection in Work & Beyond**
Workplaces and the community must be healthy and safe for all workers and their families during and beyond their working lives.
- 6. Workers Capital & Superannuation**
Workers capital and superannuation must be an industrial right for all workers and treated as deferred earnings designed for dignity and justice in retirement.
- 7. A Strong Independent Umpire**
A strong, independent, cost effective and accessible industrial umpire and regulator must be central to the future system of work in Australia.
- 8. Protection & Support for Our Future**
Protecting and supporting our future requires a strong and vibrant retail industry and supply chain providing jobs with fair and just remuneration and contributing to the economy including through skilled workers.
- 9. Work & Community**
Work is a fundamental human activity that provides for personal, social and economic development. Work as it operates in community must build and protect a balance between life at work and life so that workers can contribute to society through the wider community.
- 10. Institutional Support for Collective Agents**
Institutional support must provide for collective agents (registered organisations) so that they are recognised, enshrined and explicitly supported as central to the effective functioning of the system.

Details of specific policy positions can be discussed by contacting the SDA National Office.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Challenges of work, family and care.



Who Cares?
A FAIR SHARE OF WORK AND CARE

FOR AUSTRALIA'S RETAIL,
ONLINE RETAIL, WAREHOUSING
AND FAST FOOD WORKERS

Executive Summary

This report provides information about the work, family and care arrangements of employees in Australia's retail, fast food and warehousing industries. Through the pandemic, these workers have been recognised for their essential contributions in maintaining safe access to food and other necessities for the community. Yet this recognition is not reflected in their employment conditions and supports; they remain low paid and lack access to the flexibility arrangements which assist workers in other industries to provide care to children and adults, and to manage work and family commitments.

To explore the challenges of managing work and family experienced by these workers, including their care for children and others, and their employment needs, Australia's largest private sector union, the SDA, the union for workers in retail, fast food and warehousing, commissioned this research from the Social Policy Research Centre at UNSW. Information comes from a national survey of SDA members, conducted in early 2021, which explored:

- workers' responsibilities to care for children and vulnerable adults;
- how workers arrange their care responsibilities while they are working; and
- the challenges arising from employers' working time practices and Australia's system of childcare provision.

Findings show that as well as making important economic and social contributions through their paid work, SDA members make valuable contributions through the unpaid labour they provide as parents, and as carers to children and adults in their families and communities. Yet these social and economic contributions are poorly recognised and accommodated in their working lives.

The data shows that:

- SDA members lack genuine choice about their working times and childcare arrangements and require better support structures, including access to responsive childcare services that recognise their needs, to ensure they have meaningful opportunities to shape their working and caring lives.
- Industrial relations settings and employer practices are limiting the choices and opportunities available to SDA members. Rostering and pay are shaped too strongly around employers' agendas of profitability and cost minimisation.
- The ways work is organised exacerbates difficulties faced by workers needing to organise their work and family lives, and find time for care. This impacts on the children of retail workers, many of whom cannot access early education and have constrained opportunities to fully participate in other aspects of social and community life.

Changes are needed at the level of industrial relations policy, and within employing organisations and local workplaces. Policy and regulatory changes should be aimed at promoting decent pay, job security, predictability of shifts, employees' control over work times, access to reasonable shift lengths, genuine choices about work days and times, and to ensure workers can make schedule adjustments without fear of repercussions. Changes are also needed in Australia's childcare system, to improve the affordability, accessibility and suitability of care for low-income workers.



Key findings

Care responsibilities

SDA members contribute unpaid care work that is essential to their families and communities.

- 55% of all participants said they regularly provide some form of care to another person, such as care to a child, grandchild, or to an older person, or a person with a disability or long-term health condition.
- This includes 39% who provide care to a child or young person under 18 (either in or outside their household). The vast majority of those caring for a child were doing so as parents. Indeed, 30% of survey participants were parents with a child under 18.
- 17% provide regular care to an older person, 10% care for someone with a long-term illness or health condition, and 9% provide regular care to a person with a disability.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data indicates that 1 in 9 Australians (11%) provide unpaid care to people with disability and older Australians.¹ The equivalent figure among SDA survey respondents is 24%.

"I can't use childcare until I have more regular work to accommodate childcare."

Partnered mother, casual

Complex care responsibilities

Many SDA members work and care in challenging circumstances.

- 25% of participants who are parents with a child under 18 said they are sole parents. This is high: sole parent families comprise around 14% of families in Australia.²
- 16% of parents with a child under 18 said they have a child with a disability or additional needs. While measured differently, ABS data indicates that in 2018, 77% of children under 15 had a disability.³
- 13% of survey participants aged 25 or under were young carers; that is, they are young people who provide regular care to an older person or adult with a disability or long-term health condition. This is much higher than in the wider population: the 2016 Census found that among people aged 15 to 24, 5.6% were young carers.⁴

Managing work and care

The survey shows the needs of retail workers, including parents and carers, are being left unmet by employers and employment regulations, and by Australia's childcare system.

- Many SDA members have contributed years, even decades of service to their employers. Yet their working time arrangements continue to be characterised by short, fluctuating hours, and precarious shifts. This impacts on mental health, constrains opportunities to provide care, and limits opportunities for families to spend time together.

"I made sure [my hours] would work with my family by being completely transparent and upfront about my needs. It was perfect up until recent new management, I'm constantly having to dispute my roster and my hours are getting cut because they can no longer work with my schedule. I feel like a burden, and I come home stressed out and exhausted."

Partnered mother, casual



Informal care

- Most parents use informal arrangements to care for their children while they are working. Among parents of children aged 12 or under, 9% used formal care services only, half (49%) used informal care only, and 42% used a combination of both.
- Care by a grandparent is particularly important. It enables mothers in particular to extend their working hours and earnings, and to reduce or avoid the costs of formal care. Among mothers with a child aged 12 or under, 30% used grandparent care each week and a further 10% used it most weeks. However, access to grandparent care cannot be assumed: over a third of mothers with a child under 12 (36%) did not report using grandparent care.
- As well as drawing on grandparent care, many SDA members are themselves providing care as grandparents. Among those aged over 50, 17% were providing regular unpaid care to a grandchild.
- Young workers also provide care. Among those aged 20 or under, 14% provided regular unpaid care for a younger sibling.

"Having my eldest son (13 years) watch my younger son after school allows me to work just a little bit longer each shift so I can afford bills etc; My parents don't charge if I need them to watch or pick up an unwell child."

Sole father, permanent part-time

Formal care services

- Use of early education and care services (ECEC) or formal childcare is most common among families with a pre-school aged child, however, it is usually used in combination with informal arrangements.
- Comments from workers highlight the ways some families have to make extraordinary efforts to co-ordinate family schedules around work and care, in ways that avoid or reduce their use of formal paid childcare or use of non-parental care. This is largely due to the cost of childcare, including the charging of fees in blocks which do not correspond well with working hours, and because childcare hours do not accommodate the non-standard hours which are prevalent in retail.
- A commonly mentioned challenge is the need to pay for a full day of long day care, even if a child attends only for short hours.
- Difficulties accessing childcare are resulting in inequitable participation in early education among children of SDA members. This can have enduring consequences for children's learning. Nationally, 95% of children participate in a preschool program for 15 hours per week before they start school.⁵ Among surveyed parents with a child starting school in 2022, 72% said their child attended at least 15 hours of long day care, preschool, or kindergarten, where they might receive a preschool education. 10% said they attended but for less than 15 hours, 12% did not attend, and 5% were unsure about attendance or hours.

"It is very hard to find a childcare in the weekends, evening etc. For people like us who do shift work, it is stressful to get."

Partnered father, permanent full-time

Even where SDA members use ECEC services, they experience difficulties.

- For those with a child 5 or under, the most common childcare difficulties were affording childcare (reported by 63% of participants engaged with formal services); coordinating work times with childcare (reported by 46% of those using formal services); finding childcare that fits work schedules (35%); and finding childcare at short notice (35%).
- For those with a primary school-aged child, the most common childcare difficulties were coordinating worktime with childcare (38%), affording childcare (37%) and finding childcare during the holidays (36%).
- Where childcare arrangements were perceived to work well, success was attributed to informal care arrangements, ability to co-ordinate work times within the family, and the predictability of shifts.

Labour supply

Difficulties accessing suitable childcare are reducing labour supply, and particularly impacting on the participation of women in the workforce and their working hours. This impacts on family earnings.

- Among parents with a child aged 12 or under, 43% of mothers and 35% of fathers reported wanting to work more hours, but access to suitable childcare is a barrier: 35% of mothers and 27% of fathers agreed with the statement "If I had suitable childcare, I would work more hours".
- A third of parents with a child 12 or under (33%) said they turn down extra shifts because they won't earn much more after tax and childcare costs.

"I changed my work hours so that I can be home during the day and my husband is home at night with the children. It was too hard trying to work around childcare and school and then what to do when someone is sick"

Partnered mother, permanent part-time

Parental leave

Paid parental leave helps support parents around the time of childbirth or adoption of a child, and when a child is very young. SDA members with a child aged 5 or under were asked about whether they had taken parental leave for their most recent birth, and the type of leave they used.

- The Australian Government's provision of Parental Leave Pay is the most important source of support for SDA members. Parental Leave Pay was the most common form of leave taken, reported by 72% of mothers and 34% of fathers with a child under 5. Although eligibility and the reasons for non-use are not clear from the data, the information nonetheless indicates that many SDA members have missed out.

Overall, 19% of parents of young children said they had not accessed any paid or unpaid leave for their last birth. This was higher for fathers (35%) than mothers (14%).

- Among parents with a child under 5, 19% of mothers and 47% of fathers had not received any paid leave to support their most recent birth.
- Comments on parental leave and transitioning back to work showed mothers faced challenges securing appropriate conditions when returning to work, and also felt they were missing important milestones in their children's lives.

"It was hard to jump straight back into full-time work [while] juggling a sick baby. No sick leave entitlements...was hard. I was made to feel like I had to get straight back into it full force or they would find someone to replace me."

Partnered mother of child with disability,
permanent part-time



Working time and rostering practices

SDA members described very poor working time security. Poor working time security affects all workers, and is very adverse for parents and others with caring responsibilities, impacting on their access to formal and informal care.

- Only two in five (40%) of participants work the same shifts each week 'all of the time'. This is higher for fathers (48%) and lower for mothers (37%).
- Although casual work is most unstable, many of those employed permanently report that their employment does not provide stable, predictable hours
- One in ten parents (10%) said they do not have regular work days.

Most workers report that rosters are set by a manager who they have regular contact with. Those who are satisfied with their working times frequently attribute this to 'luck' in having a good manager, rather than systemic practice. Workers described substantial challenges, including:

- working times which emphasise business priorities and do not accommodate personal needs and circumstances. These affect everyone but make life particularly difficult for workers with complex care responsibilities;
- low hours, short shifts and insecurity, contributing to underemployment and financial difficulties and stress.
- mismatch between working times and childcare availability;
- changing schedules, often at short notice and without adequate communication from employers;
- repercussions and being penalised, including loss of hours, when workers refuse shifts or seek to change them.

"We had to change our start and finish times on night fill so the company can save on penalty rates. We were not given a choice just told it was changing so all our contracts had to change too. There was no consideration for night fill members that have to pick their children up from school etc. Now we also get paid less because of this."

Sole mother, permanent part-time

Impacts on workers and families

Rostering practices contribute to financial difficulties in low-income families, make it difficult for families to access childcare, and make it difficult for families to spend time together. Rostering practices also prevent workers from working more hours. Employers' rostering practices add to parents' unpaid workload. Among those with a child aged 12 or under:

- 68% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "When I get my roster, I have to check it fits with the family's childcare arrangements".
- 69% agreed their work times affect when other family members can work.
- 62% said they find it stressful to organise childcare around work times.

Rostering also impacts on family stress and the mental health of the worker and members of their family:

- Of those with a child 12 or under, 37% of mothers and 42% of fathers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "The way I am rostered to work impacts on my mental health".
- 63% of parents with a child aged 12 or under agreed or strongly agreed that they worry about what's happening with their children whilst working (69% of mothers and 57% of fathers).
- Among mothers with a child below school age, those using formal childcare services were less likely to worry about their children compared with others, underlining the importance of formal childcare for alleviating maternal stress.

Financial security

Many workers find that low pay makes it difficult to meet the needs of their families.

- 55% of respondents live in households with post-tax income of less than \$1000 per week. 32% of couple parents and 80% of sole parents live in households with incomes under \$1000.
- A substantial proportion of parents caring for children find their wages are too low to meet their needs. 46% of parents in couple relationships and 56% of sole parents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they are satisfied with their take home pay.
- Many find they work fewer hours than they need. Only 20% of casuals agreed (or strongly agreed) that they work enough hours to make a living, as was the case for 29% of those employed on a permanent part-time basis. Problematically, only 57% of permanent full-time employees said they work enough hours to make a living, reflecting the low hourly rates received.
- Half of participants agreed that they rely on penalty rates to make a living (50%). This was not restricted to casuals, 53% of permanent part-time workers and 50% of those with permanent full-time hours said this was the case.
- Around a third of parents agreed with the statement "I turn down extra shifts because I won't earn much more after tax and childcare costs".
- Parents commented on difficulties of living on low incomes. They described trying to work hours that enabled them to contain childcare costs. Pay was seen as low given the nature and complexity of the work.
- While a quarter of participants (26%) were unsure about the adequacy of their retirement savings, around half (51%) disagreed with the statement "I expect to have enough superannuation when I retire", and only 23% agreed.
- Mothers' expectations of retirement savings are particularly low: only 18% of mothers with a child under 18 agreed they would have enough superannuation when they retire.

"I'm a single mother that gets no child support and live week to week on my wages."

Sole mother of child with disability, permanent full-time

"It shouldn't be about working extra hours, it's about the hourly rate. 42 hrs per week to struggle paying bills!"

Sole father and carer of adult with disability, permanent full-time

Improving work and care

The research demonstrates that formal child care options and industrial relations regulations are not meeting the work and family needs of SDA members. In particular, rostering arrangements and low pay are impeding the ability of workers to organise the time needed to provide care for their children, extended families and communities. This is affecting children's access to early education and opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities.

Reform is needed to improve working time arrangements in retail, fast food and warehousing industries, so that SDA members have control over their working hours and have predictable shifts so they can organise care and other aspects of their lives. Better job security and pay are also needed, to support all workers to fulfill their care responsibilities, and to enable families to engage with formal care services.

Changes are also needed to ensure child care is available to SDA members in ways that are affordable and suitable for their working hours. Childcare reform should be oriented around principles of children's universal rights to early education and care, to enable access for every child regardless of parents' incomes or employment arrangements.

This Executive Summary has been taken from the Who Cares Survey Report:
Challenges of work, family and care for Australia's retail, online retail, warehousing and fast food workers.

To view the entire report go to: www.national.sda.com.au/care



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Cortis, N., Blaxland, M., and Charlesworth, S. (2021). *Challenges of work, family and care for Australia's retail, online retail, warehousing and fast food workers*. Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Sydney.

¹ ABS (2019) Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release#carers>

² ABS (2020) Labour Force Status of Families
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-status-families/jun-2020>

³ ABS (2019) Disability, Ageing and Carers Australia: Summary of Findings
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/2018#children-with-disability>

⁴ ABS (2018) 2071.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Reflecting Australia - Stories from the Census, 2016
<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features1432016>

⁵ Through the Council of Australian Governments', all jurisdictions have agreed to aim to provide 15 hours per week of early education for all children in the year before school. This reflects that 15 hours is considered the minimum amount of learning needed to develop the skills needed for a successful start at school.



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*A Pink Recession...
so why the Blue Recovery Plan?*

COVID19 IMPACT ON WOMEN

The need for effective and equitable
recovery policies and interventions.

Gender Equity doesn't just happen – it must be designed in.



GENDER EQUITY IN AUSTRALIA IN DECLINE

Australia is not performing well when it comes to gender equity. *The World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Gender Index* ranks Australia 44th out of 153 countries. NZ ranks 6th¹. Australia fails to rank in the top 10 in East Asia and Pacific, sitting below the Philippines and Laos.

Australia has dropped 5 places in 2 years and in 2006 Australia was ranked 15th².

Australia is ranked number 1 for educational attainment, a ranking which has not changed since 2006. Despite maintaining this ranking over this period, we have seen a worsening in our overall ranking from 15th to 44th and our ranking on labour force participation and female representation in leadership.

The 2018 Global Gender Index Report found that 'Australia (39) records a slight widening of its gender gap on legislators, senior officials and managers as well as some reversal of progress on wage equality, resulting in a slight drop in rank'³.

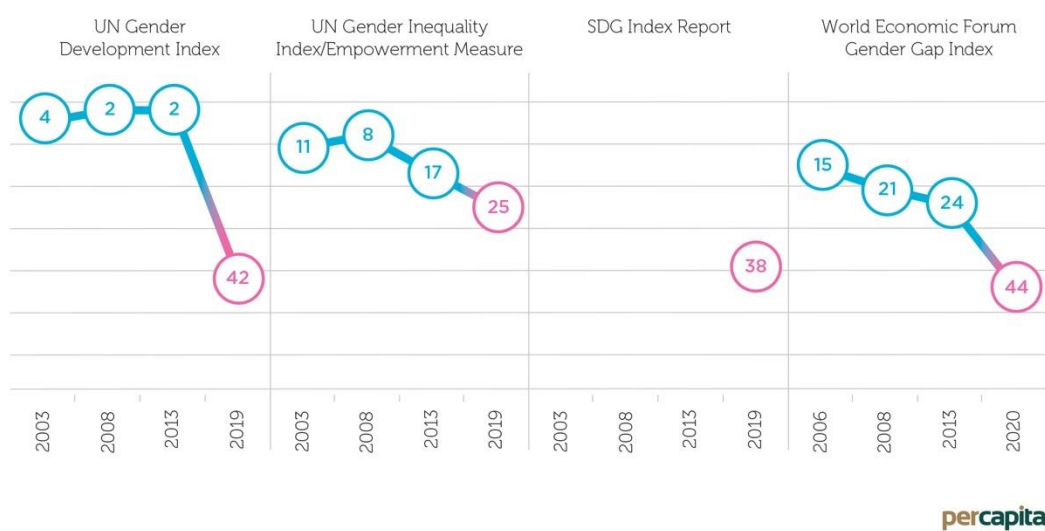
If education is not the issue, the key factors contributing to our worsening gap are most likely structural barriers and discrimination.

Looking closer, Australia ranks 49th on the economic participation gap, which measures wages, employment and workforce participation⁴. In 2006 Australia was ranked 12th.

Australia has also fallen further behind in representation of women in politics; from 32nd in 2006 to 59th in 2020 and also in health outcomes from 57th in 2006 to 104th in 2020.

ACOSS's 2018 report shows that in Australia, more women than men live below the poverty line and statistics from the ABS last December, found women were the majority of those receiving long-term Newstart or Youth Allowance and the majority of those receiving parenting payments, making them more vulnerable as poverty and economic vulnerability makes it harder to build capacity to absorb further economic shocks likely during a pandemic⁵.

Snapshot of Australia's Current International Gender Equality Performance



In 2016, KPMG released a report *She's Price(d)less: The economics of the gender pay gap*, prepared for the Diversity Council of Australia (DCA) and the WGEA. The report found that *'Despite significant advances in lifting women's participation in the labour force and women's pay across industries, and an increased recognition of the value of diversity in the workplace, the gender pay gap continues to persist.'*⁶

There are many factors driving the persistent gender pay gap in Australia, but the key one is discrimination. The KPMG report showed that sex discrimination not only continues to be the single largest factor contributing to the gender pay gap, but it is worsening with systemic discrimination remaining a persistent feature of the workforce. The proportion of the gender pay gap that is attributable to gender discrimination increased from 35% in 2007 to 38% in 2014.⁷

The report also found that career and work interruptions are responsible for 21% of the proportion of the gender pay gap which is the largest changing factor increasing from 9% in 2007.⁸

The next most significant contributing factor in the gender pay gap is industrial and occupational segregation, collectively representing 30% of the gap.⁹ The report found that the representation of men in particular industries and in occupations continues to have an effect on wages, with earnings in occupations and industries with a larger share of males being higher than wages for female dominated industries and occupations.¹⁰

While the report suggests that occupational segregation has decreased slightly, industrial segregation has increased. One reason given for the increase in the gender pay gap resulting from industrial segregation, is the increase in the proportion of males working in traditional male dominated industries which attract higher rates of pay and the simultaneous increase in the proportion of women working in female dominated industries such as health care and social assistance which traditionally attract lower pay.

Gender Equity in our Industrial Relations System

The Fair Work Act 2009 at s.3 does not contain an overarching objective of gender equality. There is currently no framework for the achievement of gender equality in the industrial relations context. The Fair Work Commission should be required to promote gender equality and strengthen minimum employment rights for women in all its functions and powers.

Modern Award Objective

The current Award system is not achieving the outcomes necessary to address the unacceptable and persistent issue of gender inequity in the workforce, including the gender pay gap. Pay equity needs to be an objective of the Fair Work Act and at the forefront when wages are set.

The Modern Award Objective at s134, includes an equal pay principle but there is no gender equity principle which underpins the operation of this section. A broad review of the current Award wage setting system and its impact on the gender pay gap, is necessary to correct the undervaluation of work in female-dominated industries. The occupations and industries which have traditionally attracted women were relatively low paid when classifications in Awards were established.

There needs to be a review of the historical gender-based undervaluation which persists in Awards.

Much has changed in female-dominated occupations and industries including the introduction of educational and training requirements which are not reflected in the wages set in Awards. The failure to recognise accredited training and skills development in wage setting in feminised industries results in a persistent gap in the wages in female-dominated industries and occupations compared to male-dominated occupations and industries where wages are set at higher rates.

The mechanisms which are currently provided in the Fair Work Act 2009 (FWA) to remedy pay inequity are not working to close the gender pay gap. Significant changes to the FWA are required to achieve positive equal remuneration outcomes.

COVID-19 EMPLOYMENT IMPACTS

Exposure to the virus

Women are more vulnerable to COVID-19 due to their economic insecurity, over representation in certain sectors of the economy, their caring responsibilities, and the feminisation of the education and healthcare sectors. As women have a higher representation in roles such as health care, retail, child-care and education – more women have been exposed to the virus as a result of their work.

Healthcare workers are predominately female so the burden of risk is highest on women in those sectors. Women make up 80% of hospital workers, 83.9% of the general medical practice workforce, including the professionals, and clerical and administration staff. 77% of pathology and diagnostic imaging workforce are women, and women make up 81.8% of residential aged care workers.¹¹

Therefore, the risk and the work involved in responding to this crisis is a female one. It has also created a tension between the need to ensure the health workforce is at peak capacity and the considerations around school closures because caring for kids and caring for the community comes back to women.

Other health implications for women include impacts of COVID-19 on pregnancy and reproductive health. While the WHO and others are still unclear on the risks to pregnant women and their unborn child, it has raised concern and anxiety for pregnant workers and the need for additional protections for those workers.

Pregnancy and COVID-19

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) which is advising the Federal Government considers that, based on the limited current evidence, the following people are, or are likely to be, at higher risk of serious illness if they are infected with the virus:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions
- People 65 years and older with chronic medical conditions. Conditions included in the definition of 'chronic medical conditions' will be refined as more evidence emerges. The most current list can be accessed on the [Department of Health website](#)
- People 70 years and older
- People with compromised immune systems ([see Department of Health website](#))

Pregnant women are not included in the AHPPC list of high-risk workers at this stage, but we believe they should be included, and risk assessments should be conducted for pregnant employees.

The WHO advice is that although there has not yet been enough research done on the risks for pregnant workers, they are generally considered to be more immuno-compromised than other workers.

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) believes that pregnant women should be considered a vulnerable group.

The UK government has recently updated their advice in relation to pregnant employees and decided that they should be included in the vulnerable workers group and that employers should be conducting risk assessments. Their [advice](#) relates to health workers, but they say this could be applied to other workers who may be at risk:

There is as yet no robust evidence that pregnant women are more likely to become infected than other healthy individuals, however, it is known from other respiratory infections that pregnant women who contract significant respiratory infections in the third trimester (after 28 weeks) are more likely to become seriously unwell. This may also lead to preterm birth of their baby if they need to recover through improving the efficiency of her breathing or ventilation.

Given these additional considerations for pregnant women who become seriously unwell in the later stages of pregnancy, the Government has taken the precautionary approach to include pregnant women in a vulnerable group.

Currently, there is no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 causes problems with a baby's development or causes miscarriage. With regard to vertical transmission (transmission from woman to baby antenatally or intrapartum), emerging evidence now suggests that vertical transmission is probable. There have been case reports in which this appears likely, but reassuringly the babies were discharged from hospital and are well.

Increased exposure to workplace violence during COVID-19

Workers in the retail sector are exposed to extremely high levels of abuse and violence from customers and the evidence shows that women are at greatest risk.

A SDA survey of over 6000 workers in 2016 found:

- **Verbal abuse** – 89.91% of females experienced verbal abuse compared with 82.35% of males
- **Sexual harassment** – 13.56% of females who experienced customer violence or abuse in the last 12 months said it was of a sexual nature compared with 4.87% of males
- **Physical abuse** – this was experienced more by men, 15.79% of males indicated they had been a victim of physical violence compared with 13.98% of females

Over the past few months, the COVID-19 pandemic has provided a very hostile environment in retail and fast food and increased the prevalence and severity of abuse and violence. This was particularly heightened in the period of panic buying, followed by low stock levels, purchase limits, customer limits and changes to service required to implement the COVID-19 health measures.

Retail workers have also experienced deliberate actions such as being spat at and coughed on by customers claiming to have the COVID virus, prompting the union to ask state governments to extend fines to individuals who spit or cough on retail workers.

This type of violence is also being experienced by workers in other sectors such as the health sector, which is also female dominated.

In a **recent survey of more than 500 members** in the SDA WA Branch survey, 76% of respondents said customer behaviour got worse since the pandemic began. It also found that **22% of retail workers had been deliberately spat on or coughed on during the pandemic.**

Retail trade losses are greater in areas dominated by women

The gender breakdown across retail is varied. Data from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency shows women make up 57.7% of retail workers. But they make up the majority of retail workers in fashion (84.2%), department stores (66.1%) and furnishings and homewares (71.3%) – all sectors of retail hardest hit by COVID-19 and experiencing more closures and reductions in trade.

Supermarkets have a much more even gender breakdown but fashion and department stores have a much higher proportion of female workers.

For example, from last year's WGEA reports:

- Coles: Females sales assistants make up 57%, Males 43%
- Myer: Females 82%, Males 18%
- Just Group: Females 93% , Males 7%

Even within industries, such as retail, which is female dominated, the impact across the sector for women is even worse than we would assume. The gendered impact is worse within retail. Parts of the sector, such as supermarkets, technology sales and hardware remained open and indeed traded strongly, whereas other parts, particularly fashion retailing which has a higher proportion of female workers have a more even gender breakdown of employees and the part of the sector which closed employ many more women than men.

Casual and insecure work

There are more women than men working in casual employment without sick leave entitlements. Women are also over-represented in the industries both heavily reliant on casual workers and likely to be hit hard by the restrictions, closure of businesses and economic downturn. The Retail industry employs a significant number of casual workers.

This crisis has magnified the industrial and social issues that already disproportionately impact women in insecure work as they are more vulnerable to losing employment, financial insecurity, domestic violence and homelessness.

200,000 Australian women who work in the accommodation, food services, and retail trade sectors alone missed out on the JobKeeper payment due to its design flaws around casual employees.

Job losses across the economy

In April, more women lost their jobs and more women were impacted by a reduction in hours:

- 350,000 women became unemployed compared to 270,000 men (5.3% of employed women have lost their jobs compared to 3.9% of men)
- Payroll jobs for females went backwards 8% compared to 6.3% for males from the middle of March to the end of May
- 11.5% of women suffered a reduction in hours compared to 7.5% of men
- JobKeeper – failure to include casuals
- Women are twice as likely as men to be on zero-hour contracts
- Unemployment figures significantly underestimate the job losses

Data released on 5 May 2020 by the ABS shows that the accommodation and food sector has been most impacted, with about one third of jobs in the sector lost between mid-March and mid-April 2020. This was followed by the arts and recreation services sector with a decrease of 27% in employee jobs. Across sectors, jobs decreased by 7.5% and wages decreased by 8.2% between mid-March and mid-April 2020. Over this same period, jobs held by women saw a larger decrease than jobs held by men, while wages paid to men decreased more. Jobs held by women decreased by 8.1% and wages paid to women decreased by 7.0%; whereas, jobs held by men decreased by 6.2% and men's wages decreased by 8.9%.¹²

There is also some evidence to suggest that women-led small and medium enterprises may be more impacted during COVID-19. This is because women-owned businesses are generally operating with less capital and relying more on self-financing.¹³

Decline in incomes and financial insecurity have ongoing effects for household members. Loss or reduction of women's incomes affects families because women often invest their earnings into the household.¹⁴

Increased risk of family and domestic violence

Increased time at home due to social distancing and isolation measures is placing women at greater risk of family violence. The economic pressures created by the pandemic and restrictions has also increased the risk and will continue to do so well beyond the end of the pandemic as those economic consequences persist. *'In April the United Nations raised the alarm over what it called "the shadow pandemic": a marked increase in violence against women during the COVID-19 lockdowns taking place across the globe.'*¹⁵

The increase in domestic violence also comes at a time when access to services are impacted by restrictions.

Almost 60 percent of the 166 support practitioners surveyed in Victoria by Monash University said the COVID-19 pandemic had increased the frequency of violence, half of respondents said the severity of violence had increased, the number of first-time family violence reports had gone up 42 per cent, and practitioners themselves were struggling working from home, which was "wreaking havoc" on their boundaries and mental health¹⁶.

A recent survey by the Centre for Women in Queensland indicated that frontline domestic violence workers had seen a 20 per cent increase in family violence incidents related to COVID-19 financial stress and a near 40 per cent increase in the levels of violence and severity¹⁷.

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency has reported that *'Women's Safety NSW is seeing the impact of COVID-19 through an increase in violence, an increase in the number of clients and an increase in the complexity of cases, among other issues, and data from Google shows a 75% increase in searches about family and domestic violence. There is concern that victims of domestic violence may not receive much-needed support during COVID-19 with essential services disrupted, and individuals unable to make calls to helplines while in the same space as an abusive partner.'*¹⁸

While additional funding has been provided to the family violence sector at both federal and state levels, this may not be enough to meet the demands that existed prior to COVID-19, let alone the significant increases since the emergence of the pandemic. Comprehensive funding and resourcing to prevent and respond to family violence will be critical over the coming years.

The Federal government has not provided any additional funding to assist those experiencing family and domestic violence or provided additional funding to emergency accommodation services.

Lockdown restrictions have left millions of girls, women, and people of all genders vulnerable to a growing shadow pandemic of violence — including cyberviolence and exploitative grooming of children — and with limited access to help. For these people, technology can be a lifesaving line of defense, whether via instant messaging services with a geolocation function, free calls to domestic abuse hotlines, or discreet apps that provide disguised support and information to survivors in case of surveillance by abusers.

The Digital Gender Divide - Access to technology

Women, girls, and marginalized groups are the least likely to have access to technology, and COVID has highlighted this lack of connectivity.

The internet has evolved from being a luxury asset to a key utility and public good, yet 3.6 billion people remain offline. Digital disparities reflect the inequality and discrimination that exist in wider society, with access lowest for the least privileged.

In low-and middle-income countries, 433 million women are unconnected and 165 million fewer women own a mobile phone compared with men. Boys are 1.5 times more likely to own a phone than girls in many countries, and among those who do own phones, boys are more likely than girls to own smartphones. The global internet user gap is 17%, and the digital gender gap exists in all regions of the world — and continues to grow.

Online commerce and mobile money is now a growing phenomenon, with over 1 billion registered accounts and close to \$2 billion in daily transactions. Digital products are reaching the screens of increasing numbers of low-income users, including young people. Yet 1.7 billion people, more than half of whom are women, remain financially excluded from the digital economy. This can mean that essential cash transfer programs do not reach women in times of crisis.¹⁹

Several key Australian government policy initiatives, announced in response to COVID, relied on the use of, and access to, technology such as the transition of school students to home learning and the use of the ATO to access online support systems.

Online learning of students highlighted the technological divide. Professor Natalie Brown, Director of the Peter Underwood Centre at the University of Tasmania, was the lead author on a paper that found 46 per cent of all children could suffer.

"We're seeing an increase in families that are struggling in terms of being able to cover the basic needs — food and shelter and pay rent and all of those kinds of things, so that covers quite a number of young Australians," Professor Brown told the ABC.

Professor Brown said that while the initial research focussed on traditionally vulnerable students, the cohort had expanded because of rapid job losses and limited home internet access — circumstances exacerbated by the rush to remote learning.

"[It includes] all of the complexities of being at home — so some people not having a home, some people in economic disadvantage at home, others trying to balance work, multiple children," Professor Brown said.

But for those without access to devices such as phones and tablets and quality internet access the disadvantage experienced is significant.

Policy responses to the economic crisis and their impact on women

The research into the impact of financial market crashes, such as Black Monday (US) 1987, the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 and the GFC in 2007, shows that existing inequalities are only exacerbated by an economic crisis.

The impact of an economic crisis is most acutely felt by women at year 3 and is felt for approximately 7 years.

Women's unpaid work is a significant contributor to economic growth yet is not counted or recognised. As a result of COVID-19, mothers are spending an extra hour each day on unpaid housework and four extra hours on childcare.

Fiscal policy has the biggest impact on gender equality outcomes and austerity policy does not achieve job creation or gender equity.

To date, there has been no gender analysis of policy decisions and no discussion about addressing the impact on women.

International research shows that investing in social infrastructure provides a greater return on investment and creates more jobs than investment in the construction sectors. Investment in the 'care' sector creates twice as many jobs as that in construction.

Policy development is still premised on the assumption of the male breadwinner model – which we see playing out with the construction jobs/ shovel ready narrative.

The economic recovery response and 'plan' to date has had, and will continue to have, a disproportionately negative impact on women.

As the economy starts to reopen, we need a strong plan to support an economic recovery from the pandemic. Australia's economy is underpinned by consumption. We need strong consumer spending to support our economic recovery. To support a consumer led recovery people need to have money in their pocket to spend.

Fiscal stimulus should be directed towards the retail industry not only to both support and recognise the valuable contribution of these low paid workers. The government should provide frontline workers with a low-income tax rebate or direct payment up to the value of \$1,500. The estimated fiscal stimulus to the NSW economy from this proposal is between \$1.2bn to \$2.8bn. Proposals to provide a combination of direct payments and/or low income tax rebates to low income earners and frontline workers up to the value of \$1,500 would cost \$3.4bn whilst providing up to \$8.7bn of economic activity (see McKell, *A COVID-19 Tax Rebate for Frontline Workers*).

Childcare package

Childcare is a key piece of infrastructure and impacts significantly on women's workforce participation.

The introduction of free childcare during the COVID pandemic was a welcome addition to families and children.

Childcare attendance among disadvantaged, vulnerable and Indigenous children increased with this initiative. Richard Weston, chief executive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's advocacy body SNAICC, said many Indigenous community services had reported increased enrolment after the abolition of fees, with vulnerable children attending for more hours and some families accessing early learning and care for the first time.

Accessible, affordable quality childcare is an important enabler to women's workforce participation.

The Federal government has chosen to discontinue free childcare. This decision was accompanied by the removal of JobKeeper for those working in the Childcare sector; a sector with a female workforce of 96%.

Superannuation

Current research shows that 90% of women will retire with inadequate retirement savings and that in 2010 one in five women yet to retire had no superannuation at all.²⁰

In Australia:

- Women currently retire with 47% less superannuation than men
- Women live five years longer than men on average
- Women only receive 1/3 of the government tax concessions on super (men receive the other 2/3)

Quick stats

- 40% of older single retired women live in poverty and experience economic insecurity in retirement
- 46.9% of the workforce are women
- 44% of women rely on their partners income as the main source of funds for retirement
- 8.5% of women between 65 and 74 still have a mortgage
- The average female salary is \$44,000 (including part-time workers)
- Female graduates earn \$5,000 less than male graduates in the same role
- Women spend on average five hours more per day caring for children than men

Key factors behind the gender super gap

- 43% of women work part-time
- Women working full-time earn 18% less than men
- Women take on average five years out of the workforce to care for children or family members which can cause their super savings to stagnate and begin to fall behind those of men
- The current 9.5% Superannuation Guarantee does not enable most women to accrue sufficient savings for a comfortable retirement
- An estimated 220,000 women miss out on \$125 million of superannuation contributions as they do not meet the requirement to earn \$450 per month (before tax) from one employer (as many women work more than one part-time job)

Access to Early Release of Superannuation

One of the first policy responses of the government was to amend the 'hardship' provisions to allow access to superannuation prior to the retirement age.

Analysis from AMP, one major superannuation fund, found that 21% of women were withdrawing their starting super balances, compared to 17% of men. Further, Female AMP clients were also withdrawing a larger proportion of their super than men, and were more likely to clear out their entire super savings (14%) compared to their male counterparts (12%). With the average superannuation balance for a woman in her early 40s at just under \$62,000, a withdrawal of the maximum is likely to wipe out the compound interest on their superannuation.

Women's ability to make up for their decreased superannuation through future earnings has also been reduced with 55% of jobs lost in Australia held by women. Female work hours also reduced by 11.5% in April, compared to a 7.5% reduction suffered by male workers.

Women's Legal Service Victoria has also warned that women experiencing family violence almost always experience economic abuse, which could take the form of being forced into accessing their super early by violent partners.

So far, 581,000 women have accessed the superannuation early release scheme.

Superannuation is not a bank account and Superannuation is not social security, yet this policy has made it both. Women have had to fund their own COVID recovery which will have significant impacts on their ability to retire with dignity and security.

Home Renovations Package

The Government's \$150,000 renovation plan announcement will have little, if any impact on job creation for women. Unlike childcare, this initiative was not accompanied by the removal of JobKeeper for those working in the housing and construction sector.

Paid Parental Leave (Flexibility Measures)

The Paid Parental Leave (Flexibility Measures) Amendment Bill introduced by the government earlier this year was passed in the Senate on Thursday 11 June and will become effective for babies born on or after 1 July 2020.

In response to the adverse outcomes for women due to COVID-19, the ALP moved an amendment to the Bill that would have enabled expecting parents who have lost their job or work hours because of coronavirus to continue to meet the work activity test so they can access the Paid Parental Leave scheme, as they had planned. The amendment called on the Government to use the extraordinary regulation making power granted to the Minister for Families and Social Services under the coronavirus laws to prevent families from being excluded because they don't meet the work test due to COVID-19. The Government did not support the amendment.

Unfortunately, this is one of many measures which has had an adverse impact on women. The Government failed to amend eligibility for JobKeeper payments to parents who would, if it weren't for COVID-19, have continued to work prior to the birth of their child and families who are now missing out on paid parental leave and JobKeeper and may also have missed out on JobSeeker payments if they have a partner who has kept their job. The failure to fix this problem will force parents especially mums, back to work, before they and their babies are ready, as they won't get the paid parental leave they were expecting.

In 2005, prior to the introduction of the Government Paid Parental Leave scheme, the SDA surveyed members who had recently had a baby and asked them when they returned to work after the birth of their baby.

The responses were:

RTW after birth of baby		Cumulative
1 week	7%	7%
2 weeks	7%	14%
3 weeks	5%	19%
4 weeks	0%	19%
5 weeks	2%	21%
6 weeks	3%	24%
2 months	2%	26%

The government's decision to ignore the impacts of COVID on the Work Activity Test for those who are ineligible for JobKeeper or have lost their job, will mean that women, who miss out on the government paid parental leave payment will be forced to return to work early. This not only negatively impacts their health, but also the health of their baby.

Industrial Relations Working Groups - Awards

The Federal Government review of Awards is limited in scope to only 3 Awards: Retail, Hospitality and Restaurants.

These three industries are characterised by low paid workers, women and young people. These three industries have been acutely impacted by COVID in terms of job losses.

More women are on the minimum Awards than men and will be greatly impacted by cuts in the wages and conditions of employment.

Award Reliance and Gender²¹

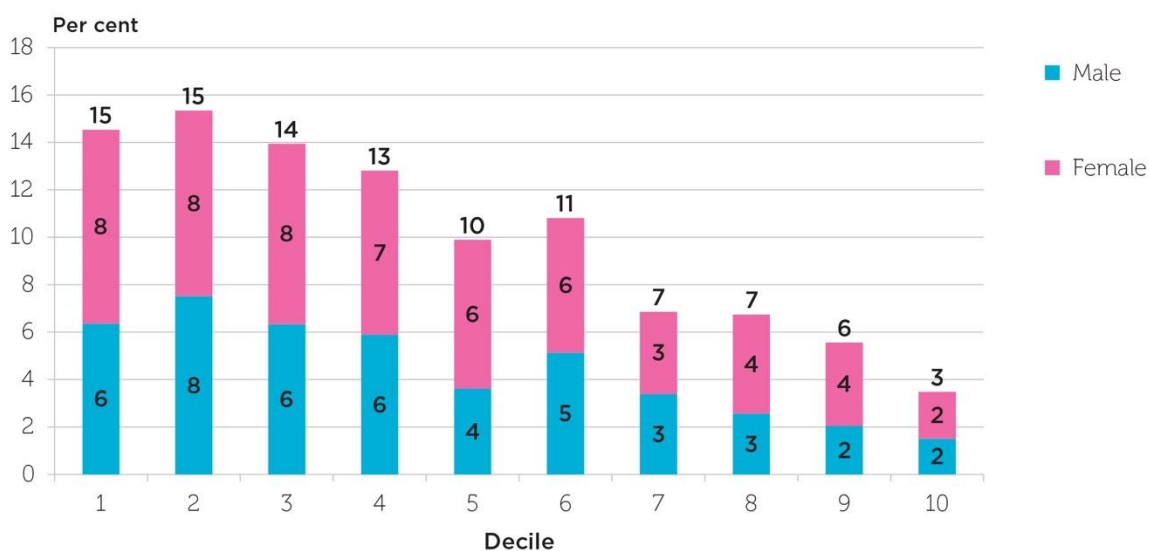
In 2020, women now make up 61% of award reliant workers.

In 2017, the distribution of award-reliant employees by gender across the household income distribution is shown in chart below.

Among this sample, 56 per cent of award-reliant employees were female and 44 per cent were male. The proportion of males and females located across the bottom half of the household income distribution was relatively similar.

At the higher end of the distribution, a relatively higher proportion of females were located across the highest three deciles, however, this comprised less than 10 per cent of all award-reliant employees.

Distribution of award-reliant employees by household income and gender



Note: The early comments regarding the Fair Work Act and the Modern Award Objective not requiring gender equitable outcomes when making changes to the Award.

COVID-19 RECOVERY

A Pink Recession – so why the Blue Recovery?

The COVID-19 response and recovery provide us with an opportunity to reset our economy and fix some of the inequities and unfairness built into the current structure of our economy and society. The measures being considered and implemented must not exacerbate the existing gender inequalities but instead should aim to ensure a more equal outcome for women.

Research comparing the employment effects of increased public investment in construction with the same investment in the care sector, which includes health, education, childcare, aged care and disability care in seven advanced nations including Australia found that the employment gains from investing 1 per cent of gross domestic product in the care sector would generate more total employment than an identical investment in construction, especially for women, and almost as much employment for men.

In Australia the rise in the employment rate after investing 1 per cent of GDP in the care sector would be nearly twice that of the same investment in the construction sector, including direct, indirect and induced employment.

Women in Australia would gain well over half the new jobs created under the care sector scenario but less than one third of total new jobs generated if the investment was in construction.

The construction sector scenario was shown to widen the existing gender employment gap in favour of men in all seven nations studied. "Investment in construction increases the gender employment gap, while investment in care decreases it," says the study titled *The gendered employment gains of investing in social v physical infrastructure: evidence from simulations across seven OECD countries*.

The researchers also found additional investment in the care sector was much more likely to draw new people into paid employment and, therefore, increase the overall number of workers in the economy. This is not a feature of most physical infrastructure investment, the study notes.

There is overwhelming evidence that investment in health and childcare, especially high-quality childcare, lifts the productive capacity of the economy over time.

The researchers conclude that "social infrastructure investment policies should be considered on an equal basis with physical infrastructure programs" when economic stimulus is required.

Politicians seem to favour spending on building schemes during a downturn because the construction sector is a major employer accounting for about 9 per cent of jobs and has well-resourced, vocal advocates and big projects allow politicians to make grand announcements. But the retail, health care and social services sectors employ far more Australian workers, many of them women. Australia's workforce has been transformed since the last time we had a recession and policies to stimulate the economy need to adapt.

For every million dollars the government spends on education, it would create 10.6 direct jobs for women and 4.3 direct jobs for men. For every million dollars they spend on construction, it would create 0.2 jobs for women and 1 jobs for men.

SDA's 10 Point Plan for Gender Equity in a COVID-19 recovery and beyond

- 1** Gender analysis at the design stage as to the impact of policy decisions and interventions
- 2** Gender impact statement in the Federal and State budgets
- 3** Women at the table on all decision-making bodies and institutions
- 4** Ensuring that tax and social security measures do not continue to disadvantage women
- 5** A public policy response to ensure investment in modern work and workplaces
- 6** Economic investment (both public and private) and job creation which targets the whole economy and particularly the female dominated industries such retail and the care sector (health, education, childcare, aged care, disability care), hospitality and tourism
- 7** Industrial Relations framework which addresses the issues for working women including the historical undervaluation of work, pay equity, flexible work and discrimination
- 8** Proactively address the gender retirement gap – super on every dollar for every worker
- 9** Flexible work rights
- 10** Access to training and skills development

- ¹ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*, p 9
- ² World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2006*, p 9
- ³ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2018*, p 21
- ⁴ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*, p 12
- ⁵ Amy Haddad, *COVID-19 is not gender neutral*, Broad Agenda, March 2020
- ⁶ KPMG, *She's Price(d)less: The economics of the Gender Pay Gap*, October 2016, p 2
- ⁷ Ibid, p 13
- ⁸ Ibid
- ⁹ Ibid
- ¹⁰ Ibid, p 13
- ¹¹ Ibid
- ¹² Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Gendered Impacts of COVID-19*, May 2020
- ¹³ Ibid
- ¹⁴ Ibid
- ¹⁵ Editorial, The Sydney Morning Herald, *How to stop the shadow pandemic of domestic violence*, June 2020
- ¹⁶ Ibid
- ¹⁷ Baz Ruddick, ABC News, *Domestic violence removalist says coronavirus isolation has increased workload by 60 per cent*, May 2020
- ¹⁸ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Gendered Impacts of COVID-19*, May 2020
https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Gendered%20Impacts%20of%20COVID19_0.pdf
- ¹⁹ UN Women, 'We cannot allow COVID-19 to reinforce the digital gender divide.'
UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and Plan international CEO Anne-Birgitte Albrectsen. Online, May 2020
- ²⁰ KPMG, *She's Price(d)less: The economics of the Gender Pay Gap*, October 2016, p 2
- ²¹ Research Report 1/2017 Award-reliant workers in the household income distribution. Carlos Jimenez and David Rozenbes, February 2017

State of the Regions Report

September 2021

A snapshot of regional Australia
in a time of pandemic



Essential.
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64%
of regional renters
are concerned about
housing affordability



44%
worry about job
opportunities for
young people



43%
see recovery
from the pandemic
in their area



Report Findings at a Glance

The pandemic experience has been largely positive for regional Australia - communities are growing and residents acknowledge they have not borne the same impact as major cities.

Migration from urban areas is both transforming regional areas and intensifying pressure on over-stretched, under-funded regional services and amenities.

People who are entering these communities are younger - providing opportunity to harness energy and enterprise to create thriving communities.

Rising housing prices are fueling a growing divide between renters and owners as regional property markets heat up, with lower income families particularly vulnerable to increased rental prices.

There is added demand for services as populations expand with particular concerns about access to health and education.

The future prosperity of regional Australia must be built on secure, well-paid jobs and supported by targeted government services.

Major retail outlets are an anchor point of regional economies and people recognize that supporting local retail flows brings benefits through the community.

There is a residual sense that government focuses on the cities not the regions, but the increased general trust in government through the pandemic provides an opportunity to reset the relationship between regional Australia and their elected representatives.

There is a generally positive attitude towards the unions and the role they can play in supporting regional communities by advocating for more secure, well-paid jobs.

The future is not about recovery it is about making the most of new opportunities for regional Australia to thrive.

Background and Research design

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the demographics of regional Australia is changing at an unprecedented rate.

Regional Australia is becoming more enticing for metropolitan residents to live in as movement restrictions implemented during the lockdowns has highlighted how achievable remote working is for many jobs. Regional communities are already seeing an impact, with housing prices increasing, along with demand for services.

This change creates opportunities and challenges for SDA and its' members across the nation, as more retail jobs will be required to support the growth in regional areas.

This report summarizes the findings of online overtime focus groups with general public members in regional communities and SDA members; and an online survey of regional communities.

Objectives

- Investigate the differences in lifestyle, opportunities and challenges for people living in diverse communities within regional Australia
- Understand how the pandemic has impacted the lives of people living in these communities
- Establish the demands of regional areas as leaders plan the recovery from the pandemic to build stronger, more vibrant communities
- Provide an overriding framework and messaging for SDA to engage with regional communities about the issues affecting them

QUALITATIVE MODULE Online overtime focus group	QUANTITATIVE MODULE Standalone poll
<p>Fieldwork: Tuesday 8th June – Thursday 10th June</p> <p>Sample: n= 20 nationally</p> <p>Recruitment:</p> <p>All soft-voters</p> <p>Good mix of gender, age, levels of education and locations</p> <p>Approximately 90 minutes time investment on behalf of participants</p> <p>\$120 incentive per person</p>	<p>Fieldwork: 6th June – 23rd June 2021</p> <p>Sample: n= 1,088 nationally</p> <p>Recruitment: Australian residents aged 18+ living in three pre-designated regional areas. These areas were defined using population data obtained from the Australian Bureau of statistics 2016 Census data.</p> <p>The sample was stratified to include a minimum of n=330 participants within each regional area. Quotas are applied within each stratum to be representative of the target population by age and gender. RIM weighting is applied to the data using information sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The factors used in the weighting are age and gender.</p> <p>The weighting efficiency of 84% provides an effective sample size of n=912 and a maximal margin of error of $\pm 3.2\%$ (at a 95% confidence level).</p> <p>This project was administered by Essential Research with sample provided by Qualtrics from online panels. The survey took an average of 10mins to complete. Participants were invited to participate and completed the survey online without an interviewer present and incentives are offered for participation.</p>

This report contains the findings from both research modules.

There is no one 'regional Australia'

This research was completed by allocating respondent to three main areas within regional Australia based on their residential postcode.

All states and territories (excl. ACT) were included, though may not have been eligible for all areas (e.g. no cities in WA or SA fit the eligibility criteria for the 'Regional Cities' definition).

Capital Cities, Remote and Very remote areas were excluded from this project.



Regional Cities

Major metropolitan areas including Wollongong, Central Coast, Newcastle, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast and Geelong



Country Towns

Individual Postal Areas with population greater than 20k. and in inner/outer regional Australia* e.g. Muswellbrook (NSW), Cairns (QLD), Mt. Gambier (SA), Geraldton (WA)



Rural Areas

All other areas in inner/outer regional Australia

*Population by Postcode and definition of inner/outer regional areas sourced from Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Remoteness Structure: <https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/remoteness+structure>

Life in regional Australia is a Good Life



Regional Australia is a great place to live. Whether you live in a regional city, a country town or a rural area, the good far outweighs the bad.

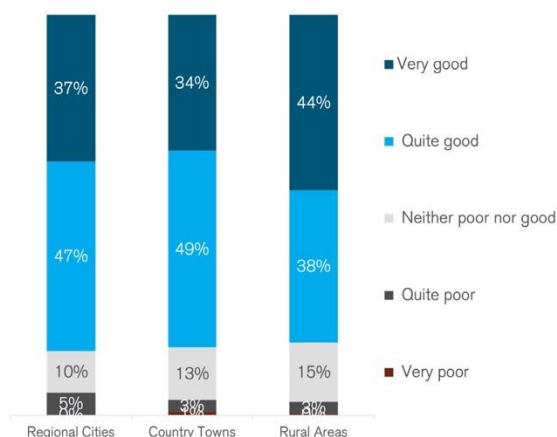
It all begins with community, the simple things in life like open spaces and a clean environment.

Far fewer people see the downsides, but those who do feel disconnected from their community and concerned about social issues.

Its a simple equation: harnessing the upside will addressing the concerns, is the key to maximising happiness across regional Australia.

Regional Australia is considered a great place to live

Rating of local area (%)



The vast majority of people living in regional Australia are positive of their local area. Over 80% in each area rate their area either quite or very good.

People with the highest opinion of their area include older people (46% of those aged 55-74 rate their area very good, 57% of those aged over 75), people owning, or living in their property (46%).

I enjoy our community as friends are loyal and work together to help each other out.
(Male, Regional City, VIC)

I enjoy the slower pace of life even though I work longer hours. Its peaceful and you can be as involved in the community as you wish. We are much more social and have joined the social club at the hotel, play bingo, have joined the bowls club and entertain friends here often.

(Female, Rural Areas, SA)

Q. Overall, how would you rate your local area as a place to live? Base Size. All participants

Those who rate their community highly love the free perks of living in regional Australia

“ We love the small town, lots of outdoor activities and closed to the beach. Not too much traffic. Everyone is very friendly and helpful.

(Female, Country Town, VIC)

“ *I enjoy the climate, plenty of work opportunities and friends and family.*

(Male, Regional City, QLD)

“ I enjoy the slower pace of life even though I work longer hours. Its peaceful and you can be as involved in the community as you wish . **We are much more social** and have joined the social club at the hotel, play bingo, have joined the bowls club and entertain friends here often whereas back in Adelaide we never had people over.

(Female, Regional Area, SA)

Q. What are the best things about where you live? OPEN ENDED. Base Size. All participants who rated their area quite good/very good (n=906)

The few that are unhappy feel disconnected from their community and are concerned about social issues

“ Since moving here, we’ve noticed crime rates are pretty bad with armed hold up and shootings not too far away. Not sure if it’s been this bad previously, but it is very scary being in a new state.

(Female, Regional City, TAS)

“ The drawbacks can be lack of public transport which means more and more traffic. There are more and more drugs in the community.

(Male, Country Town, VIC)

“ Lack of activities. There is little on offer in the community, especially for young people. Higher council rates

(Female, Regional Area, NSW)

Q. What are the best/worst things about where you live? OPEN ENDED. Base Size: All participants

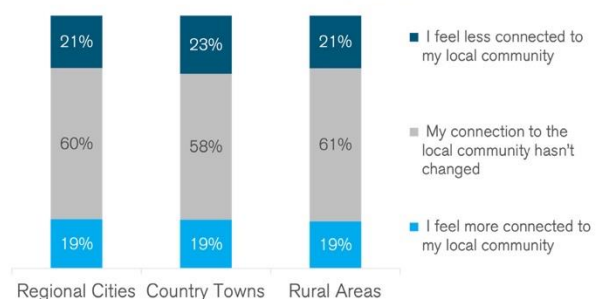
The few that are unhappy feel disconnected from their community and are concerned about social issues

For most people, their connection to community has remained unchanged through the pandemic. In all areas, around 60% of people say their connection with the community is unchanged. There has been no overall shift in connectedness of communities, as similar proportions feel more and less connected.

Older people's connection most likely to be unchanged (70% among 55-74 and 77% of those aged over 75). However younger people more likely to be both less connected (28% 18-34) and more connected (25% 18-34).

Renters are most likely to feel less connected to the community (26%), along with those who have lived in the area less than 5 years (27%).

Closeness with community (%)



Q. Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic do you feel any more or less connected to your local community? Base Size: All participants (n=1 088)

The hidden impacts of the pandemic will change regional Australia forever

The lived experience of the pandemic was, on the surface, less intense than the cities; there were fewer cases, shorter lockdowns and many parts of Australia had very limited lived experience.

But there were broader impacts that sit below the surface, particularly the impact of the flight from the cities to the regions as people realised they could work remotely.

This had an impact on property prices as well as on employment and demands on government services.

These trends are unlikely to revert back to pre-pandemic levels - the reality is that significant parts of regional Australia will become busier, more dynamic and younger as a result of these changes.

Meanwhile there are low levels of confine that authorities are planning for life after Covid.

The lived experience of the COVID pandemic was less intense for many people in regional Australia

50%

of regional Australians agree that their area was 'largely unaffected by the pandemic'

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the planning and recovery from Covid-19 in your area? My area was largely unaffected by the pandemic. Base Size. All participants

“ We have been quite insulated from most things being so far from Melbourne and have plodded along pretty much as before covid. We missed some of the tourist trade during the year, but it wasn't too bad at Christmas time.

(Female, Rural Area, VIC)

“ To be honest I don't think there has been much change in the last 12 months. Apart from being able to work from home I haven't felt much difference.

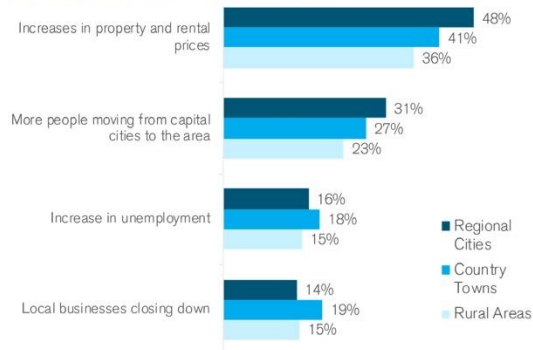
(Female, Country Town, SA)

“ We've adjusted quite well; kids have struggled missing out on sports and events but all in all we've been lucky compared to others. Work hasn't been impacted.

(Male, Regional City, QLD)

The main impact of the pandemic has been on the cost of housing, not on the local economy

Effect on area (Significant effect %)



Q. Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, how much of an effect have each of the following had on your area? Base Size. All participants

New arrivals to regional Australia are a different demographic to existing residents

New arrivals to regional areas are more likely to...



BE YOUNGER

34% are aged 18-34, compared to 18% of existing residents



BE RENTING

53% are in rental accommodation, compared to 31% of existing residents



HAVE NO CHILDREN, OR HAVE A YOUNG FAMILY

33% do not have children and 14% are a young family with mainly pre-school children (26% and 8% of existing residents)



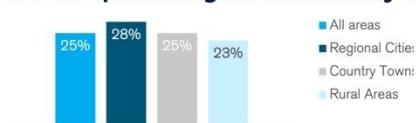
BE MORE CULTURALLY DIVERSE

24% are born outside of Australia, compared to 14% of existing residents.

13% prefer to speak a language other than English at home or with close family members, compared to 8% of existing residents.

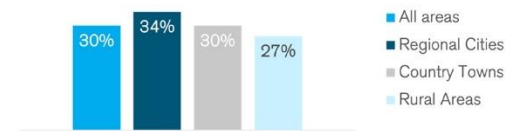
There is low confidence that authorities are planning for life after COVID

COVID planning and recovery (% TOTAL: Agree)



Area is busier now

COVID planning and recovery (% TOTAL: Agree)



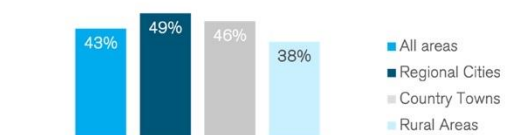
Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the planning and recovery from Covid-19 in your area? My area is busier now than it was before the pandemic. Base Size. All participants

"I live in a pretty good spot on the coast, but more people are moving up here - it's getting a bit busy. That means more congestion on roads more competitive environment in terms of looking for work."
(Male, Regional City, NSW)

"Large growth in the population in the last 6 months with has resulted in childcare getting full, doctors booked out for days."
(Female, Country Town, VIC)

Begun to see recovery in my area

COVID planning and recovery (% TOTAL: Agree)



Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the planning and recovery from Covid-19 in your area? I have already begun to see recovery in my area. Base Size. All participants

"The council have finally just agreed to build a swimming pool because of new people moving to the local area."
(Female, Country Town, VIC)

"Positive change is some new shops and business have opened and some interesting restaurants have come to our community."
(Male, Regional City, VIC)

Working in the regions



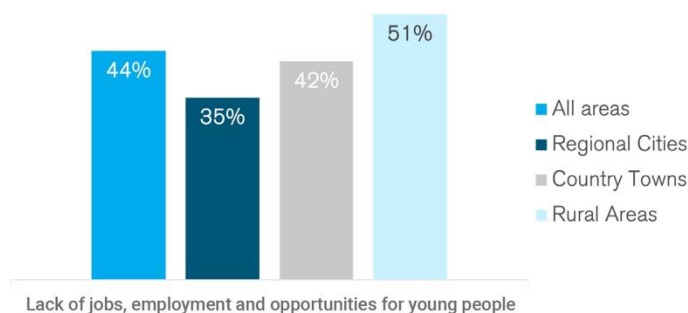
The restrictions on international borders through 2020-21 has created demand for labour in the larger population centres in the region.

However, unemployment remains a persistent problem in more sparsely populated rural areas.

Meanwhile, one in seven of those in employment are engaged on a casual or contract basis, while low or zero wages growth is entrenched in the system.

Unemployment continues to be a significant problem for many others – particularly in Rural Areas

Concerns for future liveability (Top 3 %)



44%
say a lack of jobs, employment and opportunities for young people are a major concern in their area

“ I was made redundant during covid as I was an international flight attendant. I have since found work in a new industry, but the pay isn't close to what I was making before. This has resulted in me having to move locations and make a lot of lifestyle changes. This change has created a lot of stress around my future and my security.

(Female, Regional City, NSW)

Q. Which of the following are your main concerns about the future health and liveability of your local area? - Lack of jobs, employment and opportunities for young people. Base Size. All participants

“ The drawbacks of my community is unemployment is high and opportunities limited. Historically we are a manufacturing community, most of the larger businesses have declined or closed down, there is growth in the age care sector coming up, but most positions are casual or permanent part-time, which are not great options for younger people trying to set up a family and buy a home. Our community does not appear to have the ability to attract any new business of any size which employ good numbers.

(Male, Regional City, VIC)



Casualisation has been an issue in regional Australia for a long time and this problem has been exacerbated by COVID

“ There is work if you want it around problem is most of it is casual through employment agencies with no security and no one cares about you – you're just a number. While we're alright for now, jobs will be a problem in the future I believe.

(Male, Regional City, NSW)

“ I would say that employment has remained about the same. There are not enough full-time opportunities going forward, there are a lot of people who would like more hours of work but can't achieve it at a sole employer and are having to work multiple casual or permanent part time.

(Male, Country Town, VIC)

“ I have noticed a lack of full-time jobs. Everyone seems to be hiring casually or part-time but full time has become limited. I believe there are enough jobs, but I think the pay has really dropped how do we keep up with the housing market when we struggle to find well paying and secure jobs?

(Female, Regional City, NSW)

In addition to that, the pandemic has further entrenched already low wage growth in regional Australia

“ Wages have been the same for years. Family and friends work in the area and have not received pay increases in the last few years. Business can not afford to keep staff and due to covid having a financial strain on most businesses.

(Female, Regional City, QLD)

“ There has been minimal to no wage growth in my area. I hope this changes as the cost of living is so much higher currently.

(Male, Regional City, QLD)

“ I believe that covid has certainly had an impact on many businesses, particularly small local businesses, as a decrease in income has meant there is less money to pass on to workers.

(Male, Regional City, NSW)

“ I have been retired for a while, but I haven't seen any wages growth in years. I know the cost of living has gone up in general which is hard. As self funded retirees, it is a concern.

(Female, Regional City, QLD)

The Great Regional Housing Divide

The influx of new arrivals has created a new economic divide between homeowners and renters, particularly in regional cities.

While home owners have seen a significant increase in the value of those assets, those in rental are struggling with rising rent prices and escalating barriers to entry for home ownership.

While housing affordability was an issue in some parts of regional Australia before the pandemic, there is growing concern about future housing affordability.



Increases to the cost of housing is contributing to an emerging split between homeowners and renters

While some homeowners are pleased to see the value of their property increase...

“ The house/land sales have been wonderful. Houses that have been on the market for 5 years or so are all selling or sold now.

(Female, Rural Area, SA)

“ A positive change is work has started to pick up again and house prices are on the rise which will hopefully sort out the drug problem that was setting in.

(Male, Regional City, QLD)

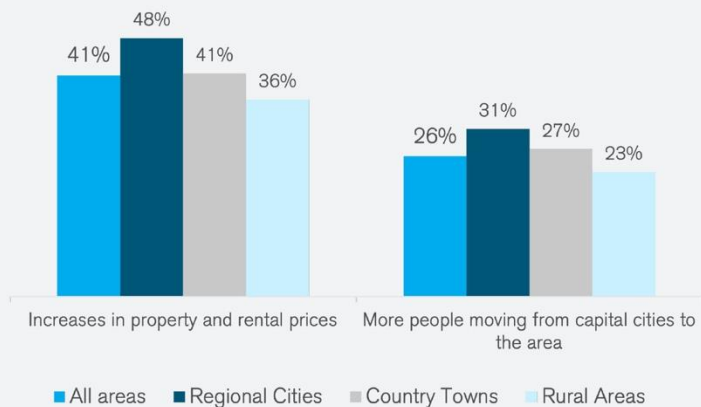
“ Surprisingly the market has skyrocketed in the past 12 months. We were all waiting for the post covid crash but the way the market is it's not looking that way. Properties are going fast.

(Female, Regional City, NSW)

→ Renters say that they are facing an increasingly tight housing market and significant increases in rent over the past year.

The pandemic has had a notable effect on housing prices in regional areas

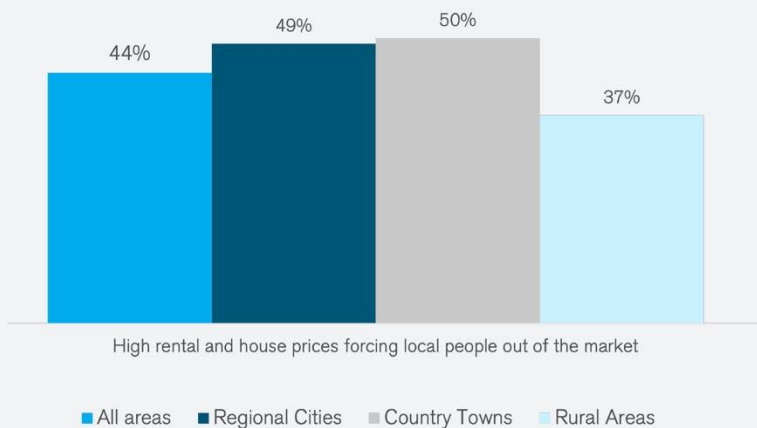
Effect on area (Significant effect %)



Q. Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, how much of an effect have each of the following had on your area? Base Size. All participants

And there is high concern about unaffordable housing in the future

Concerns for future liveability (Top 3 %)



Q. Which of the following are your main concerns about the future health and liveability of your local area? Base Size. All participants

64%
of renters rate the high rental and house prices as a main concern for the future health and liveability of their local area

“Overall, we have not had any major changes, however we were required to move rental homes due to our old landlord selling their property. This meant finding a home in a very tight market and were fighting 50+ applicants for homes. Our rent went up by around 20-25% at our new place.”
(Male, Regional City, QLD)

“We have had a large increase in rent prices, very low rental vacancy rates and increasing house prices. This has been very tough for the communities, particularly for struggling families.”
(Male, Regional City, QLD)

“Rents are sky high, and Tasmania had a big housing shortage, so more homelessness is happening.”
(Female, Regional City, TAS)

Squeeze on Government Services and Support



Growing populations place increased demands on government services and the cracks are beginning to show, especially in smaller rural areas

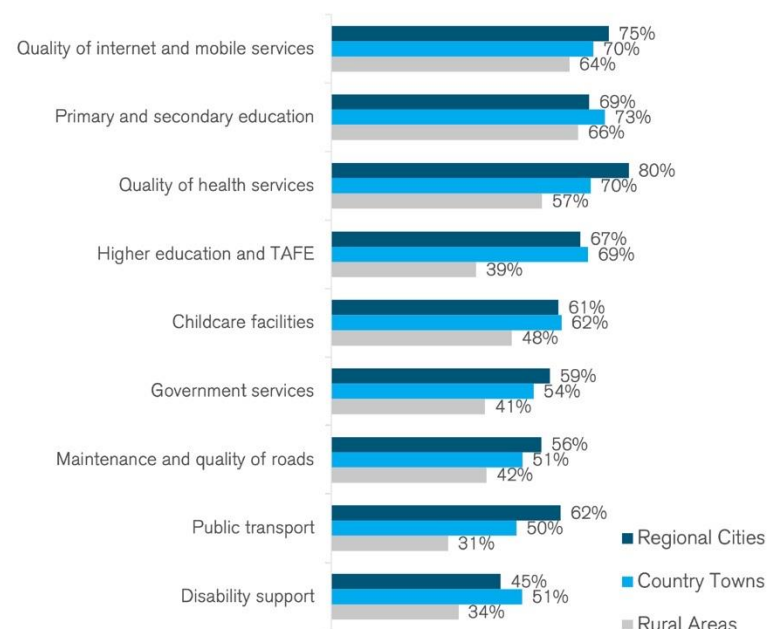
Access to childcare, higher education and TAFE and disability support are particular areas of particular concern across regional Australia.

The smaller an area's population, the more challenges are faced access services, with only half of people able to access health professionals within a week.

People in regional areas feel they are missing out on their fair share of government support

Transport and Disability services are areas of particular concern

Rating of services and amenities (TOTAL: Good %)



Rating of healthcare facilities is high in Regional Cities **80%** but this drops to **70%** in Country Towns and **57%** in Rural Areas.

While around two thirds rate higher education and TAFE as good in Regional Cities **67%** and Country Towns **69%**, just **39%** of those living in Rural Areas feel the same.

Q. How would you rate the following services and amenities in your local area? Base Size: All participants

Many regional Australians say the lack of available health services in their area is a major concern

“ Medical services are definitely lacking in our community.
It takes minimum 2-3 days to get into a GP and the hospitals are doing their best but struggle with the needs of the community.
” (Male, Regional City, QLD)

“ To see a GP, we have to drive to the next town, but for the elderly or lower socioeconomic households it is difficult to drive 90km each way to the larger town and they also have a real shortage of GPs there.
” (Female, Rural Area, NSW)

“ Due to COVID it has definitely been more difficult to access GP's, which I understand.
In my mind the most important community service is health care and there is certainly not enough GP's and health care professionals in the community.
” (Male, Regional City, QLD)

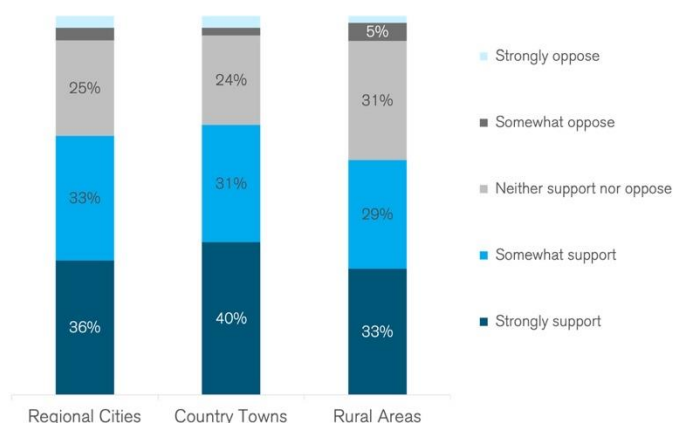
“ We don't have much childcare, we don't have a dentist in town anymore and as I said before only one good doctor, who is hard to get into see.
” (Female, Rural Area, VIC)

There is strong support for universal childcare in regional communities

“ We definitely need more childcare you can't get a spot at them moment and most have very long waiting lists.
” (Female, Country Town, VIC)

Q. How strongly do you support or oppose introducing a universal high-quality early childhood education system? A universal high-quality early childhood education system would be available at low or minimal cost to any parent who wants to access play-based learning for their child. Base Size. All participants. Labels removed for any results <5%

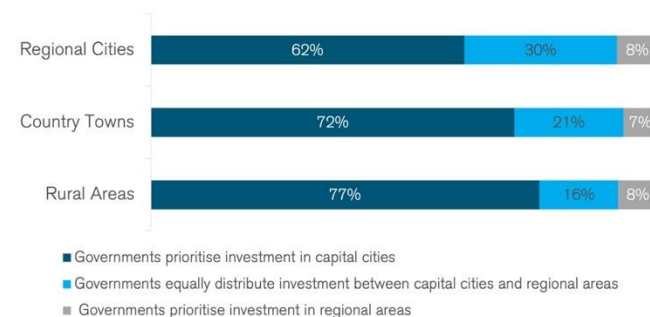
Support for universal childcare (%)



Regional Australians feel they are missing their fair share of government investment

“ I don't believe that state and federal gov have much real interest in developing industry in our area, there is always lots of talk and false hopes that rarely amount to anything.
” (Male, Country Town, VIC)

Treatment of regional areas (%)



Q. How do you think regional areas and capital cities are treated when governments are investing in core services and amenities (like infrastructure, healthcare and education)? Base Size. All participants

Retail Emerges a Regional Economic Anchor



When thinking about the future, people in regional Australia see the retail sector - along with healthcare and education - as a driver of future prosperity

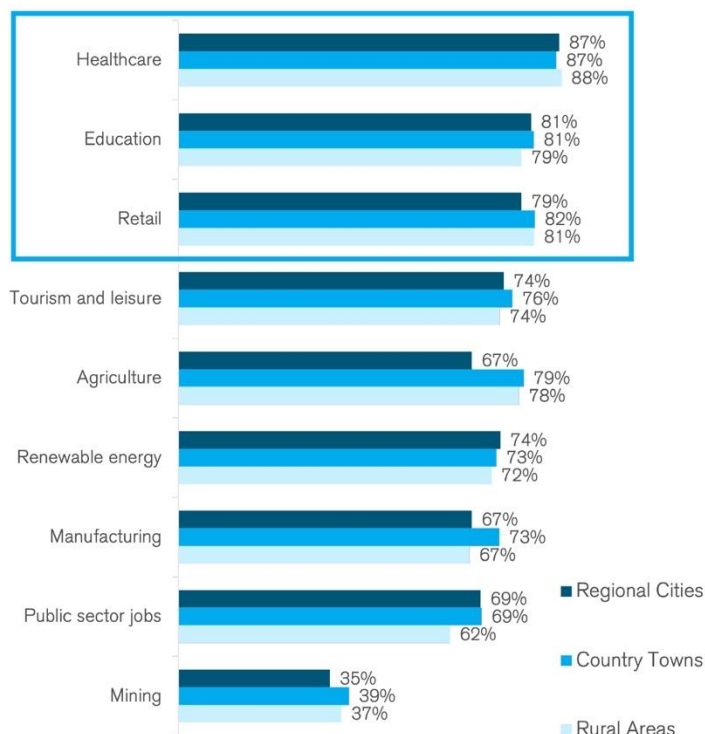


Local people buying local goods from their own community, whether in malls stores or supermarkets, creates a virtuous cycle, where consumers support each other. In fact, of all the plans for the future, 'Buy Local' is the most warmly embraced.

While some have shifted to online shopping through the pandemic, the vast majority recognise that vibrant retail precincts are essential for strong regional communities - regardless of their size.

Regional Australians see healthcare, education and retail as key

Support for local economies (TOTAL: Support %)



The three industries with highest support to help grow local economies are healthcare, education and retail.

Tourism and leisure is also seen as a key industry in all three areas.

“Biggest priority should be health and education. Kids don't stay in the country to have an advanced education and career, and therefore we end up losing generations of families to bigger centre.”

(Female, Rural Area, NSW)

“Shopping centres are important because they not only provide local employment but also help to keep people in their own community. If people have to go elsewhere they are likely to spend at other businesses rather than locally.”

(Male, Regional City, WA)

Q. How would you rate the following services and amenities in your local area? Base Size: All participants

People recognise that supporting local retailers provides long-term economic benefits to regional communities

“ Everything spent in town stays in town and is often put back into the community through grants and donations or sponsorship to the schools, sports clubs etc.

(Female, Rural Area, VIC)

“ Buying local and supporting local has a huge impact on the local economy in a positive way! It keeps local business running who may draw in tourism/visitors into the area who are interested in that particular business which in return will create business for the next local business and work as a domino effect.

(Female, Regional City, NSW)

Online shopping has increased since the start of COVID and some expect these changes to be permanent

“ I used to never shop online. Then during covid I started doing grocery shopping for pick up the next day, found I was spending less because there wasn't the usual chucking things in the trolley. I am not going back to pushing the trolley myself anymore.

(Female, Rural Area, NSW)

“ Before covid we only occasionally used online, this has changed dramatically in the last 12 month with online shopping being the first point of call. I don't think we will revert back to the way we were as it is just so convenient and cost effective, we don't use it for groceries etc.!

(Male, Regional City, VIC)

Some older people, however, are looking forward to return to the shops.

“ We did a few online shops for groceries, and it was such a pain and would rather have gone into the store. Not a big online shopper at all as I would like to see what I am buying.

(Male, Country Town, WA)

“ Before covid I used to only go to the shops but with the pandemic I have been buying online from Coles and Woolworths, but after the pandemic I will go back to the shops as I like interacting with people.

(Male, Country Town, VIC)

They see local people buying from local shops as key to the recovery of their community

40%

think there would be significant benefit to their local area by businesses providing secure jobs and higher wages for local people

SDA's Vision for

This report shows the rich opportunities to reimagine our regions as we recover from the pandemic over the coming years.

Commitment from all levels of government is required to share the benefits of a diaspora from the cities across thriving communities.

This should be anchored in an all-of-government regional approach anchored on:



A thriving retail sector

Government needs to recognise the contribution of retail precincts and supermarkets, not just as a point of transaction but as a point of connection.

Actively supporting retail centres to deliver local produce and goods with 'buy local' campaigns keeps local communities growing.



Services accessible where they are needed

As communities grow, governments must commit to essential services such as health, childcare and disability support across regional Australia. All levels of government should look at opportunities to deliver services through major retail hubs.

Regional Australia

Regional Australia's best days are ahead of it - the SDA stands ready to support our members, their families and their communities to build great lives right across this great nation.



Fair and affordable housing

Government must confront the reality that rising house prices produces both winners and losers. Federal and State government must partner to developing more affordable rentals through a Regional Community Housing Program.



Fair wages, secure jobs

Government must champion policies that actively encouraging job security and collective workplace bargaining, including using government procurement policy to award good employers and embracing workplace laws that give workers an even playing field.

