



making work work

The United Kingdom's Employers for Carers Leadership Group has responded to the Government's work to refresh that country's National Carers' Strategy. Feedback from the UK resonates in New Zealand, where employers are just beginning to consider these issues.

Services, plus other kinds of help

New Zealand's Employment for Caring group has welcomed the British Government's Call for Evidence from employers and others as it reviews the progress of the UK's National Carers' Strategy.

Our friends in the Employers for Carers UK initiative made a comprehensive submission about the evidence of Strategy outcomes relating to caring and paid work.

UK employers said in the submission that access to integrated, personalised services is a key factor in supporting carers to remain in, and return to, employment if they wish or need to do so. They said this must be complemented by access to advice, information, and advocacy so that carers are supported to take up (and use) these services.

For many carers, work is a 'break'

In New Zealand it is not possible to use the Carer Support Subsidy for relief care to help a family carer participate in paid employment. Employment outside the home is not deemed to be a 'break' for carers.



But the UK Leadership Group reports that many carer employees find it a challenge to combine work and care, describing their paid jobs as 'a lifeline' and a route to ensuring that, as well as caring, they can have a life of their own.

For many carers, work provides stimulation, economic independence, opportunities to use and retain hard-won skills, social contact with colleagues, a sense of self worth, and other

benefits. Carers often do see workforce participation as a break from their caring role, and want the choice about how to use respite options such as the Carer Support Subsidy.

Carers NZ and the NZ Carers Alliance continue to argue for this flexibility for carers in our country.

Employers working for carers

In its submission, Employers for Carers said there is still low awareness of carers' statutory right to request flexible work so they can better juggle paid work with caring. It says this is especially true among small-medium enterprises (SMEs), a claim backed up by calls from carers to Carers UK's AdviceLine.



This is likely to be a result of caring being a relatively hidden issue at work, because often employees do not see themselves as 'carers', and may only come forward for support when they have reached a crisis point.

Providing information and support to carers at an early stage is important for the national economy, because recent research undertaken by Carers UK and the Department for Work and Pensions found that as many as 1 million people (1 in 6 carers in the UK) give up or cut back work to care. This can lead to real hardship for carers and their families; to significant recruitment and lost productivity costs for employers; and, over time, harm the national economy.

FAMILY CARE FOR WORKPLACES!

You can request copies of our magazine to distribute in your workplace, or use our new 'digital edition' so carers and colleagues can read *Family Care* online. All back issues of the magazine, including this one, can now be found at www.issuu.com/familiycareworld... just click on the magazine you want to read! Employers can insert the link for the latest issue into an article at their organisation's intranet. It's a free, easy way to support carers!



“As employers we have learned from our employees’ experiences that where caring responsibilities have happened (or increased) suddenly, there is often a critical period of around six weeks where the carer will need time and support to deal with the situation immediately,” says the UK Leadership Group.

“This may involve flexibility about leave in order to access information and sort out caring arrangements, and flexibility about working arrangements in order to continue to work and care.”

Employees who have left work to care, or who have struggled to continue to work, have told Employers for Carers that if they had known such support was available at critical times, they would have felt able (or better equipped) to combine work and care.

“Promotion of such support in the workplace is therefore critical if employees are to recognise themselves as carers, and feel able to come forward for support.”

Awareness and support for all

Employers for Carers says awareness promotion can be a relatively low cost activity for employers wishing to distribute helpful information to carers in their workforce.

It says the Carers’ Strategy ‘refresh’ provides a timely opportunity to highlight these issues to employers.

“During the recent recession it appears that more businesses have sought to retain their most skilled and experienced people, many of whom will be combining work and care, than during the last economic downturn, suggesting that employers are recognising the value of these employees.”

“But there is a real need to support employers, particularly SMEs, with practical information and advice to help them retain skilled staff in the workplace during these challenging economic times.”



Read the full Leadership Group submission to the UK Government at www.carers.net.nz ... it’s a great document!

EMPLOYERS’ ADVICE

Support services must be fit for the 21st century workplace.

They must support, rather than be a barrier to, carers’ participation in the workplace so that they (and their families where the carer is a bread winner) are not forced into financial hardship because of their caring role. If working age carers are to retain their financial and personal resilience, they must have the back-up care and support services they need, says the UK Employers for Carers Leadership Group.

Help carers find good information.

The Group says this is essential, and a top concern for working carers. Information, advice and advocacy need to be easily and universally available to those juggling work and care. This should cover how to get help, how care needs are assessed, who is eligible for state-funded services, costs of services (however funded), and how to access services.

Reward or ‘incentivise’ good employers.

Promoting workplaces with carer friendly practices can inspire other employers and have a ‘cascade’ effect. Carers with skills or qualifications that are in high demand will migrate to these more supportive organisations, whose policies and practices can be shared or promoted with other employers through initiatives such as Employers for Carers.

Promote the use of assistive technologies.

The role of assistive technologies such as telecare and telehealth services can play a key role in promoting independence both for the people using them, and those in caring situations. How can such technologies be promoted and accessed more widely by health providers and commercial services through a range of channels? Most UK employees and those they support are ‘self funders’ who receive no or few social care services. Opening up the market will drive innovation, as people will buy and use what works best.

Support carers’ physical and mental wellbeing.

Employers for Carers says being supported to work and care helps carers to stay mentally and physically well. Anxiety often relates to carers’ fears that they may have to give up their jobs; this is particularly acute where they have found it challenging to access quality care and support services. The Group has urged the UK Government to ensure its updated Carers’ Strategy focuses on how they can be supported to combine work and care... not only by their employer, but by external care services, including the national health system.

New Zealand has its own leadership group, which works with Employers for Carers UK. FlexWorks Aotearoa’s Employment for Caring group includes Accelerating Aotearoa, Bupa, Business NZ, Carers NZ, the Ministry of Social Development, the NZ Carers Alliance, and the NZ Council of Trade Unions. We will report on our work to help employers and carers in the next issue of Family Care!