



Briefing paper

A summary of findings from the 2020 National Carer Survey

November 2020

Introduction

The National Carer Survey was undertaken by Carers NSW on behalf of each of the state and territory Carers Associations. Carers NSW have been surveying carers in this way since 2012, however, 2020 is the first year the survey has been undertaken nationally. The survey received a total of 7,735 valid responses from carers across Australia with surveys completed between April and June 2020. In Western Australia (WA) 274 carers responded. The survey took place during the COVID-19 epidemic and the early stages of the implementation of significant reforms to carer services nationally.

Carer demographics

Current carers made up 92.8% of respondents with 7.2% respondents being former carers. Most respondents were primary carers (93.2%) with 81.7% being female and 17.7% male. The mean age of respondents was 58.3 years. Respondents were most likely to be caring for a child, including adult children (45.1%) and/or a partner (37%) and one in four respondents (25.9%) reported caring for more than one person. The most common group being cared for by survey respondents were people with physical disability (36.1%) followed by people with chronic conditions (29.2%) and people living with mental illness (26.4%).

Key findings

As summarised in the [2020 National Carer survey – Summary report](#), the key findings of the survey were:

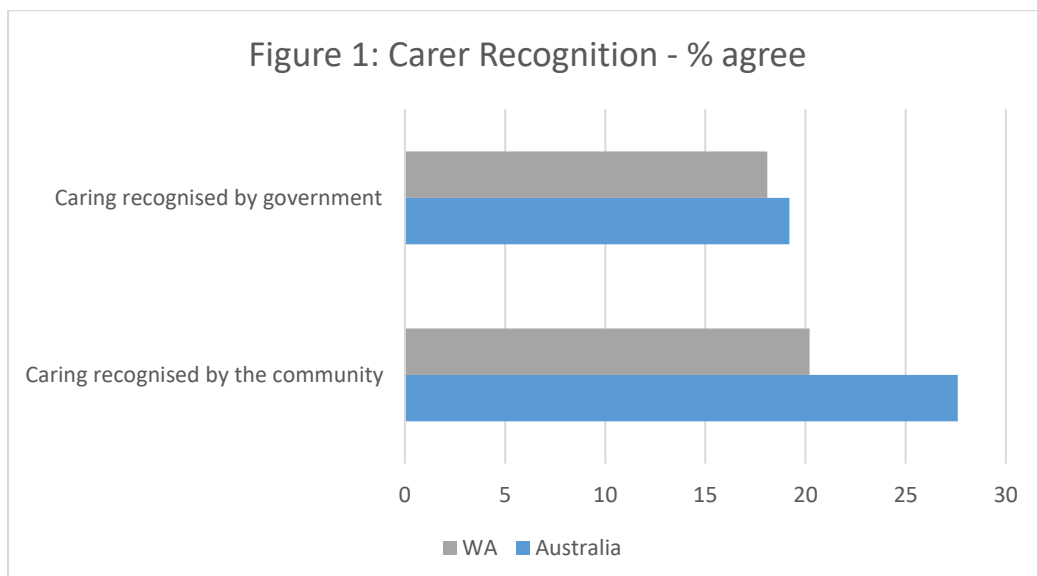
- Most respondents provided 40 or more hours of care per week, and more than half had been caring for 20 years or more.
- Nearly half of the carers who responded were experiencing high or very high psychological distress, and one in three felt highly socially isolated.
- One in three respondents said they never get time out from their caring responsibilities, with only around half having enough time to keep on top of other responsibilities.
- It was relatively uncommon for carers to be asked about their own needs when accessing services or on behalf of the person they care for, and services were much less likely to meet carers' needs than the needs of the people being cared for.

- The most common challenges carers experienced when accessing services were getting information about what services are available, and the time and energy it took to organise services. Waiting periods to access services were also a common challenge.
- One in four carers reported spending more money than they made in the past 12 months.
- Exiting employment and reducing working hours were common impacts of caring on carers' career trajectories.

WA results

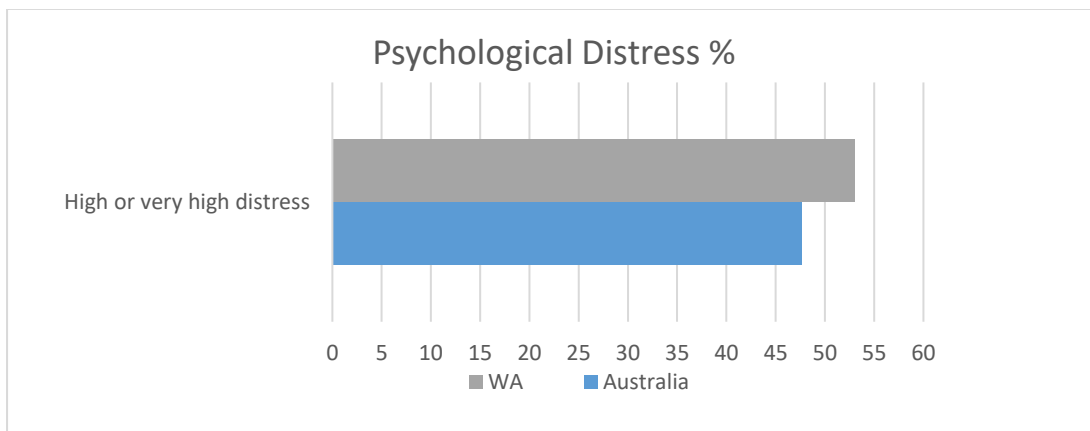
It should be noted that the sample in this survey cannot be considered representative of the broader Australian carer population of 2.65 million and similarly the WA sample of 274 limits the general application of the findings. However, a wide range of WA carers responded to the survey and their experiences provide some interesting comparisons to the national results.

Firstly, carers in WA feel that they are not well recognised by the community or government. Figure 1 below shows the percentage of carers who agree or strongly agree with the statement that *"I feel my caring role is recognised and valued by my community/ the government"* is lower than the national average.

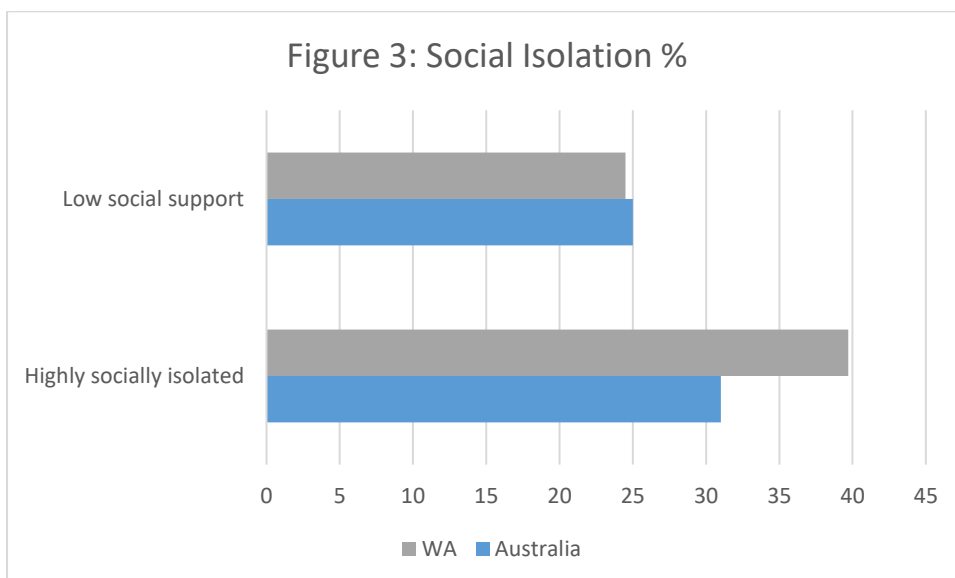


WA carers report slightly higher levels of psychological distress than those recorded nationally. High levels of psychological distress could be attributed to the adverse

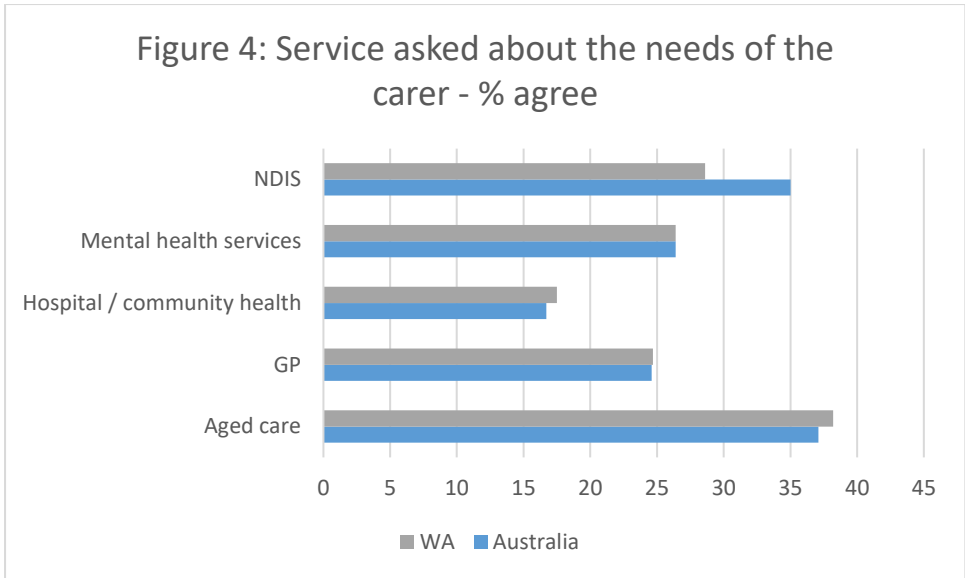
impacts of stress associated with the early stages of the COVID-19 epidemic in Australia. Figure 2 shows the percentage of carers in WA and Australia who rate high or very high on the Kessler 5-item scale of Psychological Distress (K5).



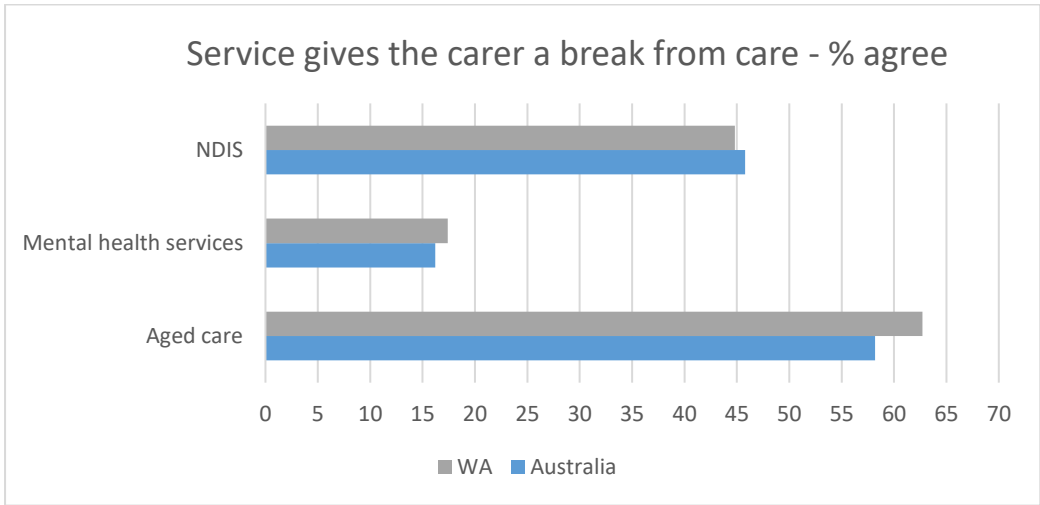
WA carers report higher levels of social isolation than their national counterparts, with 39.7% of respondents reporting as highly socially isolated on the Friendship Scale (Hawthorne 2000).



WA carers report similar levels of recognition from service providers as those experienced nationally. Figure 4 shows the percentage of respondents who strongly agree or agree with the statement "when the person I care for accesses services I am asked about my needs as a carer". Interestingly, WA carers report lower levels of agreement when asked if the NDIS asks about the needs of carers.



Positively, carers in WA did report that services enabled them to take a break from their caring role, particularly within the aged care system. Figure 5 shows the percentage of carers who strongly agree or agree with the statement *"The services received by the person I care for give me a break from providing care"*.



Further analysis

The 2020 National Carer Survey dataset is large and provides the opportunity for further analysis. Carers NSW have provided the full WA dataset and can assist with analysis if necessary.