



**MEDIA RELEASE: New report flags need for government leadership for 1m+ family carers
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New Zealand's 1m+ family carers are doing it tough.

In the face of pandemic worker shortages and service disruptions, those supporting family members who are unwell or have a disability or chronic health condition are experiencing significant hardship – and they're not getting enough help to keep going.

National charity Carers NZ and the Carers Alliance of more than 50 not for profits have released a report from independent analytics company Synergia based on 1,648 survey responses from carers of all ages and ethnicities. Carers spent an hour on average completing the 70 question survey about their wellbeing, finances, and views about available support for their role.

"The results are shocking," says Alliance Secretariat and Carers NZ CEO Laurie Hilsgen. "People can't keep going like this without support themselves."

The *State of Caring* survey will be repeated every two years to track how family whanau and aiga carers are faring over time. The first report for 2022 shows that only 2% of carers feel valued by the Government despite their largely unpaid work having (according to Infometrics) an annual economic value of at least \$16.8 billion – 5.1% of GDP.

The report shows that 59% of carers are struggling to pay their bills, that 70% experience depression or anxiety, that only 21% can work full-time, and that only 7% have been able to look ahead to save for retirement.

Hilsgen says it's concerning that almost 90% of carers have had less or much less respite from caring since before the pandemic, a wellbeing risk for New Zealanders providing high needs care for a vulnerable family member.

The issues hit women especially hard – two thirds of New Zealand's family carers are women.

The survey shows that young carers under 35 have the lowest physical and mental wellbeing but contribute the most towards care-related costs that are not publicly funded (\$100 per week or more).

Synergia estimates that care related out of pocket costs total at least \$335 million a year for the wider population.

Despite the grim picture, successive governments haven't tackled the big issues for carers because they will take the most effort and cost the most, she says.

"We've made 12 recommendations asking for authentic, urgent, long-term investment in carers. Our country's respite system is broken and under-funded, so people can't have adequate breaks. Not many carers can get paid for their role even though they may have given up paid work to care. A choice to care and help someone in our family is a choice to be poor, and to experience unacceptable wellbeing impacts that are affecting high numbers of New Zealanders."

A bright spot in the survey is that working carers say their employers have been flexible and supportive through COVID-19 despite business hardships.

While family carers have had scant government recognition during the pandemic, their mahi aroha is carrying the most vulnerable through COVID-19, she says.

“Every family carer is a legend. We can’t ask more of them than they are already giving. Now we face a long tail of hardship and a need for better support, new respite funding and services, and Ministerial leadership to ensure agencies focus on carers as an urgent priority.”

She says there is so much chaos and system change that only government leadership will achieve agency cut through to sustain carers.

Carers NZ and the Carers Alliance wrote to Carmel Sepuloni, the Minister for Social Development, and Health Minister Andrew Little, last December urging them to lead a sustainability plan for carers to in the face of the approaching omicron wave. Despite the Ministers’ supportive response, at a government agency level little has been done in vital areas like facility-based respite, Hilsgen says.

“As a country we haven’t asked carers how they are. We haven’t asked what more they need as the last line of defence for people with high support needs. Services are faltering because of the severe worker shortage. This means more pressure on family carers.”

“The Ministers have to lead. The not for profits are doing their best but the meaningful help and leadership needs to come from the Government.”

“The creep of expectation that carers can do more and more, with inadequate support, doesn’t match the rising costs, tiredness, and real life demands families are experiencing.”

Go to www.carers.net.nz to read the *State of Caring* report.

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