

# Hidden workforce of mental health carers saves Australia \$13.2b

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Mental health carers provided 208 million hours of care nationally in 2015. Credit: University of Queensland

Carers supporting Australians with mental illness are providing services that would cost governments \$13.2 billion to replace, a new report has found.

The University of Queensland [report](#) was launched by Mind Australia at Parliament House in Canberra today.

Professor Harvey Whiteford, from the Queensland Centre for Mental Health Research said mental [health](#) carers provided 208 million hours of care nationally in 2015.

"This is the equivalent to the work of 173,000 full-time mental health [support](#) workers," Professor Whiteford said.

"The dollar value of this support far exceeds current spending on [mental health services](#), which in 2014-2015 was around \$8.5 billion."

The majority of Australia's 240,000 mental health carers were women, and the biggest age group were those in their working years.

"The number of [young people](#) providing support to family members was also concerning, with 15 per cent aged under 25, with some as young as eight," Professor Whiteford said.

"For all carers, but young people in particular, taking on such responsibilities can have negative effects on their own mental health and their ability to remain engaged with education or work."

Lead author Sandra Diminic said mental health carers faced challenges in accessing services to support their caring role.

"Only a quarter of primary carers receive Carer Payment, and two thirds don't receive any assistance at all."

The report found mental health carers usually provide support to a partner or child, who most frequently have common mental illnesses like depression or anxiety.

They often have at least one other health condition, particularly drug and alcohol problems or physical health conditions.

"Carers are to a large extent the 'hidden workforce' in the Australian health system and this report sends a clear message – we need to recognise, appropriately train and support them," the authors said.

Provided by University of Queensland

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