

TRANSCRIPT OF PODCAST

WORK WITH PURPOSE #88

MAKING AUSTRALIA'S WORKPLACES CARER-INCLUSIVE

CAROLINE WALSH (Host)

CEO
IPAA ACT

ALEX ALLARS (Guest)

Executive Branch Manager, Whole of Government Industrial Relations and Public Sector Employment
ACT Government

LISA KELLY (Guest)

CEO
Carers ACT

ROBYN SHANNON (GUEST)

Acting Deputy Secretary
Department of Social Services

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Enquiries should be directed to CAROLINE WALSH on 0413 139 427 or at caroline.walsh@act.ipaa.org.au

CAROLINE WALSH:

Welcome to Work with Purpose, a podcast about the Australian public sector and how it serves the Australian community. I'm CAROLINE WALSH, and I'm the CEO of the Institute of Public Administration Australia here in the ACT. Before we get started, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we're meeting today, the Ngunnawal and the Ngambri people, and pay my respects to their elders past, present, and emerging, and acknowledge the ongoing contribution that they take to our city and this region. I'd also like to acknowledge the custodians of all the lands from where people might be joining this podcast from today. Across Australia, there are 2.65 million people who dedicate their lives to caring for family members or friends with disabilities, chronic illnesses, or age-related conditions. Many of these unpaid carers face financial hardship and grapple with great emotional pressures as they care for their loved ones.

On this episode of Work with Purpose, we want to shine a light on their invaluable work. We'll take a closer look at some of the public support mechanisms in place in both the federal and the ACT level, and we'll also unpack how they might need to evolve in the future to meet their needs. We'll discuss how the ACT Government is building carer confident workplaces and talk about the federal government's new inquiry into the recognition of unpaid carers. Reviewing the 2010 Carers Recognition Act, this inquiry is aiming to better understand how carers are currently identified and how policies have evolved since the act first came into place. We'll also look at the effectiveness of existing state territory and international recognition of unpaid care. So whether you are an unpaid carer, someone who knows and admires the dedication of a carer or a policymaker passionate about making a difference, we hope that today's discussion will bring you some new insights.

So for this special discussion, we've invited three leading women in the field of caring, two from the public sector angle and one from an advocacy background. So first off, I'd like to introduce ROBYN SHANNON, who is the Acting Deputy Secretary at the Department of Social Services. She was previously at the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations where she was responsible for the management of employment services, procurement program, and contract management functions throughout the onset of COVID-19 and the implementation of Workforce Australia. Robyn has worked in the Australian public service for over 20 years in a range of policy, program and corporate roles. Welcome, Robyn.

ROBYN SHANNON:

Thanks so much for having me, both in my professional capacity, looking after disability and carer policy at the Commonwealth level, but also as a carer of my frail aged mum.

CAROLINE WALSH: Great. Thanks, Robyn. Also joining us today is LISA KELLY. Lisa is the CEO of Carers ACT and is passionately committed to ensuring that carers received high-quality supports and services and receive recognition of their role within the community. Prior to joining Carers ACT, Lisa worked primarily in the mental health and youth sectors for agencies such as Lifeline, Headspace and Richmond Fellowship. She spent a large part of her career implementing innovative and award-winning services. Welcome, Lisa.

LISA KELLY: Thanks for having me. It's a pleasure to be here today.

CAROLINE WALSH: Great. Thanks, Lisa. Also, introducing ALEX ALLARS. Alex is the Executive Branch Manager, Whole of Government Industrial Relations and Public Sector Employment, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate at ACT Government. In addition to being a proud Canberran and public servant, Alex is mum to three teenagers and is the legal guardian of one of her younger siblings who has complex, debilitating, and persistent psychological and psychosocial needs. Welcome, Alex.

ALEX ALLARS: Thank you. I'm really pleased to be part of the panel discussion.

CAROLINE WALSH: Yeah, I'm really pleased that you can be part of the panel discussion today as well. So before we get started, listeners, we'd like you to know who we're talking about when we refer to carers. So as per the Australian Government Carer Recognition Act, a carer is an unpaid family member or a friend who helps with the tasks of daily living. The reasons why a person might need care are varied, and it can be due to a disability, a medical condition, a mental illness, or because they're frail when they're old. In Australia, as I said, we have over 2.65 million carers. So we have a number of people on the panel who are carers themselves, and I also identify as a carer. One of my children has a disability, and that's actually how I first met Lisa, was that I needed some support for myself and for my daughter and for my family. I reached out to Carers ACT early on and found that support that I needed. So Lisa, we might start with you.

LISA KELLY: Sure.

CAROLINE WALSH: Can you tell us a little bit about how caring responsibilities affect the lives of carers?

LISA KELLY: Yeah, I think caring has both a really positive space and a really impactful space. So on the positive, there's lots of skills and lots of development of capacity and competency and stuff that you never knew that you needed to know, that you now know. In particular, things like how to navigate systems, how to advocate, how to actually organise and be scheduled and all of that sort of stuff,

really great skill development. On the other side, though, caring really impacts a number of places in a carer's life, so time is one of the biggest. So what carers talk a lot about is that they don't have free use of their time, and they don't have time that isn't used. So when the rest of us might be lying on the couch watching some sort of reality TV, let's say, carers don't often have those sorts of opportunities.

So that then wears on their well-being, it wears on their health, it wears on their social life. Carers don't often have money, social friends or opportunities. In fact, the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers will say that lots of carers only have one social event in a year, which is huge. When I think about my life, I go, "If I could only get out once to one social event in a year, that would have significant impact on my well-being and my mental health." So we know that carers have some of the worst health and well-being outcomes of any part of community.

We know that they are invisible in all of the service systems in which they interact. So they might go to the doctors more often than anybody else, but nobody ever says, "Hey, how are you?" So there's this real invisibility of carers as humans and carers of anything other than a vehicle of care, so the impact can be profound. The biggest one probably for most carers who care for a significant period of time is financial and the impact on their finances. Particularly for women, we see it for women where they're not able to stay in a workplace. They're not able to generate income, they're not able to generate superannuation. So they end up with a lifetime of financial impact from caring as a mother, as a parent, as a child and a daughter.

CAROLINE WALSH:

Yeah. Wow. So you've talked about some of the challenges. I imagine that there would be differentiated challenges. So there'd be certain cohorts such as First Nations people, LGBTI carers or culturally and linguistically-diverse carers. Can you tell us how their needs can best be addressed as well?

LISA KELLY:

Well, that's a big question. Carers, I think are, they're humans to start with, so their diversity is as broad as the diversity of the human race. What might work for one person is not going to work for the next, and the whole approach of that cookie cutter service intervention for carers in particular is never going to work. At Carers ACT, we see every day people that look exactly the same, needing very, very different things. So if we talk about young carers, for example, so these are young people under the age of 24, our youngest is five, who provide some form of caring role. The balance of that with school, with friends, with social life, and just taking on really adult responsibilities at a really young age means that what we need to do to support those young carers is so different to what I might need to do to support a spouse who's

85 caring for their spouse.

So school is a really big intervention. Having adults in young carers lives who can be there to support them to give meaningful relationship, sometimes it's things like, "I just need someone to drive me to Taekwondo. Can I just have someone do that, or somebody to help me get driver's license or take me shopping for a formal dress." In cold carers, it can be, again, this huge diversity, but often there's a lot of stigma involved. There's a lot of sense of responsibility and a lack of choice that carers from cold background often express feeling that they don't have a choice in whether they care or they don't care, and there's expectation of family that floods on them. So that's a different psychological space to have to intervene with and to support and to help understand the impact of having choice taken away from you is huge. So how we support that is often much more through counselling and coaching and those sorts of places than we might for somebody else.

CAROLINE WALSH:

Yeah. Great. Thanks. That's a really great intro to us. I might move to Robyn now to talk about more from the federal government perspective. What sort of supports are currently offered and what we might be looking at as we go through that reform process with the change to the act?

ROBYN SHANNON:

Sure. So I think it's important to recognise there obviously are federal government supports, but other levels of government as well as community play a key role here. I think I was reflecting before that I was working in the carer policy space some time ago, and one of the things that I have noted in coming back is a bit more of a concerted effort to join up support for carers. So the Carer Gateway is really a key initiative that the federal government funds, which is a national single point of contact, single entry point if you like, into a range of services for carers. I think one of the things that we heard over many years from carers is just how difficult it can be to navigate the service landscape. I think one of the first things is many carers may not even consciously recognise that they are undertaking a carer role, and so they may not think to actually seek help.

So I guess one of the things that's important is to make it as easy as possible for people to actually access a range of supports, and so I've been quite struck by the Carer Gateway since coming back into this space. I think the other element of Carer Gateway, which I'd like personally to unpack a bit more when I know a bit more about it, is that it's trying to both support carers in their needs here and now, but also thinking a bit ahead about, I guess, how to support carer well-being. But for those carers who might also be thinking about a life after caring or how they combine their caring role with work, how we can start to support people to think and

plan that journey because it is a really complex and difficult time for people. So the more that people can be supported to start thinking about that, I think, the better.

It goes to Lisa's point that we do want to make sure that where people choose to and at the right time, that they do have the best opportunity to get the skills or have their skills recognised to be able to move back into the paid workforce or to increase their paid work so that they can actually improve their overall financial well-being now and into the future. So the Carer Gateway includes things like tailored support packages with focuses on employment education and respite. There's also a range of in-person and phone-based coaching, counselling and peer support, and of course, access to emergency respite, which can be really, really important at quite critical times in the caring role. So you might've seen the Carer Gateway ads. I know I did before I came into the role. I think I must've looked up something in social media and then suddenly I had all these Carer Gateway ads flooding my social media.

But if afterwards we can provide a link to the information, anyone who's listening to this podcast and having thought about it thinks actually there might be some help there, I'm happy to provide the details and how people can connect. I think that just to briefly mention as well, for people who don't otherwise have the resources, there are a couple of Commonwealth government payments. So for people who in effect their caring role really precludes them from working substantially in the paid workforce, Carer Payment is a means tested income support payment that's available. Then the Carer Allowance is a supplementary payment for people who provide substantial daily care. So there are some financial supports for people, but obviously the longer that people need to rely on those payments, the bigger the implications might be for their long-term financial well-being. So that's why it's important to bring together those services as well as the financial supports.

CAROLINE WALSH: So can people find out more about those financial supports through the Carer Gateway? Is that one of the pathways in?

ROBYN SHANNON: It definitely is. The other pathway, of course, is to contact Services Australia. Again, we can provide the 1-3 number or the various website addresses, but certainly you can find some information about the income support payments there as well.

CAROLINE WALSH: Yeah, great. Yeah, happy to share that in the show notes because I've actually used the carers support and counselling through the Carers Gateway, and then I've talked about it with friends who have also got carers responsibility. Were shocked to find that people didn't know that it existed. So happy to share that.

ROBYN SHANNON: I chuckle myself because my mum was my dad's carer for 30 years, and it wasn't until I actually worked in the carer policy area that it occurred to me that she could have been getting some more financial support.

LISA KELLY: It's actually one of the biggest barriers is that people don't see themselves as a carer. They don't recognise that they are. Even then when they do, they're so exhausted by the role that actually then going, "Hey, I need something," becomes a real challenge. So the resources are there and the supports are there, and there's only so much about how we can reach out to people over and over and over again before... We really need everybody in Australia to understand who a carer is, 'cause we all know one. We probably know one really intimately. They're going to be in our family, they're going to be in our work group. They're going to be all over the place, so how we also can say, "Hey, listen, I know about this service that can support you as well," and how we help people reach out for help and recognise that is really important.

CAROLINE WALSH: Yeah. Yeah. I love it. So Alex, I might turn to you now because one of the important factors for carers is that although some people aren't able to work while they're caring, a lot of people do combine paid work with quite significant caring responsibilities. So I'd be really interested to hear what the ACT Government has been doing to create caring confident workplaces.

ALEX ALLARS: Of course, and I think I'd start by saying the beautiful thing about working in ACT Government is you actually live and service the community that you live within. You can see the positive impact that a government, that policy has every day, but you can also see the negative impact. As a consumer in this area as well, you actually experience the services as well, so it's quite an interesting dynamic. The other thing I'd say in ACT Government is it's a very socially- progressive government. So yes, we're a large employer, 27,000 employees in a very diverse workforce from health system to education to emergency services, right through to the services that we receive, whether it's waste collection, et cetera, so a very diverse service. But the ACT Government also has to set strategy framework support for ACT community and private sector employees and not-for-profit as well.

So the ACT Government has developed with Carers ACT, there is a strategy, a 10-year strategy, ACT Carer strategy. There's also legislative frameworks around recognition of carers through Carers Recognition Act. But as an employer, which is where I'll focus, it's really setting up a culture where you do have a very purpose-driven service. People work in ACT Government because they do want to try and make an impact and try and impact in a positive way people's lives and their experience of government services. That has incredible benefits because you get amazing

discretionary effort, people go over and above. But it also means that people are, I think, more susceptible to the negative impacts potentially of taking on caring roles or working in a purpose-driven workforce. That can lead to burnout and other things. But from an employment perspective, it's about having a really robust and very diverse employment framework in place.

We do have, I guess, an enabling environment where we are a highly- collaborative and consultative workforce. We recognise the role that our unions and our worker representatives play, and also, it's important to have a voice of our workforce. So within our employment framework, we have a range of whether it's leave provisions, whether it's support provisions, we're very progressive through enterprise bargaining and other provisions in putting in place, whether it's additional leave types, whether it's leave types that aren't being envisaged or utilised in other jurisdictions, but you have to operationalize it. So whilst we have an incredible culture when it comes to being socially progressive and being open to change and doing things that benefit employees in a positive way, we also have, I guess, a workforce that like in many organisations can be, I guess, challenged with having to deliver frontline services and at pace when you have to meet the needs of the community.

But we also have to operationalize and bring to life these provisions and ensure... Lisa talked about you can't have a cookie cutter approach. You can't have a vanilla approach. People are so diverse. Caring situations are fluid and dynamic on a daily basis. So you have to have workplace mindsets that are open to allowing people to utilise benefits, have a permission-based environment where line managers where colleagues, where senior managers actually bring to life all these provisions we have in enterprise agreements and legislation and policy and allow people to access them flexibly and move around a bit. What a person might have needed at one point in their life is very different to what they might need now and what the person that they're caring for might need tomorrow. So it's having an open mindset to be able to adapt and I guess take up provisions, having the culture that supports it, but also being open to revising it and not having, I guess, a judgement attached to it as well.

CAROLINE WALSH:

Yeah. So have you got any examples of the flexibility that different carers or workplaces have put in place?

ALEX ALLARS:

Yeah. So specifically, it can be quite individual. So when you have an individual that might need additional caring or support for perhaps younger children, we have a range of entitlements; whether it's around birth leave, whether it's around adoption, surrogacy leave, whether it's around personal leave. But then as people move through their life cycle, if you talk about caring for

elderly parents, if you talk about caring for siblings, there are different, again, flexible work options. So specifically whether it's somebody perhaps works full-time but does that full-time work over a compressed working week, whether they do it over a fortnight, they do different hours, they modify their hours during the day, you also have the ability to move, I guess, to part-time employment. But more than that, there is the ability to talk about what people deliver through their day-to-day work.

Is it all just focused on being able to physically see a person about their outputs that you can measure, or it is actually about their impact and what they're doing over weeks or months? So it's taking a different approach to how you assess a person being present and the work that they're delivering at particular points, definitely accessing the different leave types for specific situations. But I think it's also about being flexible with those types of leave provisions for different individuals at different points in time. We've talked about legislation and strategies and other things that are in place that then when you start to implement and operationalize it, people might require to be away from the workplace or to work remotely or do something a little bit differently.

It's how you approach that as a line manager or a colleague in relation to why does that person need to be away? Do they need to disclose it? Do they need to provide evidence? It's actually being flexible. I know across the ACT Government, some directorates and some agencies have a very broad open mindset to that. Others are very narrow and do want more specifics and more disclosure, and it's really trying to navigate that that actually might not be the right way for particular situations. So I just come back to we have lots of leave provisions available in our public service. It is about education. People need to know what they can access. They need to get advice, but it's also about line managers and colleagues and other people having a bit more of an open mind around people accessing that and not judging them in the event that they have to over the course of their career.

ROBYN SHANNON:

It's interesting, COVID was obviously a very difficult period for everyone, but for some people in some workplaces for the first time, they saw into other people's lives because they were Teamsing in or Zooming into their house. I think that's given a lot of people a bit of an appreciation of their colleagues as people who aren't just in the workplace, that everyone's got that kind of juggle. Again, I guess there've been some benefits from the flexibility that necessarily we had to explore during COVID, a very difficult period, of course, for many carers as well who may not have been able to access some of the formal supports during that period. But I think in terms of helping to shift some of that mindset around people and how they come to work as a whole person with other responsibilities, for better or for worse, I think COVID has

made a bit of a contribution to that. That's, I guess, my personal reflection.

LISA KELLY: I agree. I think though, it's balanced now moving forward. I think, it's really easy to go, "Okay, well, the best way for me to support a carer is to allow them to work from home, and not think about the social impact workplaces have and the connection and the sense of belonging." Lots of carers will say, "It works for me better to work from home all the time." It's like, "Well, hang on-

ROBYN SHANNON: And for other people, work might be respite, actually-

LISA KELLY: That's exactly right.

ROBYN SHANNON: ... in a weird way.

LISA KELLY: They don't want to be at home.

ROBYN SHANNON: So just a break where you can be a different person.

LISA KELLY: Absolutely, and not be defined as this carer. So I think as Alex is saying, it needs to be individualised, but we need workplaces that see the wholeness and who can go, "Okay, do I really need this person to start work at 9:00 if it's causing this degree of stress? Can they start at 10:00 and have a bit more time to get the family organised in the morning?" It takes a lot to get a person with a disability to a day program in the morning. It takes a huge amount of effort, so she then turn up to work and expect to be on and in a meeting. Pulling it at 100% at 9:00 in the morning is really hard for that person. So how do we as a workplace create the space where maybe we do our big meetings in the afternoon? Because traditionally, everyone wants to do this 9:00 meeting, it blows my head. I go, "I don't understand. Let's do it at 3:00, when people have got some more space and energy." So those real little things make such a huge difference to a carer in a workplace.

ALEX ALLARS: I agree. It's not just about the timing or the scheduling of meetings because actually, on any given day, the requirements of a carer will shift as well. So you do definitely need to have structure and organisation and things set up, but you need to be open that perhaps that individual may not be able to attend at that day, but catch them up, find different ways to bring them up to speed or find out what's happening with them.

CAROLINE WALSH: Visibility.

ROBYN SHANNON: Obviously we are talking about employment in fairly large government departments and not every workplace looks like that, and a vast majority of people actually employed in small business. So one piece of work that we are doing with Carers Australia is

actually to try and develop a disability-friendly workplace initiative where they're developing, I think, it's very similar to an initiative in New South Wales. There may well be other governments that have taken a similar approach, but it's effectively to work with carers and work with employers to develop some resources that help the employer to make some of those calls about how they can make their workplace more inclusive, some of the small adjustments that might make a really big difference to people.

So it's really the development of information and materials. The idea is instead of an external assessment and accreditation process, which is a bit too big a regulatory burden, I think for particularly small business, it's really a process of self-identifying and then for employers to promote themselves as a carer-inclusive workplace. So we try and again, continue to drive that change in culture. So that works underway, and I'll be quite interested to see... I'm quite excited to see how it lands and then we'll look to roll that out.

LISA KELLY:

I guess it's really important, though, that we don't go, 'cause it's really easy to go, "Well, it has to be leave," or, "It has to be super flexible." I know a carer who her whole world changed when her workplace was able to give her a place to take a phone call at lunchtime for 10 minutes because she needed to check in with her daughter. It needed to be private, it needed to just have the space to be able to do that. Often the way modern workplaces are designed, you don't have that. You're all sitting in pods and everyone's listening to everything. So in that situation, that's all that carer needed. It was found out 'cause she was sitting in her car every day making this phone call and a work colleague starting to go, "This is crazy."

ROBYN SHANNON:

"What's going on here?"

LISA KELLY:

"Let's find a way to fix this." So it doesn't have to be big leave, and it doesn't have to be more than anybody else is getting, or any of the stuff that people get a bit antsy about. Sometimes it can be really simple and really small.

CAROLINE WALSH:

Can we explore as well what some of the benefits are for workplaces in doing this about how it might increase engagement or productivity in the workplace as well?

LISA KELLY:

Yeah. Carers, I think, make some of the most committed and dedicated workers. If they find a workplace that works for them, they will stay in that workplace, and they will stay committed in that workplace because they can manage their life then around that space. So if you're looking for a retention, 80% of my workforce are carers. Our retention, I think our average length of employment, something like 10 years or something. So from a

tenure perspective, carers make some of the best long-term employees.

CAROLINE WALSH: I love it. Alex, from your experience?

ALEX ALLARS: I was going to say the challenge of how do you even measure productivity? That's a whole different thing because we've talked a bit about is it about output or is it actually about outcomes and impact? But when it comes to engagement and satisfaction, we regularly survey our workforce around some key questions. I tried to delve into those just to get a sense. About 5% of our workforce identify as a carer. We've got another 20 odd percent that say they have caring responsibilities, and that could be quite broad, but specifically, so some of the questions that we ask are around... So there's this connection to purpose and objectives of the organisation, and we've got 83% of our workforce say that they believe in our purpose and our objectives. But it's about that over and above work, it's that discretionary effort. So again, 83% say that they work over and above what's required to achieve the objectives of the service and all the different things that we're delivering to our community.

But then we've got another 83% that say they're very satisfied with their job. But on the flexibility front, we've got over 90% that say that they can access the flexibility that they need. We talked about it's not just about leave types, it's about how when you work, it's about access to facilities to take those phone calls or to take a 10-minute break, and 91% say that they get that flexibility. So we do have strong engagement scores. Can I weed that back to say that every single one of our carer is satisfied with what they have at any given time? No, but I just come back to we have a really good enabling environment and a good context to support caring and carers. But I know that there are pockets where more must be done, but I think our overall schools look very strong. But if you dug in and then went and did discussions with individuals, they might have different perspectives on any given day. I think there's ways to measure it.

CAROLINE WALSH: There's always more to do, but that sounds like a pretty good launch for you guys being a model employer that maybe other employers might look to emulate.

LISA KELLY: It's turning that real mindset from carers as burdening workplace to carers as benefiting workplace. When I think about carers, I think they are some of the best multitaskers, best negotiators, best time managers that you'll ever find because that's what they actually need to just survive. So when you think about those really core elements of what makes a good worker in a good workplace, carers have them in abundance. So if we see them as these really resourced and contributing members rather than a burden, then

they're going to deliver twice as much work in half the time that most other workers are going to do. You as an owner, a business owner, an executive director or whatever, are going to reap the benefits of just changing your mindset about how you see carers.

CAROLINE WALSH: If you dial up the flexibility to support carers, you're likely to then be supporting other employees-

LISA KELLY: Absolutely.

CAROLINE WALSH: ... and their needs as well. Yeah. Great. So Robyn, I'd like to talk to you now a little bit. We've talked a bit about the state of play currently, but I'd like to explore with you a little bit about the reforms that are happening in this space. So the government has committed to a new national carers strategy, which will be developed in consultation with carers peak bodies and service providers. Can you talk us through a little bit about how you're engaging with these groups to build the strategy and what they're telling you?

ROBYN SHANNON: Yeah. So I think it's fair to say we're still reasonably early in that stage. There's a lot of pieces of work that are in train at the moment. So we're at the moment undertaking research, but we are very keen to be drawing in the insights and perspectives of carers. We really want to take a user-centred approach to taking the work forward. Some of the other pieces of work, which I think we really do need to be cognizant of is the review of the Carer Recognition Act, which obviously there's an inquiry in Parliament that we can talk about a little bit more, but also reviews of the independent review of the NDIS, which is quite important because obviously the interplay between formal and informal care is very important. There's a whole range of reform going on in the aged care space, in the home care and residential aged care. There's also an interesting piece of work I've been quite struck by coming back into this space after a bit of a break around looking at the care economy as a whole.

So looking at where care is provided, whether it's early childhood education and childcare, through the veterans care, disability care and aged care, and obviously each of those different care settings has its own important complexity. There are a range of differences and sensitivities, but there's also a lot of commonality. We see, for example, a lot of discussion around workforce shortage. If we can't really tackle the shortage of appropriately-skilled and fairly-paid workers, then more and more of that care need falls to informal carers. So how do we progress that work in a way where it's joined up and we actually grow the care workforce rather than pinch disability, pinching from aged carer or vice versa. So there's some important work, I think, to be done there. So there's lots of streams and strands of work. We are trying to work out where

those opportunities are to pull it together. Obviously we are very interested in the feedback that we'll get through the parliamentary inquiry into the bill because we want to use that to help shape the thinking as well.

CAROLINE WALSH: So the inquiry into the act will then feed into the national carer strategy-

ROBYN SHANNON: I think so, yes.

CAROLINE WALSH: Is that right?

ROBYN SHANNON: We don't want to do these processes separately. I think the recognition of carers needs to be a really key component of the strategy, and but also it's an opportunity for us to hear from carers and the broader stakeholder group about what they value in the legislation, which might also have important insights for us. But I think the key, and we were chatting about this before, is to really try and tap into those opportunities to join up because people don't live lives that are neatly constrained in service systems. I think that's pretty clear. So there will always be appropriate reasons why policy settings or program settings might be different, but where isn't a good reason for that, we really should be challenging ourselves to make it easier for people.

CAROLINE WALSH: What's the timeframe around the consultation process?

ROBYN SHANNON: I'll have to take that one on notice, I'm sorry.

CAROLINE WALSH: We'll take that one out.

LISA KELLY: So the inquiry is currently calling for submissions now, and I think the end is early August for those submissions to be in writing to be submitted.

ROBYN SHANNON: Yeah. I think I'm quite focused on the fact we've got to appear before the inquiry in early August. So I'm not quite sure where it finishes.

LISA KELLY: I'm pretty sure the writtens are early August and then the in-persons start.

ROBYN SHANNON: So I think one of the things is obviously there's a response burden for community organisations and individuals to provide their feedback into all of these different processes. So that's part of the reason why I really want to pull out the key themes rather than giving people who have gone to the time to actually make these submissions, is to really look across and see what can we draw out of that and then come back to people for further conversations, but trying to ... 'Cause many of the people that

we're talking to are going to be very busy in their caring role.

CAROLINE WALSH:

Absolutely. You've outlined a fairly complex set of arrangements there for carers and their families to navigate. So Lisa, from your perspective, what might be some of the key issues that you think will come out through the consultation and key things that you might like to see addressed in the strategy?

LISA KELLY:

Yeah, okay. So ACT did their strategy back in '18 using a deliberative democracy process, so it was completely written by carers. I was astounded actually at how much was around everyday policy as opposed to needing something specifically carer orientated, which we did have. There are lots of issues that are specifically carer orientated, but actually thinking about the placement of disability parking, for example, has a huge impact on carers. The ability to access like shopfronts and ACT Government shopfronts after hours has a huge impact on carers or being able to do that online or not having to prove ID every single time. We did a lot of work with the food and organic waste trial, which on surface doesn't look anything like a carer issue, but had huge impact on carers around having their bin sizes reduced. So what I'd really like to see in the strategy is that we actually are considering the everyday, 'cause what carers told us really strongly when we consulted with them was that it was the everyday stuff.

I remember a carer distinctly saying to me, "You can make this beautiful thing down the road, Lisa. You can make it gorgeous and wonderful and inviting and lovely, but if the pavement in my front driveway is broken, I can't get mum out of the house. I can't get the wheelchair out, then I can't access it, so I'd rather you just fix the pavement." I think it's that stuff that we forget all the time because we are looking for this big thing that we can hang on and say, "This is carer." There are some respite, absolutely, and the access to respite, and can I just take the opportunity to say carer-driven respite, not recipient-driven respite? Yeah, respite is actually about the carer. We should not be waiting for a participant to say, "I want respite for my person," because that is a never going to happen. So carer-driven respite is an absolute fundamental.

Financial and financial support and the Carer Network has done a report recently that shows that if you do superannuation on carer payment, then carers won't need aged care pension, and it saves the government money. So financial incentive, financial recognition, financial support, absolute imperative in the strategy. But it's then the little everyday things. The biggest problem often, or not the biggest, but one of the problems that causes huge spike in calls at Carers ACT is when the bus route change because we don't think about the fact that there's all these people that have

been trained to use a bus route that now need to be retrained, and that's going to fall back to a carer to do. So it's those really little things that I want to see in the strategy as well. Not all of those are federal, I acknowledge that, but there are still things federally that we need to just go, "How do we fix this? How do we put a carer lens or a carer impact statement on every piece of policy?" So every piece has had a lens on it to go, "What is the impact of this on carers?" That would be my hope.

CAROLINE WALSH: Amazing. So-

LISA KELLY: I'm taking notes.

CAROLINE WALSH: Yeah. Well, I thought I'd throw it at Alex now because you've had your carer strategy in place in the ACT since 2018. So are there anything that you would offer up to the federal level about what you've learned from implementing that strategy and how we can do things better to help carers juggle all of their multiple responsibilities?

ALEX ALLARS: Well, I think I would just probably build on what Lisa's indicated around the voice of the carers, and it's the granularity and the diversity of carers. So we talked a little bit about culturally linguistically diverse carers. We talked about carers that there might be, again, different stages of life for the person that they're caring for. It's actually hearing what their specific needs might be. So 2018, it's a 10-year strategy in the ACT, and we've got three-year action plans that we're working through and it's across. So if we move from the day-to-day, there's got to be, I guess middle and higher order things that we are doing in the community. So absolutely the voice of carers, the carer lens, the day-to-day, but then there's also got to be things that government and policy makers drive around, I guess, awareness raising. It's around education, whether it's holistic campaigns or holistic information raising, there's things to be done there. But it's also got to have a service that delivers it.

So we have, in ACT Government, a directorate that does have responsibility, accountability for delivering the action plans and their flow through to directorates. But there has to be, I guess, support and resources in a government to actually be able to deliver on these to the community as well that has to be dedicated, but still a long way to go in relation to ours. I know Lisa and I have spoken about how you actually go from that strategy and the theory to operationalizing and implementing. So there's always got to be a watch on how you're going and how you're meeting. So we still have, again, a good start, but still quite a way to go. But we do have built in, I guess, accountability and governance and review mechanisms that happen, but you just have to keep focused on it and have a service dedicated or a part

of your service dedicated to actually having it implemented.

LISA KELLY: It's important that we see that it's not just government-

ALEX ALLARS: Yeah, that's true, actually.

LISA KELLY: The strategy for me is really about driving across community and all levels of community. There are some parts government has to play in that, but it's also, how does the local mental health service who is providing support to a young adult with mental health, how do they actually see that care carer or that parent and go, "Hey, how are you going? What's going on for you? What support are you needing? Let me tell you a bit about how we can build some of your sense of confidence in your role as a carer." That's the carer strategy in action too.

That's that real space of real living day impact for carers. So I think sometimes we write strategies and we go, "Well, there's now this legislative thing that needs to happen or government needs to do." Yep, that's true, we do. So does every agency and every business and every person and every neighbour and every sibling, and that it has to... When we start to see caring as a community responsibility, then we'll make a difference to carers. We talk about Carers ACT, we care. We care for our staff, we care for carers, we care for the people carers care for, but we also care for Canberra that cares for carers, because we know that's where the biggest impact is going to be.

ALEX ALLARS: That's a really good point because when you talked about the deliberative panel that developed the strategy, it's still in place. It's 50-odd different stakeholders from different groups, and it is reminding us of those different needs, et cetera.

CAROLINE WALSH: So I'm going to give each of you a magic wand and put that in your hand and let you pick one thing that you would change that would make it possible for us to have an ideal Australia where carers were suitably recognised and supported.

ROBYN SHANNON: Gee whiz, that's an easy one, isn't it? I think it really does come back to more seamless joined-up services to help people navigate their way through. So from a professional perspective, that's what I would hope for. From a personal perspective, I would probably like to be able to lighten that mental load. Coming back to what it's like to both work in the area, but also... I share this as a lighthearted story, but on one of our rare family trips away with my son who's nine with ADHD, and my mum who's 75 with a lot of complex medical conditions in my still trying to wind down from work mode, I managed to give my mother my son's Ritalin.

LISA KELLY: We won't tell the commission that. That's okay.

ROBYN SHANNON: Which then, of course, resulted in a quick dash to emergency. But just, even when you think you can switch off, your mind's still going. So I have a personal wish to be able to just... Maybe actually it's to reach out and access the services that I probably need as a carer. It's that recognition that we're all where you are a carer, you really do need to reach out for help. But anyway, we can laugh about it now.

CAROLINE WALSH: Great, thanks. Alex, what would your magic wand do?

ALEX ALLARS: My magic wand would probably open up mindsets not only in the workplace, but in a personal setting so that we wouldn't be judgmental. We wouldn't assume why a person is present or not present or has to duck out or has to take a phone call. We would just accept that that is part of life, and we'd be in that mindset approach, which is very broad and open. We'd actually also, I guess as carers, be a little bit compassionate to ourselves. It's hard. It's not easy. It's never going to be easy because you're dealing with really hard, tricky things in life. But it's actually, if you get five or 10 minutes and you need to do something for yourself, you'll actually give yourself permission to do that.

I would also say in a workplace context, to every single manager, every single senior leader, every single colleague has a role to play in creating an environment where we are free from that judgement and we are open to people ducking out, as I've had to do in the last few months, "I've got to go home. I've got my sister that has to get put into hospital under a treatment order. I've got police and ambulance on way," and there's no comments or questions. It's just, "Okay, go do that." I hope for other people that are in positions that perhaps aren't a senior, that they would have the ability to just take time out and to go and do things without judgement. So I think for me, it's absolutely about mindset shifts and just openness.

CAROLINE WALSH: Absolutely. Thanks. Lisa, the final word.

LISA KELLY: For me, I think the wand I'd want to waive would be about genuine choice, that carers have a space where they can make a genuine choice about how they care about the level of care they provide, about the impact that care has on their lives, on the way in which they use their time, and that that's a choice that we've made rather than something we've found ourselves in. So that would be what I'd like to see.

CAROLINE WALSH: Thank you all for that really thoughtful and inspirational conversation about carers and the amazing contribution that they make to our economy and our society. So listeners, if you want to keep up to date with what's happening on the podcast, make sure to follow contentgroup and IPAA ACT on LinkedIn or email events

at ipaa.org.au if you have any questions for us. We will be sharing the content of the podcast and our show notes on the IPAA ACT website. Work with Purpose is produced in collaboration between contentgroup and the Institute of Public Administration Australia, and is supported by the Australian Public Service Commission. If you have questions, you might want to put some to Greg Moriarty, the Secretary of the Department of Defence.

He will be speaking at our IPAA Future Leaders Breakfast Event. The big question, you'll get a delicious breakfast and the opportunity to hear about what it means to be a leader in the public service and how to build resilience and courage during peak pressure workloads. Head to act.ipaa.org.au to find out more. Before you go, I invite you to get our your phone and subscribe to Work with Purpose on your favourite podcast provider. We're on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, and more. That way, you can stay on top of everything that we have coming up. We'll be back in a fortnight with another episode of Work with Purpose, and we hope to have you listen in then. Until then, thank you for listening and goodbye.