

Introducing Workplace Flexibility

Why would you want to do it?

1 It's cost effective!

The cost of staff turnover is far higher than the investment you'll need to make to be flexible in the workplace. Consider the costs associated with:

- Lost productivity from the 'date of notice' until an employee leaves
- Lost productivity until the vacancy is filled
- Cost of finding a replacement
- Cost of hiring a replacement
- Cost of training a replacement
- Lost productivity until the recruit 'gets up to speed'
- Lost productivity from a 'revolving-door' morale in the workforce.

There's also the loss of corporate knowledge when people leave and – although the actual cost of this may be more difficult to quantify – this loss is likely to be felt across many aspects of the organisation.

2 It opens up a new pool of potential recruits!

Many organisations recognise the value workplace flexibility has in attracting young mothers and mature women to the workforce – but the attractiveness of workplace flexibility is much wider than that! There is now a much greater focus on work-life balance than in previous generations and people are attracted to work that not only funds – but leaves room for – their lifestyle!

3 It has a positive impact on organisational culture!

Responding to the work-life needs of employees by introducing flexibility policies and practices has been shown to have a positive impact on organisational culture. Even employees who don't need to use the options recognise them as a sign of employer respect and understanding!

How would you go about it?

Consulting with your workforce (individually, in focus groups or by written survey) will help to identify flexibility options with specific appeal – but take care that the consultation process doesn't lead to a false sense of 'promise' that remains unfulfilled due to operational needs.

Explain that you are 'investigating' to identify options that could reasonably be offered within the parameters of good business management.

However, you do need to be open-minded. Don't discount something because it seems too difficult to put into practice. Talk to Supervisors or Team Leaders about the potential to adapt job design in specific roles for win-win outcomes.

When you have found 'a fit', develop a formal plan which outlines the 'rights and responsibilities' of people involved with the flexibility. This document should also cover issues such as how training, OH&S requirements, 'emergency' situations and client care will be met under the new arrangement.

Set a clearly defined trial period with clear performance measures – but use a formative evaluation process throughout the trial so you can adjust arrangements as necessary.

You need to ensure commitment 'down the line' to reap the benefits. Although workplace flexibility needs to be led by upper management, it won't work without the support of frontline management and HR personnel – who may need help with implementation strategies.

Initiatives you could consider

Flexible work hours

The ability to introduce flexible work hours for many roles in Aged and Community Care is obviously restricted by client needs (meal times, bathing, sleep patterns etc). However, there are a number of options which can introduce flexibility across the workplace:

- Are there some roles that could work in a job-sharing arrangement between two or more people?
- Are there some skilled or professional roles that could be part-time if non-skilled aspects (or even paperwork commitments) could be otherwise accommodated?
- Is it really necessary for start and finish times to be fixed? Could they be changed to match employee family commitments? Could they be worked within fixed parameters? Could they be entirely flexible within a fixed 'settlement period'?
- Is there any potential for employees to sometimes 'bank' hours to use later when they need them? In fact, could employees work 'compressed time' (e.g. work the hours of five days in only four) to give an extra work-free day?
- Is there any part of specific roles that could be done at home (for example paperwork or training modules usually completed during work time)?

Additional Leave

The most common additional Leave arrangements in Australian workplaces are Maternity Leave and Parental Leave for partners. However, other Leave entitlements are also being offered to attract and retain employees in what is an increasingly tight market. Some organisations offer 3-5 days Carers' Leave or Grandparents' Leave; many employers are recognising the value of workplace diversity by offering Cultural Leave; and recently Community Service Leave has been introduced to allow employees 1-3 days a year paid leave to work for charities and community projects.

Flexible Leave Arrangements

Although many employers have long seen the value in being flexible with Long Service Leave arrangements, new flexibilities have begun to emerge – such as offering up to four weeks additional Annual Leave – paid for throughout the year with incremental deductions in normal pay periods.

Career break opportunities

Allowing a sabbatical for employees to attend to other interests or family commitments – or even just to have a change for a while – can see them coming back to you where they may otherwise have permanently changed career pathways or retired. While these sabbaticals are mostly unpaid, other industries are beginning to introduce options where employees' fortnightly salary is reduced for four years so the employee can take a fifth year off on the same pay!



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- The *Royal District Nursing Service of SA Inc (RDNS)* provides a rotating flexi-shift arrangement, increasing the span of hours from 7 am to 6 pm. Most staff are not required to work afternoons, nights or weekends. These positions are taken up by people who choose to work them. Employees have regular Programmed Days Off (PDOs) and flexibility to 'make up time'.
- The *City of Unley's HACC* employees can enjoy up to four weeks additional Annual Leave funded by salary deductions spread evenly throughout the year – and can also access paid Personal Leave to deal with emergency situations or Carers Leave to support family members who are ill.
- *Business and Employment* is a small regional organisation in the Health and Community Services sector that was an Award winner in the *Australian Chamber of Commerce/Business Council of Australia 2007 National Work and Family Awards*. One of the workplace flexibility options introduced by the company was a paid 'Incidental Leave' which allowed employees two-hour blocks to attend appointments (such as banks or school interviews) – in addition to options to vary start/finish times to take a longer break in the middle of the day to attend to personal business.

This Information Sheet is one in a series produced by Aged and Community Services SA & NT Inc. It is provided for general information only and does not replace the need for readers to make their own enquiries or seek independent advice.

Initiatives for Mature-age Workers

Why would you want to do it?

There's a real need to retain mature-age people in the national workforce!

Faced with an ageing population, tendencies toward 'early retirement' and skill shortages across most industries, Australia has introduced incentives (such as superannuation/taxation concessions) to encourage people to stay in the workforce for longer. However, employers also need to engage mature-age workers 'on the ground floor'.

By increasing the ability of people to continue working – and enhancing their interest in doing so – workplace flexibility initiatives for mature-age workers can also:

1 Expand recruitment opportunities

Mature-age women present the greatest opportunity for gaining real workforce numbers in the current labour market and retaining your mature-age workers makes you attractive to these potential new recruits – because they know they'll 'fit'.

2 Retain corporate knowledge

Retaining mature-age workers means also retaining valuable experience and organisational knowledge to mentor incoming recruits.

3 Enhance workplace culture

Having a good mix of mature-age workers among younger employees can provide a 'steadying' effect across the workplace team – and age diversity brings benefits in different approaches to work activities.

4 Increase productivity

Research has shown that mature-age workers have fewer one-day absences – and single sick days can be costly to cover. Mature-age workers also have fewer workplace 'accidents' – and any increased potential for strains may be able to be addressed through job design, whereas inexperience is more difficult to manage. Stability and a tendency to 'stay-on-task' is a common characteristic of mature-age workers.

5 Save on costs

It's expensive to replace the 'training equity' you have in a long term mature-age worker.

How would you go about it?

Introducing initiatives to retain your mature-age workers – and attracting new mature-age people to join them – is about understanding their specific needs. Find out by:

- **Reviewing exit interviews** – to see whether mature-age workers leaving your workplace actually told you what might have enticed them to stay.
- **Talking to people individually** – or asking Supervisors and Team Leaders to do that. Ideas from one person may be attractive to another that hasn't considered there may be options.
- **Holding focus groups** – where you open up discussion about flexibility 'wish-lists'. This will give a good 'feel' for what is likely to prove attractive and also what the barriers to that might be (when other people in the group comment on suggestions).
- **Researching other sites** – suppliers, partner organisations, other Health Sectors and even other industries. This will not only give ideas about the type of flexibility mature-age workers want, but how successful specific practices have been in the 'real world' workplace.

Initiatives you could consider

The following initiatives may prove useful in your workforce planning and discussions with staff.

- **Provide financial planning advice:** Many mature-age workers may have been focussed on a set retirement date for some time – but people are often not financially prepared. Staying in the workforce for an extra two years can extend the ‘life’ of superannuation income by seven years! Helping mature-age workers to access professional financial planning advice may encourage them to delay retirement – or at least consider a transitional phase.
- **Offer phased retirement:** If the financial advice does convince them to stay at work, they’ll still want to do some of the activities they’ve been planning. Supporting your mature-age worker to move toward retirement in stages rather than an abrupt ‘all-then-nothing’ approach could mean less hours each day, less days each week or less weeks each year.
- **Reduce workplace demands:** Stresses and strains are more likely in older workers, so it makes good business sense to relieve some of the more demanding aspects of their work. Investment in more equipment to relieve heavier work and reduce OH&S risk is one option, but this can also be about introducing cycles of less responsibility (with your mature-age worker mentoring others in the role).
- **Develop mentoring programs:** Involving your mature-age workers in mentoring others has multiple benefits. It encourages appropriate training and work ethics in younger employees and helps to capture your corporate knowledge – but, importantly, it acknowledges that you value the expertise of older workers and gives them a new interest in their work.
- **Introduce ‘change’:** Mature-age workers don’t often have the thirst for change that characterises younger generations, but doing the same thing for years could have them ready for something different. Do they have skills or interests you don’t know about? Are they interested in learning new skills?
- **Access age management training (AMT):** The Australian Government’s Jobwise initiative has developed two workshops – one encourages mature-age workers to transition to retirement, the other helps Supervisors and Team Leaders to manage the process. Information about AMT trainers across Australia is available on the DEEWR Jobwise website – www.jobwise.gov.au
- **Maintain contact:** Don’t let the final day at work be the final contact! Mature-age workers who have moved into retirement may welcome the opportunity to return for fixed periods to cover Leave requirements or the occasional emergency shift – or to work as a consultant on specific projects.

This Information Sheet is one in a series produced by Aged and Community Services SA & NT Inc. It is provided for general information only and does not replace the need for readers to make their own enquiries or seek independent advice.



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- *The Royal District Nursing Service of SA Inc (RDNS)* has recently introduced ‘Elder Care and Grandchildren leave’, which pays up to three days per year from Personal Leave entitlements to support elderly parents with business arrangements or other tasks they are not able to do themselves or assist in the care of grandchildren when their parents (or their usual childcare providers) are unable to do so. The Leave is intended for emergency situations when normal arrangements are not available.
- *The St George Bank* provides ‘grandparental leave’ to allow staff to assist in the care of grandchildren.
- *The Overnewton Anglican Community College* has introduced a number of initiatives to assist employees’ transition to retirement – including information sessions on financial planning.
- *SC Johnson* is a medium-sized NSW consumer goods company that offers a six-month unpaid ‘sabbatical’ leave – allowing employees to try other activities (including retirement) for a period of time before making a decision to permanently leave the company.
- The Queensland-based *Kobold Group Limited* (with average workforce age 40.6 years) provides three days additional leave for ‘general health and wellbeing’ so employees can ‘re-charge their batteries’.
- *The Hesta Super Fund* (average workforce age of 44 years) recognises employees’ need to care for elderly parents as equal to younger employees caring for their children – accommodated through flexible hours and leave arrangements.

Setting Up Job-Sharing

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, more than one quarter (27%) of all Australians aged 15-64 years work part-time. Two in every five (41%) women in the same age group work part-time – almost three in five (58%) if their youngest child is under six years.

These statistics show a high demand for jobs that are less than full-time. However, Job-Sharing is not just about part-time work, which already has significant applications in Aged and Community Care. Job-Sharing is when two or more people work part-time on a regular basis to fill one full-time job.

Why would you want to do it?

1 It enables you to fill a vacancy that has been difficult to fill

The high demand for part-time work, coupled with the current skill shortages in many occupations, means Job-Sharing may offer a recruitment solution. Apart from parents and elder caregivers, it also opens up opportunities for people with disabilities (and others) who are not looking for full-time work.

2 It provides retention options for parents and mature workers

Job-Sharing presents excellent opportunities for those returning from maternity leave and transitioning to retirement.

3 It frees employees for professional development

Employees can be reluctant to embark on additional studies if they feel they may 'lose their place' on their personal career pathway. Job-Sharing can free time for them, while maintaining continuity in their job role and their seniority level.

4 It gives a wider range of skills and experience in the one job

Job-Sharing allows you to partner two people in the one position with skills and abilities that fill 'gaps' in each partner – with excellent opportunities to learn from each other.

5 There's more potential to cover peak periods and Leave

Although each partner has set hours, there may be opportunity for partners to work together during busy times and cover each other for Leave arrangements.

How would you go about it?

1 Consider all the job families in the organisation –

and individual job roles – to identify those that would lend themselves to one of the Job-Share designs discussed overleaf.

2 Identify the practical issues that would need to be addressed such as:

- Would the partnership divide tasks or simply 'share' the job function?
- How could the work hours be split (each work part-day, part-week, or rotate weeks)?
- Would you need extra resources (e.g. will the partners share a desk etc)?
- If the partners share the job function, how could you manage performance appraisal?
- If one partner left, would the other be expected to fulfil the role until a replacement partner was found? What process would you use to replace a partner?
- How would communication between the partners be managed? Would there be a need for a hand-over?

3 Document the Job-Share Design – clearly outlining duties, responsibilities, accountabilities and all the practicalities addressed in Step 2. At this stage, it's not really an agreement – but provides a checklist for meeting the needs of the organisation during later discussion with potential candidates.

Initiatives you could consider

- 4 Communicate the potential for Job-Share** in the roles and job families you've identified as feasible. The published list isn't about roles where you have received an expression of interest – or where you *think* there may be one – it's about letting the workforce know you would consider Job-Share as an option in these roles.
- 5 Develop a Job-Share Register** which allows employees to express interest. The 'register' allows you to identify whether there is potential for appropriate partnerships.
- 6 Renegotiate the Job-Share Design** to accommodate where possible the needs of individual employees (while managing the practicalities you've identified) and include an initial fixed timeframe to trial the arrangement.
- 7 Communicate agreed Job-Share positions to the workforce** – so that other team members fully understand the new arrangements and how future interactions should be managed
- 8 Monitor, Review and Evaluate!** Although you'll have included a fixed timeframe in the initial agreement, the new arrangements should be monitored throughout, with incremental review periods to ensure the Job-Share is working for the partners and the organisation.

Job-Share Designs you could consider

Divided responsibility – will require a comprehensive assessment of all the tasks to be performed within the job, which are then allocated in an equitable division for the partners. The division needs to account for the proportion of the job worked by each partner – but also the nature of the tasks – so that one partner isn't left with all the mundane duties if their skills and abilities are comparable.

This design works best when the job involves easily identifiable 'project' components and can work well when the partners have different skill levels or are not well known to each other.

Despite the fact it can be more intensive to establish, this design is often more easily managed on an on-going basis.

Partners in a 'divided responsibility' Job-Share can still provide support to each other during peak times or cover absences – and this is often when the additional skills development can occur.

Shared responsibility – where both partners perform the full range of tasks within a job and the partners are fully interchangeable on specific tasks.

This design works best when the partners are relatively evenly matched in skills and approach to work – and requires a greater level of communication and cooperation between the partners so that interchanges are seamless.

'Shared responsibility' is often thought to provide a better approach for clients and co-workers and is easier to establish – but can often require more co-ordination over time (and sometimes intervention).

Individual performance appraisal can be difficult in this Job-Share design, but it's important to establish parameters so partners can be appraised individually.



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- *Life Care* encourages and supports Job-Sharing across all sites. The organisation feels this flexibility is an important contributor to being able to attract and retain the best people in the job. At one site, an important role is shared by three people!

Where you can find more information

- The Australian Government's *Jobwise* website provides information about Job-Sharing as part of its Mature Age Employment information. The site even offers 'sample clauses' to help you construct your agreement (although also cautioning the use of appropriate legal advice). Go to www.jobwise.gov.au → *Employers* → *Mature Age Employment Practical Guide* → *Flexible Work Practices* → *Job Sharing*

This Information Sheet is one in a series produced by Aged and Community Services SA & NT Inc. It is provided for general information only and does not replace the need for readers to make their own enquiries or seek independent advice.

About Home-Based Work

Is it possible in Aged Care?

While the nature of many jobs in the Aged and Community Care Sector can at first have you thinking they are unsuitable to even consider for Home-Based Work – also known as *teleworking* or *telecommuting* – it's worth taking another look.

There are many jobs in the sector where at least part of the work could be performed remotely, such as roles in:

- Business Development
- Human Resource Management
- Accounting and other Financial Services
- Data Processing
- Research.

Even in some Direct Care roles, there are some aspects which don't have to be performed entirely on-site such as:

- Report Writing
- Case Management Planning
- Quality Management Planning.

Why would you want to do it?

1 Increased productivity *from* employees

As home-based work becomes more popular in Australia, research is building a business case that says people working from home can be more productive during the hours they spend on it, because they have fewer distractions such as workplace noise and interruptions – and therefore work with lower stress levels.

A report by the *Australian Telework Advisory Committee* to the Australian Government 'Telework for Australian Employees and Businesses: Maximising the economic and social benefits of flexible working practices' (February 2006) suggests this productivity gain may be as high as 40%!

2 Increased job satisfaction *for* employees

The same research is suggesting employees get more satisfaction from their work because they are able to focus on agreed outcomes and deliverables and often 'donate' the time they would have spent travelling to achieving the task at hand.

3 Savings on required office space and equipment

Depending on your agreement in regard to home-based equipment (see overleaf), savings in not having to have desks/computer equipment available to everyone at the one time can be significant.

4 All the benefits of offering workplace flexibility

These benefits include the retention of valued staff who may otherwise leave; the potential to recruit from new pools of jobseekers who need this type of flexibility for work/life balance; reduced absenteeism; and developing a reputation as an 'employer of choice' so that high quality staff are attracted to you.

How would you go about it?

Home-based work can be full-time, part-time or used on an occasional or 'emergency' basis. Employees can use their own or the employer's equipment and the work can be conducted through an informal arrangement; under a formal workplace policy; or even through a formal contract.

Planning to introduce home-based work under any of these circumstances requires consideration of the following:

- **What roles or parts of roles should be excluded from home-based work options?**

Obviously jobs or tasks that involve direct contact such as client care, nursing and tasks that can only be performance-measured in the workplace such as cleaning, cooking, etc must be excluded – but also jobs or tasks which involve a high degree of collaboration, consultation and accessibility to clients or other staff.

- **Are there any award, agreement, or contract implications?**

Checking legal requirements may only require a re-wording of some clauses, but needs to be addressed early in the planning process. At the very least, you should have a letter of agreement which covers the circumstances of the arrangement.

- **How will Occupational Health and Safety responsibilities be managed?**

Mutual obligations still exist when the employee works from home. You should conduct a health and safety audit to ensure the designated workplace complies with legislation and regulations.

- **Are there insurance issues to be addressed?**

Workers' Compensation cover needs to be confirmed and Public Liability Insurance may be an issue if there's going to be anyone else visiting the home-based office.

- **What are the set-up and on-going costs?**

For an on-going arrangement, it's usual for employers to supply equipment such as a lap-top, desk and appropriate office chair, secure file storage, mobile phone etc – and you will need a documented assets register. However, it's possible for staff to use some or all personal equipment and potentially claim a tax deduction (although they need to obtain their own advice on this). How will work-related expenses be assessed, reported and reimbursed (e.g. telephone and internet usage)?

- **How will you measure performance?**

Will there be agreed outputs from home-based work or can you negotiate agreed Key Performance Indicators?

- **How will contact and team communication be maintained?**

If only part of a job role is going to be fulfilled at home this may not be an issue, but where all components of the work can be performed from a remote base, you will need to build in networking opportunities, preferably at the central work site.



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- *Life Care* has a number of workplace flexibility initiatives in place – including allowing staff to work from home where possible. The organisation has commenced a program to 'risk assess' workspaces used by staff during home-based work.
- *Eldercare* staff are allocated two hours paid time to complete online 'Infection Control' training and have the option of completing this training from home if they prefer.
- The *Royal District Nursing Service of SA Inc (RDNS)* has staff rostered 'on-call' to cover unplanned absences in the RDNS Direct call centre on night shift. However, if asked to cover the shift, the on-call staff member works from home – using supplied telephone and computer equipment.
- *Aboriginal Home Care* allows Case Managers to take a wireless broadband-equipped laptop computer home to write up notes from the day's home visits, rather than 'return to the office', when this is more convenient.

Where you can find more information

- The report by the *Australian Telework Advisory Committee* to the Australian Government "Telework for Australian Employees and Businesses: Maximising the economic and social benefits of flexible working practices" can be found at www.workplace.gov.au → Programs → Work and Family → Telework Taskforce

This Information Sheet is one in a series produced by Aged and Community Services SA & NT Inc. It is provided for general information only and does not replace the need for readers to make their own enquiries or seek independent advice.