



THE MCKELL INSTITUTE VICTORIA

Our place in time: Making unpaid work count

Rebecca Thistleton

September 2023



This page is intentionally blank

About the Mckell Institute

The Mckell Institute is an independent, not-for-profit research institute dedicated to identifying practical policy solutions to contemporary challenges.

www.mckellinstitute.org.au

Acknowledgement of country

This paper was written on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. The Mckell Institute acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to both their land and seas.

About the author

Rebecca Thistleton is Executive Director, Mckell Institute Victoria.

About this paper

This paper has been prepared by the Mckell Institute for HESTA.

The opinions and recommendations in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of HESTA, its staff or Board, the Mckell Institute's members, affiliates, individual board members or research committee members. Any errors or omissions are the responsibility of the author.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	3
Foreword	4
Summary	5
Australia's unpaid workers.....	6
Paid and unpaid work: the choice carers face	6
Unpaid workloads and gender.....	6
How unpaid work impacts women's earnings and superannuation.....	7
Adding value: how time use surveys can capture unpaid work	10
Historical Context.....	10
Political context	10
GDP fails to include unpaid work.....	11
Quantifying unpaid work is a critical to adequately recognising carers	12
Time use data influences policy all over the world	12
Finland has led the way: case study.....	13
The case for capturing unpaid work.....	14
Comprehensive time use data can galvanise policy frameworks.....	17
Recommendations	21
Conclusion	22
References	23

Foreword

Why is it that buying cow's milk to feed babies contributes to gross domestic product (GDP) and economic growth, but breastfeeding babies has no measurable economic value?

Milking a cow is viewed as "productive" work, economically quantified in government statistics, and recognised as essential. Breastfeeding is not.

Unpaid work dominates the global economy but takes a back seat in economic discussions and policymaking. Everyday tasks, such as caregiving and household chores, must be recognised for what they are - invaluable unpaid labour that enables paid work to be done.

Renowned academic Professor Emeritus Dame Marilyn Waring, considered the founder of feminist economics, argues that GDP is a dated and inadequate output measure. GDP fails to recognise how unpaid work supports paid employment; but remains a key metric for decision-making. It is a leading reference point for policymakers, legislators, and the media.

Time use surveys offer a different perspective. Time use surveys allow governments to quantify how people spend their time, using data to better inform resource allocation.

Unpaid tasks at home allow and empower economically productive work – not only for other people, such as a spouse, but for entire segments of the broader labour market.

The glaring gender divide in unpaid work also impacts workforce participation, career progression, and retirement savings. We will never fully understand the labour market until we are accounting for the indispensable unpaid work underpinning it.

Aging populations, escalating living costs, and a dwindling caregiving workforce are international challenges Australia is also grappling with. We cannot shape effective policy, guide resource allocation and bridge gender disparities, unless we know more about those challenges than traditional GDP metrics are telling us.

Fortunately, Australia's Federal Government has said the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) will produce regular time use surveys from 2024.¹ While specifics are still emerging, this renewed focus on time use surveying paves the way for informed and inclusive policy.

To truly balance the scales, unpaid labour must gain the emphasis it deserves. Otherwise, activities like milking a cow will perpetually eclipse critical tasks such as breastfeeding in economic, societal, and political hierarchies.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Thistleton'.

Rebecca Thistleton
Executive Director,
The McKell Institute Victoria

Summary

This paper discusses why unpaid work needs to be quantified, how and why unpaid work is under-valued, and the need for unpaid work to be properly recognised as essential for supporting paid work and reducing the burden on governments.

We consider the need for effective time use surveys to gather this information for governments. Time use surveys are data collection instruments that capture and analyse how people allocate their time. These surveys provide insight into daily routines, work habits, leisure activities and caregiving responsibilities, providing a comprehensive view of people's economic and non-economic contributions to society.

The data is a useful tool for policy development, including health and wellbeing, infrastructure and urban planning, education and social services, consumer behaviour and changing work patterns.

This paper underscores the imperative for the Federal Government's reintroduction of regular time use survey to comprehensively account for unpaid work.

It acknowledges the complexities of recording and measuring unpaid work, secondary activities, and the mental load or 'worry work' that provides the scaffolding to running a home and supporting work considered economically productive.

To highlight the importance of this data, we have used survey responses from Australian workers to highlight how the unpaid care work they provide affects paid employment.

This information was collected by HESTA, the industry superannuation fund for people working primarily in health and community services.

This paper offers a glimpse into the importance of recording unpaid work hours and emphasises the need for an exhaustive engagement strategy to ensure surveys are user friendly, thereby giving time-poor people grappling with daily demands the ability to participate. This paper also provides international examples of how time use surveys have measured unpaid work and achieved valuable policy outcomes.

This work is not an argument to enable all people into paid work, but an argument to measure the economic contribution of unpaid work and how it *enables* paid work. With this full economic picture, we are better able to direct public policy and investment that will improve all lives.

A note on gender

Central to this paper is the gender-centric nature of unpaid domestic work. This paper does not differentiate between cisgender, transgender, or non-binary individuals. We assume people responding to time use surveys would do so according to their self-identified gender. Sex assigned at birth, where it may differ, holds no bearing. As a progressive organisation, The McKell Institute firmly acknowledges trans women as women and trans men as men. However, we advocate that government data collection must transcend the conventional gender binary for a more inclusive representation.



Australia's unpaid workers

Paid and unpaid work: the choice carers face

This paper delves into the dynamics of workers who are also doing unpaid work. While unpaid work goes well beyond caregiving, unpaid care work is a focus given workers are faced with difficult decisions about how to meet their caring and earning responsibilities.

This paper includes results of a HESTA members survey that shows many would spend their time doing more paid hours if they were able. While we do not aim to dissect the reasons behind choices, the data illuminates how certain external factors often leave workers feeling they have limited options.

Our objective is to enhance the recognition and value of all unpaid work, including caregiving.

Unpaid workloads and gender

One crucial aspect of unpaid work that time use surveys shows is its gendered nature.

A baby adds 44 hours a week to a woman's unpaid workload.² As Professor Waring notes, when assigned a market value, unpaid childcare becomes Australia's largest industry, at about 20 per cent of the Australian economy, followed by all other unpaid work at almost eight per cent.

Together, these industries are four times the value of the financial and insurance industries.

Single parents, predominately women (over 80 per cent in Australia), can face significant challenges and hardship when balancing the need to provide essential care for children with paid employment without the support of a partner.³

In June 2022, the labour force participation rate of single mothers with a child under five years was seventeen percentage points lower than partnered mothers and forty percentage points lower than all fathers, according to Treasury analysis of ABS Labour Force Status of Families.⁴

How unpaid work impacts women's earnings and superannuation

Australian women retire with an average of \$67,000 less than men,⁵ according to Industry Super Funds. That is about a 30 per cent difference. Multiple generations of women are lagging in retirement savings, and if not addressed, the gender superannuation gap could persist until 2061 and beyond.

There are many complex drivers to this alarming difference in earnings. One reason is the country's persistent gender pay gap which has ranged between 13 per cent and 19 per cent for the past 20 years.⁶

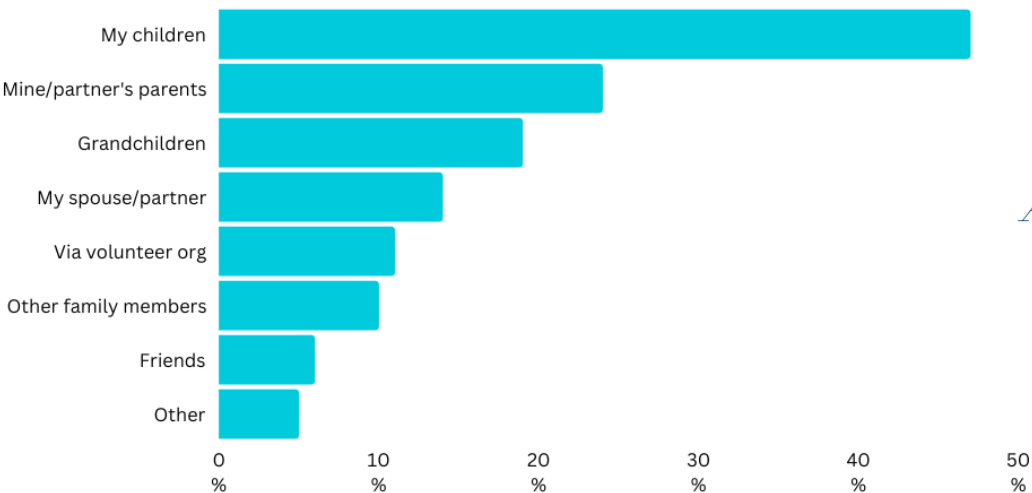
Another is career interruptions when women care for family members, are major contributing factors.

For example, if a woman has a child when she is aged twenty-nine and takes five years away from paid labour until she is thirty-four, her overall retirement savings will be about \$100,000.

Excluding the economic contribution of women who undertake unpaid care work that often enables the paid work of others diminishes its value and does not reflect the true economic position of the country.

Unpaid carers: A snapshot

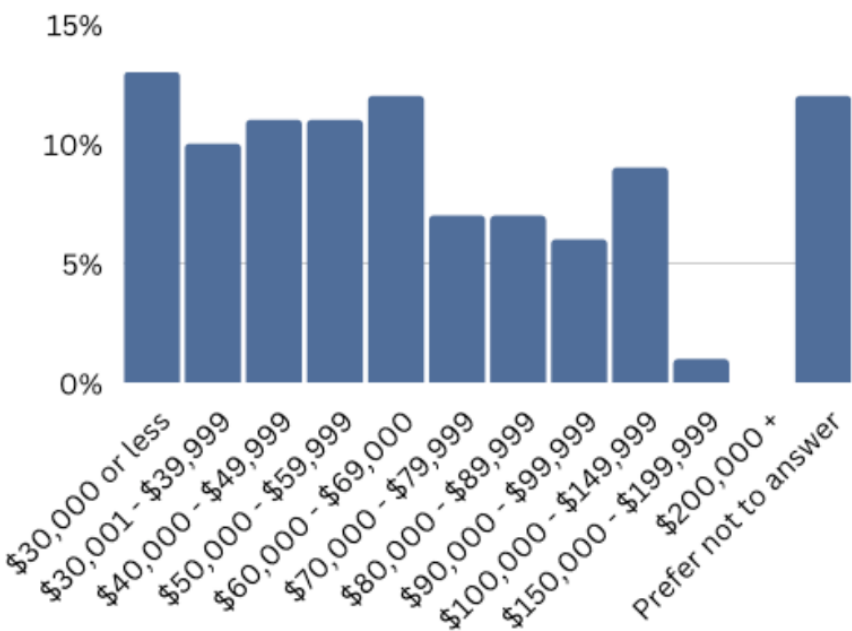
Who do you provide unpaid care for?



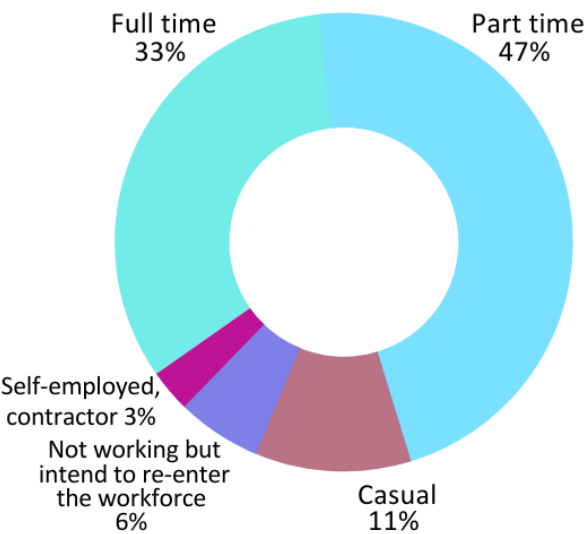
28

*AVERAGE HOURS PER
WEEK PROVIDING
UNPAID CARE*

Annual personal income before tax



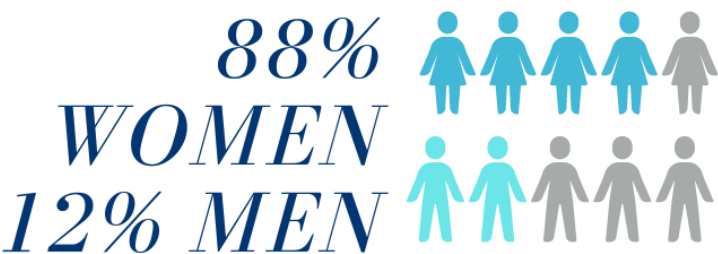
Employment status



About this survey

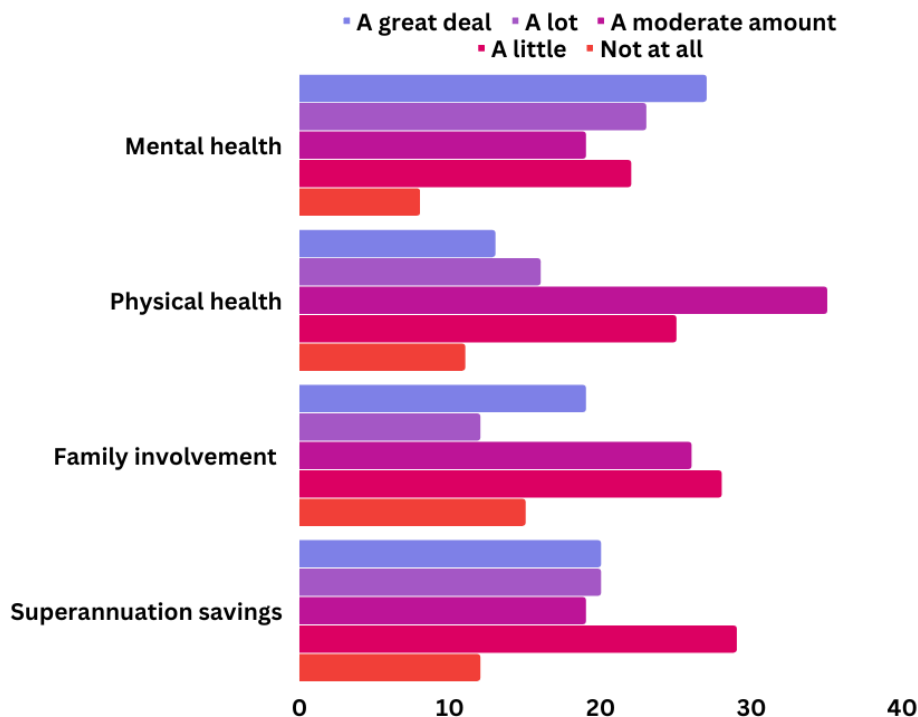
Insights surveys conducted amongst HESTA members who are not retired with an open Accumulation account. Research conducted between November 2022 and September 2023. Results weighted to be representative of the HESTA member base, n=91-1,569.

Gender split

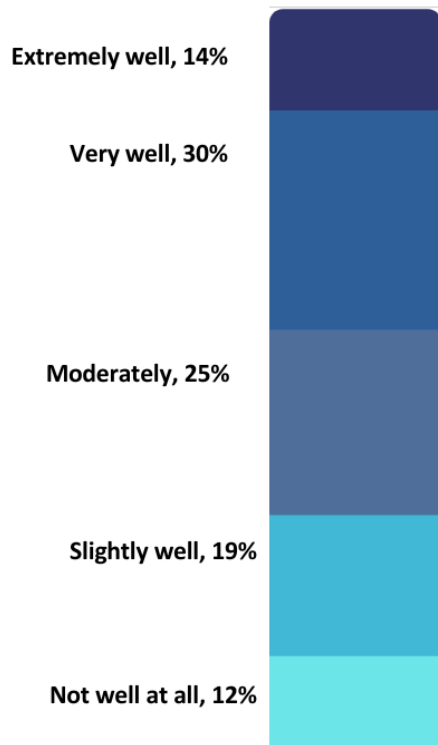


HESTA, the superannuation fund for health and community services, surveyed members to gain insights into the unpaid care they provide outside their paid roles, showing how such unpaid responsibilities affect workers.

How much has providing unpaid care impacted the following aspects of your life:



How well did your employer accommodate your unpaid care responsibilities?



If circumstances allowed, how many extra days would you ideally spend in your paid role each week?



TWO-THIRDS OF HESTA MEMBERS UNDER-50 WHO DON'T WORK FULL-TIME BECAUSE OF THEIR CARE RESPONSIBILITIES WOULD WORK MORE IF THEY DID NOT HAVE THOSE OBLIGATIONS.

Adding value: how time use surveys can capture unpaid work

Historical Context

The initial concept of recording time use data formed in the late 1920s and 1930s, when small-scale occupation-based surveys collected data.

With increased interest in social and economic activity in the 1960s, time use surveys were done on larger scales. Countries including the Soviet Union, the United States, and Europe started gathering comprehensive data about how people spent their time.

In the 1970s, a surge in feminist research began to highlight the invisibility of women's unpaid labour in official statistics. Time use surveys became an important tool to quantify and draw attention to household work, childcare, and other unpaid activities predominantly done by women.

Over the years, time use data has influenced policymaking, especially in areas related to labour, health, and gender equity. Insights from these surveys helped shape policies concerning work-life balance, leisure, healthcare, and more.

In a similar vein, by understanding how people allocate their time to paid and unpaid work, governments can better comprehend the dynamics of the labour market, including trends in part-time employment, underemployment, and the gig economy.

Data can offer insights into lifestyle factors affecting public health, such as physical activity levels, sleep patterns, and leisure activities. It can also show how and when people use public transport, roads, and other public services, which guides urban planning and infrastructure investment.

There have been increasing efforts to harmonise time use research globally.⁸ Organisations such as the International Association for Time Use Research (IATUR) facilitate collaboration and exchange among researchers worldwide.

Political context

Australian time use surveys were conducted in 1992, 1997, and 2006, and a survey in 2021 that was significantly influenced by the COVID pandemic.

The Federal Government has directed the ABS to carry out regular time use surveys from 2024. Upon making the announcement, Assistant Minister for Employment, Dr. Andrew Leigh, highlighted Australia's pioneering role in time use surveys.⁷

He said the ABS would use modern digital methods so results are available faster than in years past, and said that data would be instrumental for policy formulation across multiple sectors including gender equity, health, social services, transportation, infrastructure, employment, tourism, and the arts. The insights will be invaluable for academia, non-governmental organisations, and the business community.

GDP fails to include unpaid work

Professor Waring has produced a body of work detailing the shortfalls of using GDP as a benchmark and decision-making metric. Her influential book, *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics* challenges the traditional framework of economic measurement and highlights the gender biases embedded in GDP calculations.

Professor Waring's central argument revolves around the idea that GDP fails to accurately capture and value the unpaid work done predominantly by women, such as caregiving, housework, and community services. She criticises the narrow focus of GDP on market-based activities and argues that it excludes crucial aspects of the economy that are essential for societal well-being.

According to Professor Waring, excluding unpaid work from GDP calculations leads to an undervaluation of women's contributions to the economy and perpetuates gender inequality. By assigning zero economic value to activities performed outside the formal market, GDP reinforces the notion that women's work and unpaid care work is less important or non-existent, reinforcing stereotypes and marginalising women's labour. Invaluable contributions of unpaid volunteer and community work — which bolster biodiversity, community health, and social cohesion — also remain overlooked.

The WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All, of which Professor Waring is a member, notes the GDP model used today was originally conceived to assess how best to pay for the war.⁹ The focus on boosting GDP means factoring in spending that is detrimental for humanity. For example, massive military expenditures, which amounted to US\$2 trillion in 2020, boost GDP figures and are seen as positives. At the same time, two pillars of the global economy — unpaid labour and our natural ecosystems with their biodiversity — remain woefully underfunded and underappreciated.

Health is a key example. The WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All notes that unpaid care work silently picks up the slack in under-resourced health systems globally, covering up for the lack of “official” health care.¹⁰

The McKell Institute agrees that GDP is a limited measure and time use survey data offers a more fulsome and progressive perspective, and, for the reasons explained throughout this paper, can help governments deliver better outcomes through targeted resourcing for people doing unpaid work.

We support and encourage a move away from GDP's use as a decision-making metric and driver of outcomes; but see merit in putting a value on unpaid work to help elevate its recognition. Putting a market value on unpaid work remains a pragmatic option for maximising time use data.

Quantifying unpaid work is a critical to adequately recognising carers

Data can be used to develop and assess policies in areas such as labour, gender equity, social services, health, and education. These are the areas of public spending where people need and expect governments to invest; yet are costly to government and require recurrent funding.

Crucially, data can also be used to estimate the economic value of unpaid work, showing the significant contributions of homemakers, caregivers, and volunteers to the economy. Unpaid labour is the enabling force to paid labour and deserves to be recognised as such.

As Professor Waring notes, time-use data helps expand the understanding of "care work," moving beyond narrow views focused on tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry.

Typically, a female family member handles these demanding roles. When a woman serves as an unpaid caregiver at home, she performs tasks equivalent to what a paid professional would do in a health facility.¹²

Time use data influences policy all over the world

Data2X, a gender data advocacy alliance, has found that eighty-eight countries have collected some form of time use analysis.¹³

Time use surveys are increasingly being used to inform development agendas in developing countries as well. A report from the United Nations Foundation's Data2X initiative titled *Invisible No More? A Methodology and Policy Review of How Time Use Surveys Measure Unpaid Work* examined 18 country case studies across different regions of the world to look at how time use data has shaped policymaking.¹⁴

In Albania and Mexico, time use data has been used for gender equality policies. While in Cambodia and Colombia, time use data were used to define policies regarding children. In Moldova, the 2011–2012 time use survey results influenced employment strategies.¹⁵

Uruguay used information from different time use studies to provide the rationale for a comprehensive National Care Policy (2015) that codifies the function of care under the law and underwrites facilities for childcare and care of the elderly. Mongolia, South Korea, and Tanzania have also made use of these surveys.¹⁶

Finland has led the way: case study

Finland has collected time use data every 10 years since 1979 and used the data to inform its social policies:

- Finland's comprehensive package of family policies started with fathers being given the option of taking paternity leave in 1978 – subject to the mother's approval. Since then, family support has grown to include subsidised childcare, flexible work arrangements, a national child home care allowance system, and extensions to secondary parent leave in 2007 and 2013.
- In 1990, time use surveys found a decline in rural women's' employment since 1979 and their reduced social interaction compared to urban women. This resulted in the Women's Working Group for Rural Development, which promoted entrepreneurship through training and funding.
- Data collected about time spent alone has influenced Finland's mental health policies and built understanding of loneliness.¹⁷ Their discipline-deep data collection gives health agencies access to trend analysis to drive good decision-making based on the effectiveness of interventions.
- Analysis of the 1999-2000 time use data showed a larger unpaid work gap for younger women, and that only 25 per cent of children under three years were in outside care, compared to 50 per cent in Sweden. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health introduced a program to boost workplace retention, including for mothers returning to work from maternity leave. Maternity allowance went from 70 per cent to 90 per cent of pay for the first 56 days, and the parental allowance rose to 75 per cent of salary for the first 30 working days to encourage more second parents to take up leave.¹⁸
- Finland uses time use data to understand gender disparities in unpaid work and form policies to reduce inequalities in women's participation, both economically and socially. This includes supporting parental leave, childcare, domestic services, and boosting rural women's' employment. ¹⁹
- In 2001, Finland introduced a tax deduction for domestic chores such as cleaning and childcare to reduce unpaid work. A study using 2009-10 data revealed this increased women's employment and created a new services market.
- The National Consumer Research Centre, in collaboration with Statistics Finland, utilised time use data to determine the monetary value of unpaid household work, named the household satellite accounts. Finland has compiled these accounts for several years. Estimates from the NCRC suggest that including all household production would raise Finland's GDP by 40 per cent.

Unpaid work that must be counted

The activities listed below are a summary of unpaid tasks this paper is broadly referring to. This is provided for context and to show the varied and invaluable nature of the tasks, rather than attempting to capture the full spectrum of unpaid work.



Childcare

Feeding, bathing, supervision, helping with homework, play and activities, managing medical needs and appointments.

Elderly care

Assisting with mobility, medication management, companionship, bathing and dressing, helping with daily tasks.



Household upkeep and maintenance

Cleaning, cooking, laundry, home repairs, gardening and lawn care.

Education and skill-building

For family or community members without formal payment, such as tutoring, skill sharing sessions and tech assistance, teaching someone how to drive, passing on cultural practices, translating help for relatives, neighbours or friends.



Food and cooking

Planning meals, food shopping, packing lunches, preparing and cooking meals, managing dietary requirements, growing food at home.

Transport

Driving family members or community members to appointments, school, or events.



Volunteering

Community service, event organisation and participation, fundraising, helping at schools or community centres.

Emotional labour

Providing emotional support, conflict resolution within the family or community, maintaining social connections and relationships.



Financial management and administration

Managing household budgets, bills, utility accounts, planning for future family needs.

Cultural work

Cultural preservation activities, rituals, ceremonies, and traditional practices, indigenous land protection and stewardship



Healthcare

Providing at-home medical care for family members or friends, such as giving injections or changing dressings, administering medication, helping with physical therapy or rehabilitation exercise.

The case for capturing unpaid work

In a pivotal report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, there is a recommendation to broaden income measures to non-market activities: "...for many of the services people received from other family members in the past are now purchased on the market.

This shift translates into a rise in income as measured in the national accounts and may give a false impression of a change in living standards, while it merely reflects a shift from non-market to market provision of services.

Many services that households produce for themselves are not recognized in official income and production measures, yet they constitute an important aspect of economic activity.”¹

When it comes to monitoring unpaid household activities, the most important source of information is time use surveys.

The OECD breaks activity into five main categories for time use surveying:

1. paid work or study, (work related activities);
2. unpaid work (household activities);
3. personal care;
4. leisure; and
5. other activities not included elsewhere.

It is interesting to note the OECD breakdown marks travel time as an associated or secondary activity. As a consequence, travel to work is added to work-related activities and travel to buy food or to look after children is counted towards unpaid work or household activities.

Counting secondary activities is difficult

Secondary activities are those which do not require full attention and can be done concurrently with a primary activity. Including secondary activities in time use surveys provides a more complete picture of time.

The United Nations Statistics Division's

Guide to Producing Statistics on Time Use: Measuring Paid and Unpaid Work notes the complexity involved with defining tasks, timeframes, and secondary activities which may be happening at the same time.²¹ 'Worry work' often falls to this category, the mental load women tend to carry in households. It is the daily thinking, planning and forethought that can be hard to quantify. However, if all the organising, management, logistics and administration was to suddenly stop, its absence would be quickly felt within the household. The nature of many at-home secondary activities is that they form the unpaid work which largely facilitates the paid work (often completed by a spouse) which is considered to have direct economic benefit.

The difficulties of properly calculating all unpaid domestic work has been well documented. Many secondary tasks are also intangible, such as emotional support, supervision, or simply being 'on call'.²² Time-use survey respondents have been found to under-report activities that are considered "less desirable" and overreport "more desirable" activities – in other words, under-reporting unpaid activities and over-reporting paid work. Errors vary across socioeconomic groups, with a larger gap between men and women.²³

Secondary activities

Secondary activities are those which don't require someone's full attention and can be done concurrently with a primary activity. Including secondary activities in time use surveys provides a more complete picture of how people allocate their time and multitask throughout the day, and recognise how time-poor people with multiple responsibilities get things done.



Childcare

A parent might have children under their supervision while also cooking, cleaning or working from home. Recognising childcare as a secondary activity is important for capturing complete data about unpaid childcare, and to reflect the constant nature of childcare requirements.

Meal preparation

Someone might be boiling water and chopping vegetables while also engaged with children.



Watching television, listening to music or radio

While cleaning, cooking, or working, people often have music or the radio playing in the background. An important consideration as time use surveys can count this time as leisure, rather than unpaid work.

Monitoring

Keeping an eye on something, such as checking an oven or watching for a delivery, while doing something else. This is an example of the domestic 'worry work' that is hard to quantify, but an important part of supporting a household.



Mental planning

Planning meals, food shopping, packing lunches, preparing and cooking meals, managing dietary requirements, growing food at home.

Phone use

Scrolling, checking social media, reading news while doing another primary task.



Eating or drinking

Snacking or sip on a beverage while reading, working, or doing another activity.

Conversation

Chatting with a family member while both are engaged in separate primary activities, like one person cooking and the other setting the table.



Survey reviews have also found that while most have been designed to effectively capture primary activities, the design and wording can make it hard to report secondary activities. Given unpaid caregiving in the home often involves multitasking, for example when a caregiver is cooking while keeping an eye on a child or a frail family member, one activity may go underreported.

Time use surveys often rely on respondents' memory, and routine secondary activities, can be easily forgotten or overlooked and the duration difficult to recall.

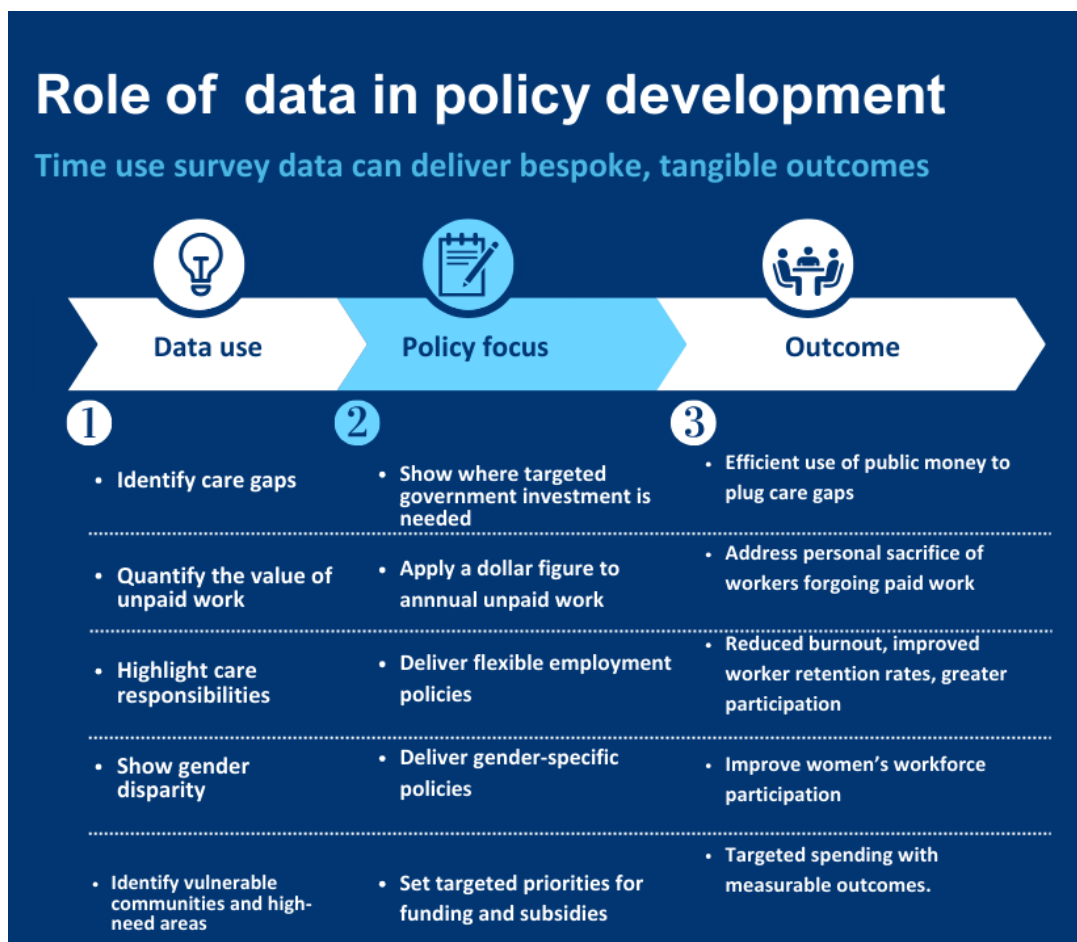
These challenges underscore the importance of careful survey design, done specifically to make sure unpaid work is properly captured. Clear definitions and respondent training ahead of the survey can improve the measurement of secondary caregiving activities.

Comprehensive time use data can galvanise policy frameworks

Australian surveys have been regarded internationally as world-leading, but until 2024 have not been conducted at regular intervals such as the Australian Census of Population and Housing, which is conducted every five years.

The government's announcement that regular surveys would start from 2024 provides an opportunity for the country's surveys to again be world leading.

As shown in this paper, the highest and best use of this data is to provide an accurate picture of value of unpaid care as an enabler of economic activity. Other insights into the way people spend their time, such as in recreation activities, is interesting and provides insight into living standards, but does not add to our understanding of the true cost of progress.



Improving how governments at all levels treat unpaid work

Time use data on unpaid work is critical for governments to have a clear picture of the otherwise invisible labour sustaining communities.

Making sure every dollar of public money is well-allocated can be underpinned by time use data, so that spending is not based on assumptions or generalisations. A targeted, data-driven approach, money is invested where it will make the most difference.

Since 2012, Australian legislation mandates that all Bills have a Statement of Compatibility with Human Rights, ensuring they align with international treaties Australia has ratified.²⁵

This includes the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979. This Convention categorically defines discrimination and underscores the importance of equality, compelling member states to champion women's rights and guarantee their equitable enjoyment with men.

To meet the requirements to fully consider compatibility with Human Rights, specifically as set out in the Convention, Ministers presenting a new Bill and the Parliament should consider data available to them that shows how unpaid work will or will not be impacted by the Bill.

Enhanced data can boost Australia's wellbeing framework

Measuring What Matters, Australia's first wellbeing framework, was released by the Federal Government in July 2023.

The framework is based on 50 indicators sitting within five core themes: healthy, secure, sustainable, cohesive, and prosperous. It was designed to complement GDP and wage metrics to give focus to social objectives.²⁶

This first edition of the framework cites how ABS time use survey data will be used to inform one single indicator - showing how much time people tend to spend on recreation and social interaction.

This is a missed opportunity, and we encourage policymakers to reconsider this initial focus. The framework does note that indicators will be strengthened in future through additional data the ABS will be able to provide via extra resources, and states that overall wellbeing indicators could benefit from better coverage of cohorts, such as unpaid carers.

The framework highlights the importance of "inclusion, equity and fairness" to outcomes across all five themes. Should the first indicator measure activities that assume time for recreation and social interaction – activities often afforded by those with leisure time – it will miss the opportunity to recognise and measure the economic and wellbeing contribution unpaid care work provides.

Time use data can play a crucial role in shaping the government's subsequent wellbeing frameworks by making sure unpaid work is a core contributor.

Here is how time use surveys can provide more detailed insights into the framework's five themes:

Healthy indicators

- Time dedicated to unpaid work can place mental and physical health strains on individuals, especially caregivers. Extended hours of unpaid work might correlate with increased stress or physical ailments.
- If a significant proportion of the population relies on unpaid care, their health outcomes might be closely tied to the efficacy and availability of this care. Data can also give more detail about equitable access to quality health and care services and support services.

Prosperity indicators

- People who do extended hours of unpaid work can face economic strain due to lost income. Time use data can also show the need for flexible work policies, enabling carers to balance paid employment with caregiving responsibilities.
- As the HESTA member survey findings showed, many people who provide unpaid care do so at the expense of their own potential for employment.

Sustainable indicators

- Time use data can deliver transport insights, highlighting the amount of time people are spending on the road taking family members to appointments, sports, other commitments, and show the distances people have to travel to access services.

Cohesive indicators

- Chronic engagement in unpaid work can lead to feelings of isolation, burnout, or stress. Governments can develop mental health and support initiatives for caregivers based on these insights.
- Certain demographic groups are disproportionately represented in unpaid work; the data may highlight other social imbalances that need addressing. Data can provide insights into cultural norms and expectations related to unpaid work, helping governments understand diverse cultural practices and promote understanding.
- Understanding unpaid caregiving, especially towards the elderly or children, provide information about intergenerational relationships, which are crucial for cohesion.

Secure indicators

- Unpaid work data can help to quantify the economic sacrifices many people make, which may lead to financial insecurity. Data can guide social safety nets, tax incentives, or support programs for those engaged heavily in unpaid work.
- People heavily engaged in unpaid care work can have fragmented formal employment histories, jeopardising their future opportunities. Time use data can inform policies to provide job security or flexibility for these people.

Data can bolster the Women's budget statement

Time use data can be instrumental in defining the Women's Budget Statement, particularly to support unpaid carers, who are disproportionately women.

The *Federal Budget 2023-24 Women's Budget Statement* notes women are more commonly employed on as casuals than men and are more likely to be underemployed. It shows most women unable to start a job or take on more hours are caring for children or adults.²⁷

More detail about this unpaid work is needed to inform future budget decisions, and should be underpinned by time use data to deliver lasting policy outcomes:

Highlight economic contribution: Time use data can assist the government in reinforcing how women's unpaid time is contributing to the economic prosperity of the country. By assigning a monetary value to these hours, the importance of women's unpaid contributions to society and the economy becomes clearer, justifying budgetary and policy support.

Improve policy outcomes for First Nations women: As stated in the *Budget 2023-24 Women's Budget Statement*, Indigenous women have persistently lower workforce participation than other women in Australia. Ongoing experiences of intergenerational trauma, racism and workplace discrimination continue to impact.

Indigenous women are also more likely to be providing unpaid care to multiple people, further impacting their workforce participation. These challenges intensify for First Nations women (and men) in rural and remote areas.

Tailored support services: Services such as respite care and counselling for unpaid carers can be financed effectively and efficiently with detailed time use data, delivering better outcomes for women who are giving unpaid care and those they are looking after.

Financial assistance: Given the economic value of women's unpaid care, time-use data can provide a basis for subsidies, tax breaks, or direct financial support for women who are providing unpaid care. This will ultimately reduce pressure on the public system and the impact on women's retirement savings.

Healthcare Initiatives: Recognising the time and emotional stress linked to unpaid care can form the basis of decisions regarding funds allocated for women's physical and mental health services. This could be the difference between unpaid carers remaining healthy and able to provide long-term care or suffering from a lack of support to the point where they themselves, as well as the person they are caring for, are a cost to the public healthcare system in the long-term.

Childcare and eldercare services: Government spending on care subsidies and care locations should be informed by time use survey findings so that public money is used precisely and deliberately. Stronger evidence regarding the links between investment in childcare and eldercare services, rates of unpaid work and women's overall workforce participation is attainable through detailed time use data.

Recommendations

1. The Federal Government should recognise unpaid work's economic contribution to Australia.

The Federal Government should recognise the contribution of unpaid care work to the economy by assigning it a monetary value. As in Finland, a set of satellite accounts need to be developed in addition to standard economic measures like GDP, to show the value to the economy of unpaid work.

The next step is to explore superannuation supplements or tax deductions for unpaid caregivers to acknowledge their economic contribution and make sure their own retirement savings are not unfairly sacrificed.

2. The Federal Government should ensure time use survey data is part of assessing Human Right Compatibility for new Bills.

Data collected for unpaid care through time use surveys should be requisite to the Human Rights Compatibility Statement to assess compatibility of legislation against the ratified Convention regarding the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

3. The Federal Government should provide mental and physical health support for unpaid carers.

We call on the government to examine opportunities to provide targeted mental health services and wellness programs for caregivers and investigate options for free or subsidised health assessments for unpaid carers. As the HESTA member survey data showed, people providing unpaid care experience negative effects on their mental and physical health, their time with families, and often have reduced paid work hours.

4. The Australian Bureau of Statistics must prioritise unpaid work in time use surveys.

Providing detailed data that captures unpaid work should be highlighted as a key deliverable for the

2024 and future time use surveys, with an emphasis on the importance of accounting for unpaid caregiving.

Previous time use surveys have focused heavily on recreation and social interaction. The HESTA member survey data shows the nation needs clarity on time spent providing unpaid care.

5. The Australia Bureau of Statistics should design the new time use survey based on consultation with people doing unpaid work to enable maximum participation.

By conducting broad public consultations during the survey design phase, and engaging groups at risk of being overlooked in survey data, the ABS can proactively work to ensure people who are time poor, have heavy work and care responsibilities, and come from remote locations and are from non-English speaking backgrounds are included. It is pivotal that those shaping the survey collaborate closely with the intended respondents, so the resulting surveys are designed to deliver maximum participation.

Conclusion

Unpaid work is the invisible backbone of our society and our economy, largely shouldered by women. Every day, uncounted and unpaid hours are dedicated to nurturing, caring for the sick, elderly, and children.

Without this effort, homes would not function, neither would our workforce. The burden on our care sectors would be impossible for governments to manage.

Yet, this paper shows that unpaid care workers, devoting their professional lives to supporting others, shoulder considerable work responsibilities outside their paid roles - uncounted and unrecognised.

The dual roles of caring at work and home is detrimental to the mental health and long-term financial stability of people working in the care sector, as shown in the survey data supporting this paper.

So long as unpaid work isn't counted, we are sidelining the people who dedicate their time to the wellbeing of others.

This year, the Federal Government released a Women's Budget Statement and Wellbeing Framework outlining their commitment to better outcomes for women and carers. Yet, these cornerstone policy statements failed to account for unpaid work.

Fortunately, the Albanese Government is reintroducing strategic time use surveys to properly ground policy in data. While we agree that up-to-date data is needed after decades of sporadic surveying, international insights show that unpaid work is best captured through comprehensive and nuanced surveying, rather than shorter annual surveys.

While quality time use data is expensive and complex to gather, securing this information is our best chance at capturing the essence and enormity of unpaid work. For the government's new time use survey approach to be beneficial, the data must show the unpaid work Australians do every day.

The real relevance and value of data comes from what is done with it. Time use data must be used to elevate the value of unpaid work, to strengthen the care sector and improve long-term outcomes for women.

Data can paint the picture to prove just how much unpaid labour is holding up society and enabling the paid workforce with a dollar figure attached.

May it also mark the leap to a deep appreciation from all those who benefit.

References

- ¹ Leigh, A. (March 2023). ABS to commence regular time use survey in 2024, media release, <https://ministers.treasury.gov.au/ministers/andrew-leigh-2022/media-releases/abs-commence-regular-time-use-survey-2024>
- ² Waring, M. (2022). The gender pay gap is wider than you thought: Making women's unpaid care work count toward an economy for health. Think Global Health, [The Gender Pay Gap Is Wider Than You Thought | Think Global Health](https://thinkglobalhealth.org/2022/05/10/the-gender-pay-gap-is-wider-than-you-thought/)
- ³ Chalmers & Gallagher. (May 2023). Budget 2023-24, Women's Budget Statement, Commonwealth of Australia, https://budget.gov.au/content/womens-statement/download/womens_budget_statement_2023-24.pdf
- ⁴ Single fathers also tend to report lower participation rates than partnered fathers, although small sample sizes mean data for this group is volatile, according to Treasury analysis.
- ⁵ Industry SuperFunds, Closing the gender superannuation gap, <https://www.industrysuper.com/campaigns/closing-the-gender-superannuation-gap/>
- ⁶ Ibid
- ⁷ Leigh, A. (March 2023) ABS to commence regular time use survey in 2024, media release.
- ⁸ Lachapelle, U. (April 2023). Studying how people spend their time reveals how societies differ and change over time, *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/studying-how-people-spend-their-time-reveals-how-societies-differ-and-change-over-time-180940>
- ⁹ WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All. (August 2022). Time-use data can clarify crucial inputs to health for all, <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/time-use-data-can-clarify-crucial-inputs-to-health-for-all>
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Waring, M. (2022). The gender pay gap is wider than you thought: Making women's unpaid care work count toward an economy for health.
- ¹³ Data2X, Valuing Women's Unpaid Care and Household Work, <https://data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/ValuingWomensUnpaidCareWork.pdf>
- ¹⁴ Buvinic, M. & King, E. (March 2018), Invisible No More? A Methodology and Policy Review of How Time Use Surveys Measure Unpaid work, <https://data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Data2X-Invisible-No-More-Volume-1.pdf>
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Anttila, T., Selander, K. & Oinas, T. Disconnected Lives: Trends in Time Spent Alone in Finland. *Soc Indic Res* 150, 711–730 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-020-02304-z>
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Data2X (November 2019), Using Data to Address the Unpaid Work Burden: A Case Study of Finland, <https://data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Impact-Case-Studies-Finland-6P.pdf>
- ²⁰ Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi, 2009, Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/8131721/8131772/Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi-Commission-report.pdf>
- ²¹ United Nations Statistics Division (2005). Guide to Producing Statistics on Time Use: Measuring Paid and Unpaid Work, accessed online, https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesF/SeriesF_93E.pdf
- ²² Budlender, D. (2010). Time use studies and unpaid care work. Routledge, accessed online *
- ²³ ILO and UNDP (2018). Time-use surveys and statistics in Asia and the Pacific: A review of challenges and future directions, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_630892.pdf
- ²⁴ Ibid
- ²⁵ This requirement is set out in the Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny Act) 2011, <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2016C00195>
- ²⁶ Department of Treasury. (2023, July). Measuring What Matters: Australia's first wellbeing framework. Australian Government, https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-07/measuring-what-matters-statement020230721_0.pdf
- ²⁷ Chalmers, J. & Gallagher, K. (2023, May). Budget 2023-24, Women's Budget Statement, Commonwealth of Australia, https://budget.gov.au/content/womens-statement/download/womens_budget_statement_2023-24.pdf