

## MEDIA RELEASE

2 April 2013

### **Care work is not invisible but is it only noticed when it is missing?**

economic Security4Women is taking part in the national discussion on care work started by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner Ms Elizabeth Broderick.

“Existing policy frameworks around care are quite significantly focused on early childhood care, which is important, but the case that we want to make is that the policy framework needs to recognise the continuum of care including out of school hours care and that women’s caring obligations are expanding at the other end of life” Ms Broderick stated last week at the ACOSS National Conference.

“To contribute to the discussion, four pieces of research into what we call ‘the care economy’ were presented and considered as a whole by an expert audience in a forum we hosted last week” said Ms Jope of economic Security4Women, a National Women’s Alliance.

In Australia while the care economy is almost ignored, it is a significant contributor to productivity. According to research for eS4W it employs 1.8 million paid workers, nearly 20 per cent of all paid employment, equivalent to 8.8 per cent of GDP. However, unpaid care workers contribute 21 billion hours of their time, equivalent to 11 million paid workers or 1.2 times the total Australian workforce, equivalent to 50 per cent of GDP. Huge figures, but the work remains unrecognised and undervalued and importantly for women, it increases their risk of poverty on retirement.

“Unpaid care work is the most significant contributing factor to the gender gap in retirement savings and retirement income in Australia. To prevent poverty in older women, we need to invest in care and to ensure that all workers have the right to request flexible work arrangements to accommodate their care responsibilities” said Ms Jope.

“There are good reasons for public investment in the care economy but the stand out one is a predicted rise in future demand of 325 per cent for paid aged care workers coupled with evidence that this work is not attractive to younger workers; it’s value is not recognised”. said Dr Valerie Adams, of University of South Australia, presenting findings on current research into aged care workers.

“Care work is not widely respected and some people see care work as low skilled work that does not need to be paid well. The problem is that care work does require skills and many workers are not paid well enough to have a decent standard of living. Is this because it has been seen as women’s work; another example of unequal pay?” she asked.

“International experience presented today demonstrates an increased recognition and investment in care actually promotes gender equity. Families who have to make choices about who will reduce work hours in order to care, will consider the costs; with improved equity between pay and work conditions offered to men and women, the decisions may result in a more equal share across genders” said Professor Bettina Cass of the Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW.

The Australian Human Rights Commission has suggested the Productivity Commission could conduct an inquiry into mechanisms for valuing unpaid caring work that include parental leave, carers leave, the superannuation system and care bonus to be applied to the age pension.