

## Submission to the *Senate Select Committee on Work and Care* consultation

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### Background

The Continenence Foundation of Australia welcomes the establishment of the Senate Select Committee on Work and Care and its consultation on the impact that combining work and care responsibilities has on the wellbeing of workers, carers, and those they care for.

For 30 years, the Foundation has represented the interests of Australians affected by, or at risk of, bladder and bowel control problems and act as an advocate for their interests. The Foundation has also worked with a range of professionals across the health, aged care, disability, community and fitness sectors to implement programs, deliver education and provide advice and resources.

Incontinence is a highly personal and stigmatised condition which can often be treated, improved or better managed. Because of the stigma and shame, many people and their carers keep the condition secret, which adds an extra dimension of suffering and leads to social isolation, higher psychological impact and delayed helpseeking.<sup>1</sup>

We believe the role of informal carers in supporting people living with incontinence to enable them to continue living in the community cannot be underestimated, and that recognition of the impact on them, their access to and capacity for employment, finances and wellbeing has been lacking.

We know that caring for people with incontinence has an impact on carers and is often an overlooked aspect of their caring role.

- The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found three in four carers spent 40 hours or more per week caring for someone with incontinence.<sup>2</sup>
- Primary carers who assisted with managing incontinence reported feeling weary and lacking energy or being worried or depressed at significantly higher rates compared with carers who did not usually assist with managing incontinence.<sup>3</sup>
- It is likely these factors impact workforce participation with primary carers aged 15 to 64 who provide support and care to person with incontinence having a lower level of employment than carers who did not (44.3% vs 55.4%). It also translates to lower levels of full-time employment where only 15.2% of people who care for a person with incontinence are in full time employment compared to 26.7% of carers who did not.<sup>2</sup>
- In the Foundation's 2022 National Consumer Survey<sup>4</sup> 49% of people caring for someone with incontinence report that caring for them has a financial impact, with 7% reporting they are struggling financially; 72% report that it severely impacted on their life, and 51% reporting it affects their mental health and wellbeing.

The economic burden of incontinence totalled \$66.7 billion in 2010 and most of the cost of incontinence (74%) is borne personally by individuals, particularly by women. These costs include Productivity losses and were estimated at

- \$34.1 billion for those with incontinence, and

- \$2.7 billion for those who care for people with incontinence.<sup>5</sup>

We would like to also bring to the attention of the Committee the following information which demonstrates the extent of the impact on the quality of life for people who are living with incontinence, and their carers:

- Currently one in four people in our communities are affected by incontinence.
- An estimated 316,500 Australians live with both incontinence and disability.<sup>2</sup>
- The impacts of incontinence are far reaching including physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing for those living with incontinence and their carers, restricting their interactions with family, work and the community.
- 80% of people in the community with urinary incontinence are women.<sup>5</sup>
- In 2010 an estimated 1.17 million community-dwelling Australians aged 65 years and over were living with incontinence.<sup>4</sup>
- 46% of people who experience incontinence are under the age of 50 years.<sup>5</sup>
- 19% of children starting primary school are estimated to have incontinence.<sup>6</sup> Many children with some form of incontinence at this age continue to have incontinence into adolescence and adulthood.<sup>7,8</sup>
- More than 1 in 10 young women experiences urinary incontinence.<sup>9</sup>

We look forward to working with the Australian Government to ensure people with incontinence and their carers are supported to have a good quality of life and meaningful participation in their community.

Yours faithfully



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**Chief Executive Officer**

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