

Media release

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Work/life balance worsens under burden of unpaid overtime

Millions of Australian workers are losing the battle for better work/life balance due to excessive unpaid overtime and feel they have little control over how to change the situation, new research by The Australia Institute reveals.

Released to coincide with today's **national Go Home on Time Day**, *Walking the tightrope: Have Australians achieved work/life balance?* finds that the answer is 'no' for 4.9 million workers.

While 3.4 million workers have seen an improvement in their work/life balance over the past five years, a further 3.3 million saw no change in their circumstances.

Now in its sixth year, Go Home on Time Day is an initiative of The Australia Institute which promotes conversations about the significant physical and mental health consequences of poor work/life balance and the impact this can also have on workplace productivity.

On average full-time workers reported working six hours unpaid overtime each week and part-timers, three hours. This 'donated' contribution adds up to the equivalent of \$109.6 billion worth of unpaid overtime across the workforce.

"Australian policy-makers have failed dismally at finding solutions for what has become an enduring issue for workers. Finding ways to improve work/life balance shouldn't be the sole responsibility of individual workers," Dr Richard Denniss, Executive Director of The Australia Institute, said.

"It is disappointing that over the life of the Go Home on Time Day initiative we have not seen a more remarkable improvement in people's circumstances, especially with regard to unpaid overtime. We might yet be having the same conversation in another six years."

The vast majority (77%) of people believe that employers have more power than employees in negotiating work/life balance, more than one-third of people (35%) believe achieving work/life balance would harm their career, and a significant number (62%) believe that laws are necessary to ensure that everyone can achieve work/life balance.

"For many Australian workers rocking the boat appears to be a genuine concern. If seeking better balance is perceived to be a threat to career prospects people are unlikely to freely raise the issue with their boss," David Baker, Director of Research, said.

Of those who reported an improvement in their work/life balance over the past five years, the key reason given was a change in job (51%) and reduced working hours (42%).

For media enquiries, please contact: Serena Rogers on 0455 777 718

Five tips to help you go home on time

1. Decide what time you're going home before you go to work
2. Identify early any tasks that might prevent you from going home on time and speak to your manager about their expectations
3. Take a lunch break – it can clear the head and boost productivity
4. Schedule activities for after work e.g. meet a friend at the gym, take the kids to the park
5. Make a commitment to go home on time once a week or once a month; it's easier to do something if it is seen as routine.

A copy of *Walking the tightrope: Have Australians achieved work/life balance? is available on request.*

Notes for editors

- The Australia Institute conducted two online surveys of Australian workers for this research paper. In August 2014 982 people were asked about their working hours and in November 2014 985 were asked about work/life balance. Respondents were sourced from a reputable independent online panel provider and earn reward points to participate. Results were post-weighted by age and gender based on the profile of the adult Australian population.

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