

Media release

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Better work/life balance key to creating more jobs Go Home On Time Day – November 24

Giving work/life balance greater priority could create an additional 390,000 jobs, according to new research by The Australia Institute.

A survey conducted for national Go Home On Time Day found that workers would prefer to work an average two and a half hours less each week than they currently are, with only one in five indicating that they are working the hours they want to work.

Go Home On Time Day, which will be held on November 24, is an initiative of The Australia Institute to raise awareness of the extent of overwork in Australia and the important workplace, health and social consequences it has.

Anyone can get a personalised 'leave pass' from the www.gohomeontimeday.org.au website, or register their intention to participate on the GHOTD Facebook page.

Long time, no see: the impact of time poverty on Australian workers reveals that half of all survey respondents wanted to work fewer hours than they had worked in the previous week. For those working overtime, four in five (81 per cent) wanted to work less. Conversely, 60 per cent of part-time workers wanted to work more hours.

The Australia Institute's Deputy Director Josh Fear said there is a clear mismatch between the hours the labour market makes available and the hours that people want to work.

"Addressing the problem of overwork would create opportunities for both the unemployed and the underemployed. Bringing the standard working week down to 30-35 hours would mean that many people would be working the hours that better reflect their preferences," said Mr Fear.

The survey also found that people caring for a disabled family member suffer the effects of time poverty very acutely; carers expressed a desire to work six hours less per week than they currently do. Three in four carers (75 per cent) reported feeling always or often rushed or pressed for time, and most (50 per cent) said that work had prevented them from looking after someone who needed them in the past week.

The Institute's Executive Director Dr Richard Denniss said a variety of changes in the workplace, by individuals and through policy intervention is needed.

"Despite claims that Australia has a flexible labour market, millions of Australians are unhappy with their hours of work. The result is unnecessarily stressful family lives, unproductive work lives and higher than necessary rates of unemployment.

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“Tackling this problem will require change on a range of fronts. Government’s need to follow the European lead and introduce caps on hours. Employers need to reduce their reliance on unpaid overtime and employees need to pay more attention to the number of hours they spend in the workplace and talk to both their colleagues and their managers about their desired hours of work,” said Dr Denniss.

The survey also found:

- One in two (50%) Australians, and 61 per cent of those working overtime, were prevented from spending enough time with family in the week leading up to the survey because of work
- One in two (46%), and 58 per cent of those working overtime, said work had stopped them doing physical exercise
- Work prevented one in three (35%) from eating healthy meals
- One in five (20%) were prevented from walking or cycling to work because of their job commitments.

beyondblue, VicHealth, Finance Sector Union, Public Health Association of Australia, Australian Health Promotion Association, Oxfam and the Media Arts and Entertainment Alliance are also supporting GHOTD.

Notes for editors

- The Australia Institute conducted an online survey of 1, 786 adult Australians in June 2010. Survey respondents were sourced through a reputable independent online pan provider. To ensure a representative sample of the broader Australian population, interlocking quotas were applied by gender, age and state/territory.
- *Long time, no see: the impact of time poverty on Australian workers* can be downloaded at www.tai.org.au or www.gohomeontimeday.org.au
- The estimate of the potential number of jobs created by redistributing work is based on the number of jobs created in France after the introduction of shorter working hours. For more information see page 24 of the paper