



# No choice but to care

## Carers Week report 2024



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In 2024, Carers Week is made possible through Carers UK working together with seven other major charities: Age UK, Carers Trust, The Lewy Body Society, The ME Association, Motor Neurone Disease Association, Oxfam GB and Rethink Mental Illness.

# Executive Summary

Millions of unpaid carers across the UK provide support to a family member, friend or neighbour due to a disability, illness or frailty due to old age. Yet a majority of unpaid carers have no choice but to take on a caring role. While providing unpaid care can be rewarding, it also comes with significant negative impacts on carers' lives.

The low level of social security benefits, inadequate structures to support carers to stay in paid work alongside their caring role as well as a lack of time to take a break or to look after their own wellbeing means that unpaid carers often face lower financial resilience, fewer opportunities to continue with their career as well as a worsening of their physical and mental health.

We need to see significant action from the next UK and devolved governments to help mitigate some of these negative consequences of caring and put in place a comprehensive package of support for unpaid carers, who help to hold society together as well as collectively contributing 162 billion every year through their caring role.<sup>1</sup>

Carers Week commissioned YouGov to carry out polling of the general public, including adults who are currently providing unpaid care.

The YouGov Omnibus polling, of nearly 6,500 people, found that:

- 62% of those who are currently providing or those who have previously provided unpaid care said that they had no choice in taking on the role because no other care options were available – this is around 10 million people.<sup>2</sup>
- The impact of caring has been more negative than positive for all areas unpaid carers were asked about, particularly for employment, finances and savings, and physical and mental health.

## 62%

of those who are currently providing or those who have previously provided unpaid care said that they had no choice in taking on the role



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.carersuk.org/media/2d51e03c/valuing-carers-report.pdf>


<sup>2</sup> All numbers of people in the Executive Summary were estimated by Carers UK using ONS population data and Yougov polling.

- By far the biggest negative impact has been on mental health with 63% of current and former unpaid carers saying that caring had a negative impact on their mental health, with 24% saying it had a 'very negative' impact. An estimated 10.1m current and former unpaid carers in the UK experienced a negative impact on their mental health as a result of caring.<sup>3</sup>
- Current and former unpaid carers also said that caring had a negative impact on their:
  - » Physical health (53%) – around 8.5m people in the UK<sup>4</sup>
  - » Job and ability to work (48%) – around 7.7m people in the UK<sup>5</sup>
  - » Finances and savings (47%) – around 7.6m people in the UK<sup>6</sup>

An estimated


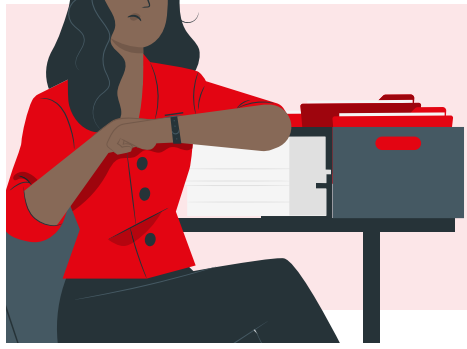
# 10.1 million

current and former unpaid carers say caring had a negative impact on their **mental health**



# 53%

of current and former unpaid carers say that caring had a negative impact on their **physical health**

# 48%

of current and former unpaid carers say that caring had a negative impact on their **job and ability to work**

# 47%

of current and former unpaid carers say that caring had a negative impact on their **finances and savings**



3 All numbers of people in the Executive Summary were estimated by Carers UK using ONS population data and Yougov polling.  
 4 Ibid.  
 5 Ibid.  
 6 Ibid.

- Of those who said they had no choice about taking on a caring role, a greater proportion of current unpaid carers and former unpaid carers experienced negative effects of caring.
- Women fared worse than men due to the impact of caring; they were far more likely to say that caring has had a negative effect on their physical and mental health, employment, pensions and relationships.
- Those aged 45 to 54 were most likely to have no choice when taking on a caring role and were most likely to say that caring has had a significant negative impact on their finances, career and pensions.

Carers Week also commissioned a second YouGov Political Omnibus poll of over 4,200 members of the general public, which found that:

- 73% of the UK adult population said that the next government should provide more support for unpaid carers
- When asked about what the next government should focus on to support unpaid carers, the most popular issues picked by the general public were financial support for unpaid carers (53%) and investment in social care to enable unpaid carers to take a break (53%).<sup>7</sup>



# 73%

of the UK population said that the next Government should **provide more support for unpaid carers**

# 53%

of the general public thought the next Government should **focus on financial support for unpaid carers**



# 53%

of the general public thought the next Government should **focus on investment in social care to enable unpaid carers to take a break**



<sup>7</sup> The question asked people to choose a maximum of 3 out of 6 options.

# Introduction: the impact of caring and what support unpaid carers need from the next UK Government

Unpaid care has a profound and positive impact on people receiving care but also on our society and wider economy – the value of this care is estimated at £162bn every year – equivalent to the cost of the NHS.<sup>8</sup> Yet, too often, without adequate support, caring comes at a significant personal cost to the unpaid carer, drastically affecting their finances, health, ability to work and to live fulfilling lives.

Despite their huge contribution, far too many unpaid carers are not adequately supported in their role to enable them to take a break, attend a medical appointment or take time out to do something for themselves. Since 2011, the number of hours of unpaid care being provided has increased significantly, with 1.5 million people in England and Wales now caring for over 50 hours every week.<sup>9</sup>

With this increased intensity, it is not surprising that more unpaid carers are reporting negative effects on their physical and mental health. The widespread lack of formal support from health and social care services has left many unpaid carers extremely concerned about the future and how they will cope.

Lost earnings and career opportunities have a significant financial impact on unpaid carers as well as on their future savings and pensions, while the lack of accessible and affordable social care services also affects carers' ability to juggle paid work with unpaid care.

Younger unpaid carers are also often struggling to combine caring responsibilities with the demands of their education, which can affect their attainment, ability to progress into higher education or employment, as well as earning potential later in life.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.carersuk.org/reports/valuing-carers-research-report/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/unpaidcareenglandandwales/census2021>

Supporting carers to continue to provide unpaid care and to participate in everyday life through paid work, education and leisure is cost-effective and in everyone's best interest. There is a compelling economic case for providing unpaid carers with the support they need. Ensuring unpaid carers – especially those over 50 – can enter, stay in, or return to paid employment is vital, if they choose it or are able to. Independent analysis suggests that the value to the economy of unpaid carers being able to work is £5.3 billion a year.<sup>10</sup>

Anyone could find themselves taking on an unpaid carer role, which is why it is so important to ensure that good support mechanisms are in place for people when it happens to them, whether that is financial support, support from employers and educational providers or support from health and social care services.

Unpaid carers need recognition and commitment from all political parties and the next Government more than ever. The

profound and encompassing effects that caring can have on people's finances, employment and pensions as well as their physical and mental health means that an ambitious and comprehensive National Carers Strategy is needed in England and Wales to bring together targets and initiatives across different Government Departments to better support carers of all ages. The next UK and the devolved governments should also use their powers to better support unpaid carers financially through the social security system, as well as with better workplace protections, better access to breaks from caring and healthcare support.



<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-press/archive/care-in-crisis-more-than-53-billion-wiped-from-the-economy/>

# Methodology

YouGov carried out two polls to inform the findings of this report

**1. YouGov Omnibus:** All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 6,472 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 4th – 8th April 2024. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

**2. YouGov Political Omnibus:** All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 4,259 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 5th – 9th April 2024. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

YouGov Omnibus polling found that 13% of people said they are currently an unpaid carer, with another 17% saying they were not currently an unpaid carer but had previously been – meaning just under a third (30%) of people had experience of unpaid caring in the UK. Based on UK population data,<sup>11</sup> 7 million people are estimated to be currently providing unpaid care, 9.1m have provided unpaid care in the past and 16.1m are current or former unpaid carers in the UK. All estimates of the number of unpaid carers throughout the report are worked out by Carers UK using these figures as starting points.

YouGov Omnibus polling found that 13% of people said they are currently caring in Scotland. 19% said they were not currently caring but had previously done so – meaning a third (32%) of people had experience of caring. Based on ONS population data, we estimate that over 1.4m people are currently or have previously provided unpaid care in Scotland.

YouGov Omnibus polling found that 13% of people said they are currently an unpaid carer in Wales and 19% said they were not currently an unpaid carer but had previously been – meaning a third (32%) of people had experience of unpaid caring. Based on ONS population data, we estimate that over 804,000 people are currently or have previously provided unpaid care in Wales.

YouGov Omnibus polling found that 14% of people said they are currently an unpaid carer in Northern Ireland. 21% said they were not currently an unpaid carer but had previously been – meaning over a third (35%) of people had experience of unpaid caring. Based on ONS population data, we estimate that there are 516,000 current or former unpaid carers in Northern Ireland.

<sup>11</sup> ONS, Mid-Year Population Estimates, UK, June 2022.



# **Data analysis (UK)**

# Data analysis (UK)

## Why people started caring

Reasons why people become an unpaid carer are complex and can be in response to a number of different situations. However, carers often talk about not having much choice when it comes to taking on their unpaid caring role. YouGov Omnibus found that:

- 29% of current and former unpaid carers said that other care options were available but they chose to undertake care.
- 62% of current and former unpaid carers said they did not have a choice as there were no other care options available. This is equivalent to 10 million people.<sup>12</sup>
- Those aged 45-54 were most likely to say that there was no choice (70%) compared with other age groups.

Feeling there was a lack of options was strongest for the 45-54 age group (70%) compared with all other age groups (52-66%).

People who are currently providing unpaid care were more likely than people who previously provided unpaid care to say that they had to take on the unpaid carer role because no other care options were available (66% compared with 59%). This suggests that the alternative care and support options may have reduced over time, forcing more people to take on a caring role now than they would have done before. The lack of alternative care options available, the poor quality and high cost of social care services could be reasons why people feel they have no choice on taking on a caring role. The shift from hospital to home, smaller families and changing demographics could also be contributing factors.

# 70%

of current and former unpaid carers aged 45–54 said they started caring because they did not have a choice as there were no other care options available.



<sup>12</sup> Carers UK analysis using ONS population data and Yougov polling.

## The balance of positive to negative experiences of caring

YouGov Omnibus polling found that across all categories the impact of caring has been more negative than positive and the negative impact

is particularly pronounced for employment, finances and savings and physical and mental health.

**Table 1: Impacts of caring for current and former unpaid carers**

	Mental health and well-being	Physical Health	Relationships	Finances and savings	Job and ability to work	Pension
Very negative impact	24%	17%	10%	20%	20%	11%
Slightly negative impact	39%	36%	27%	27%	28%	11%
No difference	20%	35%	35%	41%	38%	61%
Slightly positive impact	10%	7%	16%	5%	6%	5%
Very positive impact	6%	5%	11%	5%	4%	4%
Don't know	1%	1%	1%	2%	3%	8%

The negative effects of unpaid caring are more pronounced for those who said they had no choice but to take on a caring role.

**Table 2: The impacts of unpaid caring for those who had a choice about caring and those who did not**

	Unpaid carers and former carers who said they had no choice in taking on a caring role (% who said caring had a negative effect)	Unpaid carers and former carers who had other options available (% who said caring had a negative effect)
Mental health and wellbeing	70%	49%
Physical health	60%	40%
Job and ability to work	56%	38%
Finances and savings	54%	35%
Relationships	43%	25%
Pension	27%	15%

# Kate's story

Carer's story provided by 

Kate has been a carer for ten years, first for her dad and then her mum Nina who has heart failure and vascular dementia. Supporting Nina to live independently in her own bungalow whilst coordinating her care is a huge responsibility for Kate who works hard to ensure her mum feels “safe, cared for, loved and can trust the people looking after her.”

As Nina's care needs developed, Kate found it difficult to find an agency to provide the care required and now uses a team of 5 to 6 private care workers who come in three times a day costing £2,500 a month. The cost of this, taken from savings and pensions is a big financial worry for Kate who says there “*isn't a bottomless pit of money.*”

Although care workers flag health concerns, Kate takes overall responsibility for Nina's care – calling the GP, being there when they visit her mum and at times, taking her to hospital. She does her mum's shopping, collects medications, and arranges activities out – a trip to the day centre or a lunch club – to give her the best quality of life possible.

*“We did have agency care at various points, and it was just awful,” said Kate. “They didn't come at the right times, didn't follow the care plan, and wouldn't provide additional cover where needed. They were always messing up, which I had to sort out.*”

*“When you love someone, you can't just abandon them. Thank goodness I have been able to advocate for my mum, because it feels like nobody really cares. The buck stops with me all the time, which has had an impact on me. A lot of attention goes on the person being cared for (and rightly so) but there have*

**“Thank goodness I have been able to advocate for my mum, because it feels like nobody really cares. The buck stops with me.”**

*been times when I've felt like saying 'hello, I'm drowning'.*”

Kate works for the NHS and feels lucky to have supportive line managers who allow her to take the time off she needs to – often last minute. However, she has had to drop down to 4 days a week to juggle work and care, and feels that her caring responsibilities have impacted career progression.

*“I haven't got the headspace because it takes a huge amount of mental energy keeping on top of everything for mum,” Kate said. “One time my mum was discharged from hospital although I told them she wasn't well. I was left to deal with the situation. I think being a carer is one of the hardest things you can do. The support from the system just isn't there.*”

*“Even if you're able to get support, it costs a fortune and often the quality isn't good. Until care is properly valued, paid and viewed as something of worth, this is the situation we're going to have.”*



## Impact of caring on mental health

By far the biggest negative impact due to unpaid caring is on mental health with 63% – estimated 10.1 million<sup>13</sup> – of current and former unpaid carers saying that it had a ‘slightly’ or ‘very’ negative impact on their mental health with 24% saying it had a ‘very negative’ impact.

Women were significantly more likely than men to say unpaid caring had a ‘very’ negative impact on mental health (27% compared with 19%). Those who are currently providing unpaid care were more likely than those who had previously provided unpaid care to say that caring had a ‘slightly’ or ‘negative’ negative impact on their mental health (65% compared with 61%).

Carers UK’s State of Caring survey 2023 found that over three quarters (79%) of carers feel stressed or anxious, half of carers (49%) feel depressed, and half of carers (50%) feel lonely as a result of their caring role. Over a third of carers (36%) whose mental health was bad or very bad said they had thoughts related to self-harm or suicide.

*“I have become completely isolated as a result of my caring situation and quite frequently do not see anyone but my father for weeks.”*



# 63%

of current and former unpaid carers said that their mental health was negatively affected

*“I don’t like to think about what comes next and how I will deal with this. I can get stressed or anxious when I have to fit all my responsibilities, including my carer role, into each day. I feel I don’t have sufficient time to address things I need to.”*

Many carers are struggling with their mental health. While caring can be rewarding, it can also be stressful and unpredictable, especially if there is no adequate, accessible, good quality and affordable support that carers can access readily when needed. Carers can also feel that they have lost their own identity and have become isolated as a result of caring. Unpaid carers providing high levels of care and carers who are struggling financially are even more likely to have poor mental health, and some are providing care despite being at breaking point. Only a small proportion are seeking help: many feel unable to look after their own wellbeing due to the demands of caring, or are reluctant to seek help due to concerns over long waiting times. It is vital that the health service treats carers’ needs as a priority.

***“I have become completely isolated as a result of my caring situation and quite frequently do not see anyone but my father for weeks.”***

<sup>13</sup> Carers UK analysis using ONS population data and Yougov polling.

# Georgie's story

*Georgie, who lives with depression and anxiety, has been supporting her son through schizophrenia for nearly 35 years. She shares the impact this has had and the difficulties of being a carer.*

“ When Christian became ill, it hit me like a ton of bricks. The first seven years were horrendous. To develop schizophrenia at any age is devastating, but harder if you're only 15. Chris had no experience of work, socialising, driving, relationships. We were either incredibly sad because he was spending his life in bed or absolutely terrified by him hearing voices or seeing things.

On 27.12.97, Christian went into an acute ward. He didn't come home again for five years. After our first visit to Chris on the ward, my husband and I went straight from the hospital to Basildon town centre. Everything felt unreal, we both felt numb. We were exhausted, sleeping until about 2pm, and although neither of us was going to work, it seemed as much as we could do to keep the home tidy. We lived on takeaway meals.

Chris was, still is sometimes, plagued by his thoughts, moods or feelings and this in turn affects, or should I say 'infects', his loved ones. It's almost as if a light goes out and we're left frantically searching for the switch.

Sometimes I get so tired of the responsibility of being a carer, forever thinking: what will happen when we're gone? What about my other son and my daughter-in-law and the burden that it will inevitably put on them?



My mum is 81, my sister is ill, what if something happens to them? Will Chris relapse?

**“Sometimes I get so tired of the responsibility of being a carer, forever thinking: what will happen when we're gone?.”**



**“Carers find comfort in each other, and having someone take the time to talk over the past has helped me to work through things and take stock of my own behaviour, emotions and feelings.”**

Carers need emotional support to help them come to terms with their loss and the enormity of their situations. A doctor suggested that Chris and I attend family therapy, as well as a carers’ group which I attended for three years. Carers find comfort in each other, and having someone take the time to talk over the past has helped me to work through things and take stock of my own behaviour, emotions and feelings.

When someone you love becomes mentally ill, you go through many stages before you reach acceptance. Professionals can play a very important role in this process, by giving the right level of support and perseverance. The service user has to come first, but professionals should also take carers into consideration because we also have to recover.”

## Impact of caring on physical health

Many unpaid carers have their own health conditions and some feel that the demands of caring mean they are unable to prioritise their own health and wellbeing, by taking breaks or doing the things they enjoy. The huge pressures in the NHS, often result in delays in obtaining both primary and secondary healthcare appointments, together with the record levels of demand for social care services, means many unpaid carers are not getting the support they need.

53% of current and former unpaid carers said that caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their physical health – estimated to be 8.5m people<sup>14</sup> – with 17% saying that it has a very negative effect.

Women were more likely than men to say that their physical health has been affected negatively (59% compared to 42%). Those aged 45-54 were most likely to say that caring has had a negative impact on their physical health (60%). However, nearly a quarter (23%) of unpaid carers aged 18-24 also said that caring has had a negative impact on their physical health. This highlights the importance of ensuring there is support available for working-age and young adult carers.

Unpaid carers often have worse physical health than non-carers. The 2023 GP Patient Survey in the UK found that 64% of carers said they had a long-term physical or mental health conditions, disabilities or illnesses, compared to 54% of non-carers.<sup>15</sup>

State of Caring 2023 survey on health also found that just under a third (30%) of unpaid carers waiting for hospital treatment or assessment for themselves had been waiting for over a year. 42% of carers said

# 53%

of current and former unpaid carers said that caring had a negative impact on their physical health



they needed more support from the NHS or healthcare professionals.

*"I feel so physically worn out and old before my time at 49."*

*"I have been putting off referrals from the doctor for treatment, ultrasound scan and blood tests because I don't have time or the energy to deal with [them]."*

*"I have cancer but couldn't have an operation to remove it as I can't care for myself or my wife. I am having radiotherapy and chemo instead. I am worried now this will affect us both."*

Physical health can impact unpaid carers' ability to return to paid employment alongside or after their caring role ends. This is why it is so important to ensure that carers of all ages are better supported to take breaks and be able to look after their own health while providing vital care to someone else.

<sup>14</sup> Carers UK analysis using ONS population data and Yougov polling

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gp-patient.co.uk/>.



# Val's Story

Val Pain, 74, from Littlehampton in West Sussex, is a carer for her husband Chris, 86, who is a retired Met Police officer. Chris has had serious mobility issues since suffering a fall last year which led to a three-month hospital stay. Since then, he has gone from being independent and driving every day to not being able to get around without a walking frame.

For Val, this is even more challenging because she had a stroke four years ago which left her with weakness down her right side, drastically reducing the amount of things she can do too.

She said: *"We feel we've been left in the lurch. It's very hard to be a carer where you really need a carer yourself. Carers are being treated terribly. We're just left within our four walls to get on with it. The extra money we have to spend to get things done around the house that neither of us can physically do is going through the roof."*

Val, a retired bank worker, estimates she and her husband's extra annual costs have grown by thousands of pounds because of their disabilities as they now have to pay for things like cleaners and carers to come in the morning. This has been made worse by the rising cost of living.

She applied for money from the Household Support Fund with help from Carers Support West Sussex as energy costs soared. Val received £300 last December to help pay for heating.

She explained: *"Our bills shot up so much. Because of my stroke I get cold and I can't move very quickly, so heating is very important for us. The money from the Household Support Fund made a big difference for us – every penny does."*

*"These little things add up especially as the cost of everything has increased so much. I can't cook because it's not safe to do one hand so we have to rely on ready meals and they're so expensive now too. We thought with Chris having a police pension that would be enough to see us through but it goes so quickly."*



***"It's very hard to be a carer where you really need a carer yourself. Carers are being treated terribly. We're just left within our four walls to get on with it."***

## Impact of caring on relationships

Caring can come with high personal costs. Many unpaid carers find that their friendships and relationships are impacted, with less time to spend with family and friends. This can lead to loneliness and isolation, with many unpaid carers feeling unsupported and undervalued.

37% of people who are currently providing or have previously provided care said caring had a 'slightly' or 'negative' impact on their relationships – equivalent to 6 million people.<sup>16</sup>

A higher proportion of women said caring had a negative impact on their relationships compared with men (42% compared with 30%). People who are currently caring were more likely than people who had previously provided care to say that caring had a 'slightly' or 'negative' negative impact on their relationships (41% compared with 35%).

The State of Caring 2023<sup>17</sup> survey found that 53% of unpaid carers said that maintaining their relationships with their partner, family or friends would be a challenge – an increase from 48% last year.

*"I have a family, so it has an impact on them when I have to leave my house."*

*"The impact on my mental and physical health from years of intensive caring (so to speak) is already causing damage to my marriage, with no possibility of respite."*

# 37%

of people who are currently providing or have previously provided care said caring had a 'slightly' or 'negative' impact on their relationships



*"I have a family, so it has an impact on them when I have to leave my house."*

<sup>16</sup> Carers UK analysis using ONS population data and Yougov polling.

<sup>17</sup> Carers UK, State of Caring Survey 2023 – The impact of caring on: health, 2023.

# Asha's story

Carer's story provided by



Asha shares her experience being an older carer for her 93 year old mum at 74.

“ A lot of my values come from my parents, such as looking after those who need it most. So I always wanted to make sure I was able to support them in their older age.

My mum used to live in India, and she worked there as a head teacher until she retired. In 1997, she was sadly diagnosed with breast cancer and in the same year my father passed away. It was a difficult time for her, so she started visiting us in England more regularly and I also went back to India when I could. I was still working at the time, I've done many jobs including teaching, like my mum.

Fortunately, she beat cancer, but in 2012 she had a bad fall. At that point my husband and I decided it would be best for my mum to come and live with us in England so I could care for her full time. She's always been independent but over time mobility became a real issue and she was eventually diagnosed with arthritis.

Some of the things we used to do together like cooking are not possible anymore. She requires my assistance a lot more, from getting around the house to showering.

She will often push herself to do things herself but I know she needs my help. I try my best to maintain her dignity and let her tell me how I can best support her.

**“I want her to feel like her voice still matters, that her feelings are valued. I think she's worried about being a burden, but she's not a burden to me.”**



I want her to feel like her voice still matters, that her feelings are valued. I think she's worried about being a burden, but she's not a burden to me. It's a privilege for me to be able to spend time with her. I hope my children will feel the same way about me.

My mum is financially dependent on me and my husband, and we only have our pensions to keep the three of us afloat. I was advised to get attendance allowance so that helps with the extra services my mum needs and the adaptations in our home.

I think Government should support families more, so we can look after each other better. Many of us want to look after our families but I know it's not always possible. I couldn't imagine putting my mum in a care home but I'm getting older, I'm 74 now and one day me and my husband might need extra help looking after my mum. We should be able to access extra help at home, if we need it.

## Impact of caring on finances and savings

Providing unpaid care often limits someone's ability to earn a full income and adds new and inescapable costs. The inadequacy of social security benefits, including carer benefits, also works to compound the effect on unpaid carers, leaving many permanently struggling to make ends meet.

47% of current and former unpaid carers said that caring had a negative impact on their finances and savings – around 7.6m people.<sup>18</sup> Those in less well-off households (C2DE) were more likely to say that unpaid caring had a negative impact on their finances and savings than those in the more well-off households (ABC1) (50% compared with 44%). 49% of current unpaid carers reported a negative effect on their finances and savings compared to 46% of former unpaid carers. People aged 45-54 were more likely to feel caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their finances (56%) compared with all other age groups (26–50%).

We know the devastating impacts that many unpaid carers face when it comes to their savings and finances. Unpaid carers experience an average pay penalty of nearly £5,000 per year, reaching nearly £8,000 per year, after 6 years of providing unpaid care.<sup>19</sup>

Carer's Allowance is also the lowest benefit of its kind, worth just £81.90 per week (2024/25 rates). This combination means that unpaid carers are at a higher risk of poverty.<sup>20</sup> The recent cost of living crisis has had a significant effect on unpaid carers who typically live on a very low income. Over a third (34%) were cutting back on essentials such as food and heating in 2023, compared to 13% in 2021.<sup>21</sup> Worries about money and debt are often linked to a deterioration of carers' mental health and wellbeing.

*"I've lost weight because I can't afford to eat."*

*"I'm 3 months in rent arrears. Though my landlord has been very understanding, I don't know how to catch up with the rent."*

*"I am burning through my life savings to live."<sup>22</sup>*



# 47%

of current and former unpaid carers said that caring had a negative impact on their finances and savings

<sup>18</sup> Carers UK analysis using ONS population data and Yougov polling.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The caring penalty, 2023.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, UK Poverty 2024: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK, 2024.

<sup>21</sup> Carers UK, State of Caring 2023 report on finances, 2023.

<sup>22</sup> Carers UK, State of Caring Survey 2023 – The impact of caring on: finances, 2023



# Martyn's story

Martyn cares full-time for his wife Anna who has motor neurone disease. They have three daughters. Here is his story.

“ I turned 40 in January, so still quite young. My wife Anna was diagnosed with motor neurone disease in May 2023. We've got three daughters and we're evolving as a family with Anna's MND. I'm a full-time carer, I do more than 35 hours a week and I'm up during the night. Everything I do and every decision I make, it's about Anna, her best interests, what she wants, how she wants things to happen. I do everything for Anna because we have our routines. She doesn't need to tell me to do anything. It's like a military operation. Unfortunately, the kids become an element of care and support for Anna. It's not full time, but everyone in the house and across our wider family, has caring responsibilities. They're all carers in some way.

I gave up work in November and Anna is on ill health retirement as a Social Worker in August last year. We're now 70% down on our income. I've just had my latest energy bill, that's gone up by about £250. Anna can't deal with the cold and has the fire on, heated blankets and central heating. But that's the effect of MND.

As a carer, you're not just dealing with the obvious that's in front of you, like your wife and what she needs now her MND is evolving, and the changes that you have to make. You're battling social care, you're battling home adaptations, you're battling benefits. I believe as a carer, if you don't have a voice, you're hindered and the person you're supporting is hindered.

My main concern is that we can't go into another winter with what we're doing now. The impact from where she was when she was diagnosed, to now, is a massive difference. I don't want local authorities and healthcare thinking we've got time. We have a laugh that I can walk through my house backwards, I've got used to it that much by holding on to Anna's hands to move her around the house, but that's not how it should be. They need to invest into MND and make sure they do the right thing for dialogised people, quickly, so they can live their lives. We've been a year now, battling, and I don't want another year. I want to be able to make things a little easier.

My priority is Anna and what she needs. ”

**“As a carer, you're not just dealing with the obvious that's in front of you, like your wife and what she needs now her MND is evolving, and the changes that you have to make. You're battling social care, you're battling home adaptations, you're battling benefits.”**

## Impact of caring on employment

Nearly 2.5m people in employment are providing unpaid care in England and Wales – 9% of the total number of people in employment. The 2022 NHS Staff Survey results show that 1 in 3 NHS staff have unpaid caring responsibilities.<sup>23</sup> Providing unpaid carers with the right support to enter, stay in and return to the labour market therefore has benefits to the carer as well as to the wider economy and society.

YouGov Omnibus polling has found that nearly half of current and former unpaid carers (48%) said that caring had a ‘slightly’ or ‘very’ negative impact on their job and ability to work – an estimated 7.7m people<sup>24</sup> – with one in five people (20%) saying it had a ‘very’ negative impact.

People aged 45-54 were more likely than all other age groups to feel that unpaid caring had a ‘slightly’ or ‘very’ negative impact on their job and ability to work (64% compared to 28-55%). Women were significantly more likely than men to say that unpaid caring had a ‘very’ negative impact on their job and ability to work (22% compared with 16%).

Carers UK State of Caring 2023 has found that nearly half (49%) of unpaid carers who had given up work or reduced their working hours had seen their income reduce by over £1,000 per month. 53% of unpaid carers who are employees said that flexible working helps them balance work and care.

# 49%

of unpaid carers who had given up work or reduced their working hours had seen their income reduce by over £1,000 per month

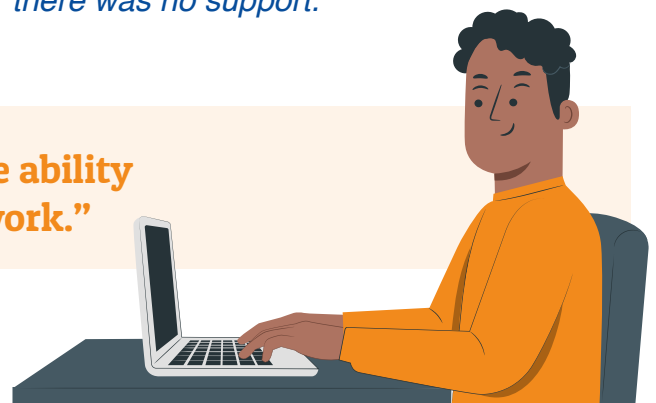


*“If it wasn’t for flexible working and the ability to work at home I wouldn’t be able to work.”*

*“I had a good job in retail management but could no longer juggle 15hr days with my husband’s regressing health...I had a nervous breakdown and attended NHS mental health facilities.”*

*“I loved working, but I was unable to progress my career due to needing part time work. There is still a definite dislike of people who need time off for caring. You are seen as troublesome and difficult and no one wants you in their department despite the fact you work extra hard and give your all when you are there. Whilst my immediate line manager was supportive, beyond that there was no support.”*

**“If it wasn’t for flexible working and the ability to work at home I wouldn’t be able to work.”**



<sup>23</sup> [https://www.carersuk.org/media/hiekwx0p/carers-uk-crd-employment-report-2023\\_final.pdf](https://www.carersuk.org/media/hiekwx0p/carers-uk-crd-employment-report-2023_final.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Carers UK analysis using ONS population data and Yougov polling.

# Kim's story

Kim supports her elderly mother to care for her Dad, who was diagnosed with Lewy body dementia in 2020. She still works full-time and describes the struggle to juggle work with care responsibilities below.

“ I care for my dad who was diagnosed with Lewy body dementia in 2020 at the age of 74, having previously being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Dad has always been very active. He was a semi-professional footballer and a bricklayer, and he and Mum have been married for 55 years. Mum is Dads main carer, but my sister and I visit every week and take it in turns to stay over weekends to help mum, as night times are very difficult. I work full time as a Design Manager, my employer is supportive, but it is a lot to manage.

Someone comes in for two hours once a week to sit with Dad so that Mum can go out and do the weekly shop. These services can be cancelled with less than a day's notice. This causes a lot of disappointment and extra stress.



For advice on Dad's condition and support for Mum on how to cope we have relied heavily on the Admiral Nurse Dementia Helpline, and particularly the Consultant Admiral Nurse for Lewy body dementia who has been fantastic.

We also rely on a local group run by volunteers. This provides an afternoon once a week where Mum and Dad can go for support. I worry that we rely on one club so much and would love there to be more support available. ”

**“We also rely on a local group run by volunteers... I worry that we rely on one club so much and would love there to be more support available.”**

## Impact of caring on pensions

Reducing the number of hours worked or quitting paid work altogether will have an impact on unpaid carers' pensions and savings for their own retirement. A fifth of people (22%) who are currently providing or have previously provided unpaid care said that caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their pension – an estimated 3.5m people.<sup>25</sup> People aged 35-44 and 45-54 were more likely to feel caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their pension (28% and 30% respectively compared to 15-20% in all other age categories).

Women were more likely than men to say that unpaid caring had a 'very' negative impact on their pension (12% compared with 9%).

Many older unpaid carers responding to the State of Caring survey 2023 said that they needed to retire early to manage the demands of their caring role and many were struggling to manage financially because they weren't able to access Carer's Allowance while in receipt of a pension.

*"I had to retire early which obviously affected my pension."*

*"In my NHS role I was unable to adjust my working hours to meet my caring commitments so I retired early."*

*"I feel aggrieved that having worked for most of my life and having paid tax and NI, I am not paid the Carer's Allowance which I am told I am entitled to, because I am getting a pension."*



**"I had to retire early which obviously affected my pension."**

<sup>25</sup> Carers UK analysis using ONS population data and Yougov polling.



# Debbie's story

Carer's story provided by

Debbie shares her story of caring for her daughter Alex, who has ME, as well as her elderly parents.

“ I am a full-time carer for my daughter Alex. She became unwell at 21 and is now 30 years old. Alex has had severe M.E. (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis) for all this time. She couldn't return to work, and she's never got better.

Caring and supporting Alex physically and mentally has definitely had an effect on my own health, with chronic stress being the main concern. I am physically and mentally exhausted to the point of hardly being able to function at times.

The constant worry, the non-stop fight to be believed and to receive help from the NHS, family and friends, trying to keep relationships going, financial concerns, and being incredibly lonely; have all made me feel very disconnected from the outside world.

I have little time for self-care. I do all the physical caring for Alex, which can be demanding, and I have started caring for my elderly parents. I have been coping with the menopause for years in silence and I developed 'lichen planus' a horrible autoimmune disease. I also over-eat for comfort which impacts my health.

**“The long waiting lists on the NHS and lack of healthcare support has meant paying for many different private specialists. We've had to spend every last penny and use our savings to fund it all.”**

Financially it's been tough. I had to give up my cleaning job. We've have had to pay for nearly everything for Alex. The long waiting lists on the NHS and lack of healthcare support has meant paying for many different private specialists. We've had to spend every last penny and use our savings to fund it all.

But I care for Alex and my parents unconditionally. I wouldn't have it any other way. I pray every single day that I can keep going to fight the fight along with Alex for as long as is necessary. And I hope that one day there will be more help and recognition for people with M.E. and for the all the incredible, brave carers that are out there.



## Public support for unpaid carers

Coming up to a UK General Election, the average voter is very sympathetic to unpaid carers receiving more support. YouGov Political Omnibus found that 73% of the UK population said that the next UK Government should provide more support for unpaid carers.

People who are currently, or who have previously, provided unpaid care were more likely to say the next UK Government should provide more support for unpaid carers (83%) than those who had never been an unpaid carer (71%). Women were more likely than men to say that UK Government should provide more support for unpaid carers (78% vs 69%).

**Table 3: Percentage of general public who said that Government should provide more support for unpaid carers by age**

Age	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+
Percentage	68%	73%	75%	75%



## What do unpaid carers need?

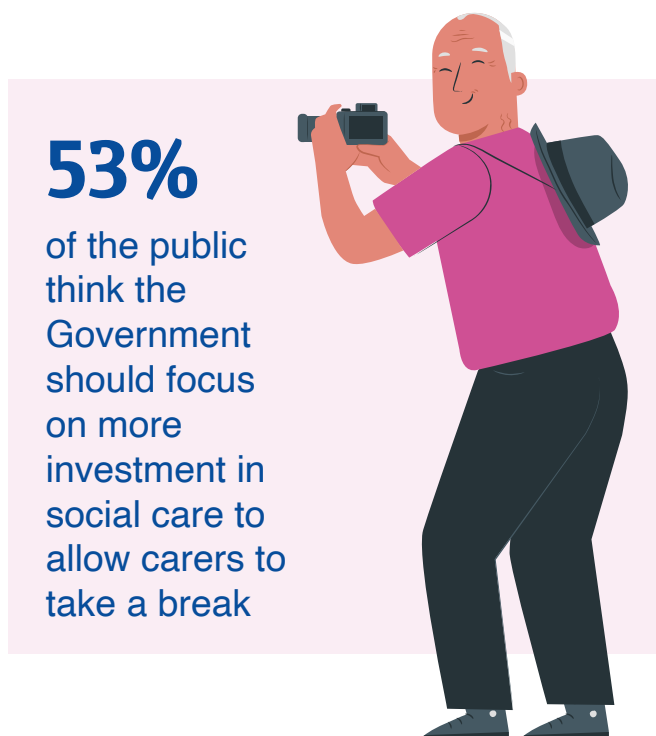
Members of the public were asked which areas they thought the next UK Government should focus on to support unpaid carers. YouGov Political Omnibus found that the two most common areas which people wanted

the next Government to focus on for unpaid carers were more financial support (53%) and more investment in social care to allow carers to take a break (53%).

**Table 4: Areas general public would like the next government to focus on to better support unpaid carers**

Which of the following, if any, do you think the next government should focus on to support unpaid carers? Please select up to three options.	Percentage
Provide more financial support	53
Invest in social care to allow carers to take a break	53
Provide better access to the NHS	34
Help unpaid carers to recognise their role so they can access better support	34
Provide mental health support	31
Support their return to paid work / continuation with paid work	20
Don't know	9
None of these	2

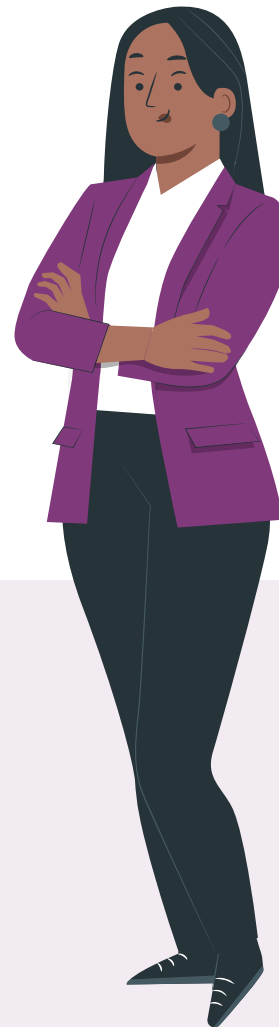
People who are current and former unpaid carers were more likely to say the next Government should provide more financial support (61% and 56%) than people who had never been an unpaid carer (52%). They were also more likely to say the next Government should help unpaid carers recognise their role so they can access better support (44% and 42% vs 32%). They were less likely, though, to say that the next Government should support unpaid carers return to work/continuation with paid work – 16% of people with caring experience (12% of current and 18% of former unpaid carers) said the next Government should do this compared with 22% who had never been unpaid carers.



# Differences by demographic factors

## Gender

Women are more likely to provide unpaid care<sup>26</sup> and to provide more hours of unpaid care than men.<sup>27</sup> YouGov Omnibus found that women were far more likely to say that providing unpaid care has had a negative effect on their health, employment, pension and relationships. Women were significantly more likely than men to say caring had a 'very' negative impact on mental health (27% compared with 19%), on their job and ability to work (22% compared with 16%) and on their pension (12% compared with 9%). A higher proportion of women said caring had a negative impact on their relationships compared with men (42% compared with 30%) and on their physical health compared to men (59% compared with 42%).



**22%**

of female carers said caring had a 'very' negative impact on their job and ability to work, compared to 16% of men

**36%**

of male carers said the next Government should provide better access to the NHS, compared to 32% of women



YouGov Political Omnibus found that women were more likely than men to say the next Government should provide more financial support (57% vs 49%) and invest in social care to allow carers to take a break (56% vs 49%). They were also more likely to say the next Government should help unpaid carers recognise their role so they can access better support (36% vs 32%) and provide mental health support (36% vs 27%).

Men were more likely than women to say the next Government should provide better access to the NHS (36% vs 32%), and support unpaid carers return to work or continue with paid work (22% vs 19%).

<sup>26</sup> Census 2021.

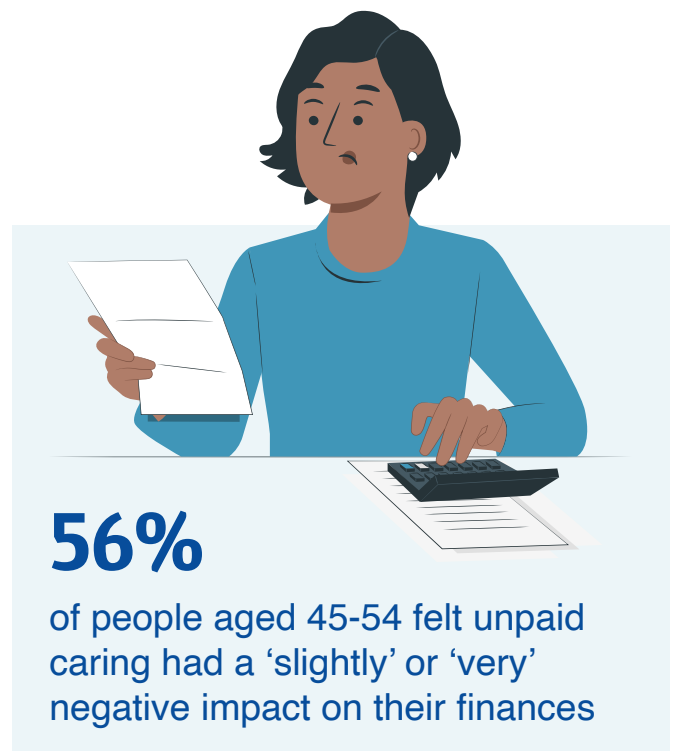
<sup>27</sup> Transitions into and out of caring, Petrillo and Bennett, 2022.

## Age

YouGov Omnibus found that current and former unpaid carers aged 45-54 were more likely to say they had to take on the unpaid carer role because no other care options were available (70%) compared with all other age groups.

The impact of unpaid caring on finances, career and pensions is also strongest for those in their middle years. These findings reflect the impact of lost prospects of career advancement, lost earnings as well as lost pensions contributions for people unpaid caring during their working-age years.

People aged 35-44 and 45-54 were more likely to feel unpaid caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their pension (28% and 30% respectively) compared with those in all other age groups (15-20%). People aged 45-54 were more likely to feel unpaid caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their finances (56%) compared with all other age groups (26-50%).



People aged 45-54 were more likely (64%) than all other age groups to feel that unpaid caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their job and ability to work (28-55%).

YouGov Political Omnibus found that older people were more likely to say the next Government should invest in social care to allow carers to take a break – 58% of people aged 65 and over said the next Government should do this compared with 42% of people aged 18-24. They were also more likely to say the next Government should help unpaid carers recognise their role so they can access better support – 42% of people aged 65 and over said this, compared with 24% of people aged 18-24.



Younger people were more likely to say the next Government should provide better access to the NHS (42%) than people from other age groups (29-37%). They were also more likely to say the next Government should provide more mental health support – 36% of people from the 18-49 group said the next Government should do this compared with 21-31% of people aged 50 and over. Younger people were also more likely to say the next Government should support unpaid carers return to work and continuation with paid work (25% of people aged 18-24 said this compared with 15% of people aged over 65).

Whilst this research only includes those over the age of 18 from the results of the YouGov Omnibus and YouGov Political Omnibus polling, we recognise the importance of not forgetting that there are likely to be more than one million young carers (under the age of 18) across the UK – at least two young carers in every class.<sup>28</sup> There are significant numbers of children providing large levels of care; almost 15,000 young carers across England and Wales are caring for over 50 hours each week, including over 3,000 5 to 9 year olds.<sup>29</sup>



**36%**

of people from the 18–49 group said next Government should provide more mental health support, compared with 21–30% of people aged 50 and over

There are almost

**150,000**

young carers across England and Wales are caring for over 50 hours each week, including over 3,000 aged 5 to 9 years



On average it takes three years for a young carer to be identified for support – with some waiting over 10 years.<sup>30</sup> The potential short and long-term negative effects of caring on children and young people providing care and not being supported is well documented across health, wellbeing, education and paid work. This year has seen the launch of the first Young Carers Covenant – a commitment to ensuring a fair future for young carers. Given the inequalities faced by young carers, and the fact that negative impacts continue into adulthood, we have added recommendations that also seek to mitigate these effects and support the aims of the Young Carers Covenant.

<sup>28</sup> Carers trust analysis using ONS population data and estimate on p.15 of the APPG on Young Carers and Young Adult Carers report: Inquiry into the life opportunities of young carers and young adult carers, Nov 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Census 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Young Carers Alliance/Carers Trust (2022). From-caring-to-support-we-still-need-to-close-the-gap-for-young-carers-PDF-158kB.pdf (caringtogether.org)



## Socioeconomic status

YouGov Omnibus found that there were no statistically significant differences in the lack of choice when taking on an unpaid caring role between higher and lower socioeconomic groups. 64% of those in the lower income (C2DE) socioeconomic group had to take on unpaid caring role as no options available compared to 61% in ABC1. This suggests that caring can really happen to anyone and is a key rationale for a strong and ambitious National Carers Strategy to support people from all walks of life if and when they take on a caring role.

However, people in the lower socioeconomic groups were more likely to say that unpaid caring had a negative impact on their finances and savings than those in the higher socioeconomic groups (50% compared with 44%).

# 50%

of people in the lower socioeconomic groups said unpaid caring had a negative impact on their finances and savings, compared to 44% of those in the higher socioeconomic groups

YouGov Political Omnibus found that people from the higher socioeconomic groups were more likely to say Government should invest in social care to allow unpaid carers to take a break (56% vs 48%) and to support unpaid carers return to paid work or to continue with paid work (23% vs 17%).



# Results in the nations: Scotland

## Taking on a caring role

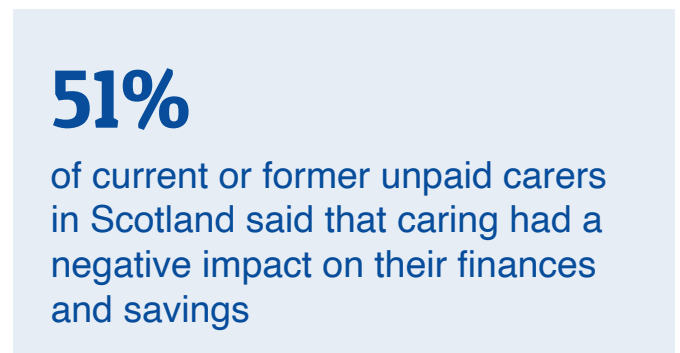
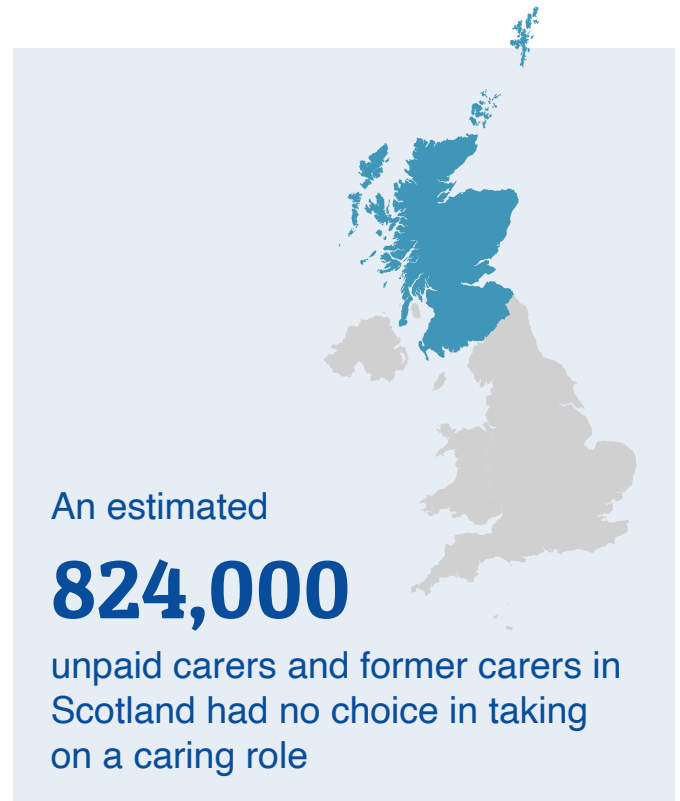
YouGov Omnibus found that 58% of people who are currently providing or have previously provided unpaid care said that they had to take on the unpaid carer role because no other care options were available – an estimated 824,000 people.<sup>31</sup>

People who are currently caring unpaid were more likely than people who were formerly caring unpaid to say they had to take on the unpaid carer role because no other care options were available (64% vs 55%). Women were more likely than men to say they had to take on the unpaid carer role because no other care options were available (60% compared with 56%).

## Impact of caring on finances, pensions and employment

Over half (51%) of people who are currently providing or have previously provided unpaid care said that caring had a negative impact on their finances and savings. 48% of people who are currently providing or have previously provided unpaid care said that caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their job and ability to work, with 22% saying it had a 'very' negative impact. An estimated 725,000 carers and former carers in Scotland experienced a negative impact on their finances and savings because of caring and 682,000 experienced a negative impact on their job and ability to work.<sup>32</sup>

People had previously provided unpaid care were more likely to say that caring had a negative impact on their job and ability to work than those currently providing care (49%



compared with 44%). Women were more likely than men to say that unpaid caring had a negative impact on their job and ability to work (52% compared with 43%).

29% of current or former unpaid carers said that caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their pension, with 19% saying it had a 'very' negative impact – significantly higher than in England (10%).

<sup>31</sup> Carers UK analysis using ONS population data and Yougov polling.

<sup>32</sup> Carers UK analysis using ONS population data and Yougov polling.



## Impact of caring on health and relationships

Over half (52%) of people who are currently providing or have previously provided unpaid care said that caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their physical health. 63% said it had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. An estimated 895,000 current and former unpaid carers in Scotland have experienced a negative impact on their mental health as a result of their caring role and 739,000 experienced a negative impact on their physical health.<sup>33</sup>

35% of people who are currently providing or have previously provided unpaid care said caring had a 'slightly' or 'very negative' impact on their relationships.

People who are currently caring were more likely than people who had previously provided unpaid care to say that caring had a 'slightly' or 'negative' negative impact on their mental health (66% compared with 62%) and their relationships (38% compared to 33%). Women were more likely than men to say that caring had a 'slightly' or 'negative' negative impact on their mental health (69% compared with 56%) and relationships (41% compared with 26%).

**63%**

of carers in Scotland said that caring had a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing



## Public support for unpaid carers

YouGov Political Omnibus found 76% of people in Scotland said the next Government should provide more support for unpaid carers. Women were more likely than men to say the next Government should provide more support (80% compared with 72%).<sup>34</sup>

The two most common areas which people thought the next Government should focus on were investment in social care to allow carers to take a break (58%) and more financial support for unpaid carers (57%). A higher proportion of people in Scotland (58%) said the next Government should focus on investment in social care to allow carers to take a break compared to people in England (52%), Wales (55%) and Northern Ireland (52%).

32% of people said the next Government should provide better access to the NHS. 34% of people said the next Government should provide mental health support. 32% of people said the next Government should help unpaid carers recognise their role so they can access better support. 19% of people said the next Government should support people's return to work/continuation with paid work.

Women were more likely than men to say the next Government should provide more financial support (59% vs 56%), support to return to paid employment or continuation with paid work (22% vs 16%), investment in social care to allow carers to take a break (64% vs 53%), and mental health support (38% vs 30%). Men were more likely than women to say the next Government should provide better access to the NHS (34% compared with 30%).

<sup>33</sup> Carers UK analysis using ONS population data and Yougov polling.

<sup>34</sup> Although the YouGov question asked about the next Government we understand that some areas of policy are devolved to the Scottish Government.

# Results in the nations: Wales

## Taking on a caring role

Yougov Omnibus found that 64% – around 514,000<sup>35</sup> – of current and former unpaid carers said that they had to take on the unpaid carer role because no other care options were available.

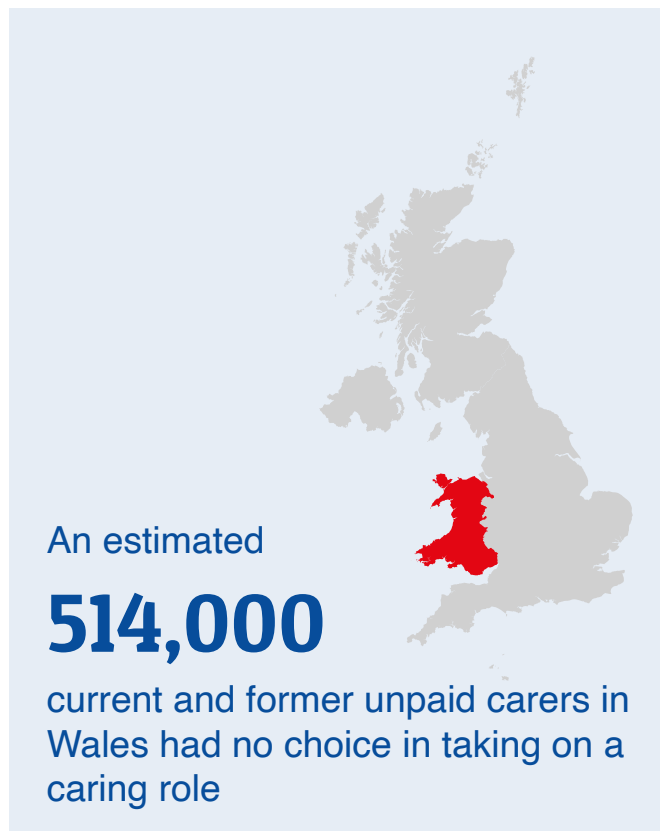
## Impact of caring on finances, pensions and employment

44% of current or former unpaid carers said that caring had a negative impact on their finances and savings. 45% said that unpaid caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their job and ability to work, with 22% saying it had a 'very' negative impact. A quarter of people (25%) who are currently providing or have previously provided unpaid care said that caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their pension.

An estimated 354,000 current and former carers in Wales experienced a negative impact on their finances and savings as a result of their caring role and 362,000 experienced a negative impact on their job and ability to work.<sup>36</sup>

## Impact of caring on health and relationships

Over half (51%) of current or former unpaid carers said that caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their physical health. 59% said it had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing, with 24% saying it had a 'very negative' impact.



**45%**

of carers in Wales said that caring had a negative impact on their job and ability to work

**59%**

of carers in Wales said that caring had a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing



<sup>35</sup> Carers UK analysis using ONS population data and Yougov polling.

<sup>36</sup> Carers UK analysis using ONS population data and Yougov polling.

31% of people who are currently providing or have previously provided unpaid care said caring had a 'slightly' or 'negative' negative impact on their relationships.

An estimated 474,000 current and former carers in Wales experienced a negative impact on their mental health as a result of their caring role and 410,000 experienced a negative impact on their physical health.<sup>37</sup>

## Public support for unpaid carers

YouGov Political Omnibus has found that 77% of people in Wales said the next Government should provide more support for unpaid carers.<sup>38</sup>

The two most common areas which people in Wales thought the next Government should focus on to support unpaid carers were more financial support for unpaid carers (59%) and investment in social care to allow carers to take a break (55%). 36% of people said the next Government should help unpaid carers recognise their role so they can access better support. A third (33%) of people said the next Government should provide better access to the NHS and a third (33%) said the next Government should provide mental health support. 1 in 5 (19%) said the next Government should support people's return to work or continuation with paid work.

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<sup>37</sup> Carers UK analysis using ONS population data and Yougov polling.

<sup>38</sup> Although the YouGov question asked about the next Government we understand that some areas of policy are devolved to the Welsh Government.

# Results in the nations: Northern Ireland

## Taking on a caring role

YouGov Omnibus polling has found that 58% – equivalent to around 299,000<sup>39</sup> – current and former unpaid carers said that they had to take on the unpaid carer role because no other care options were available.

## Impact of caring on finances, pensions and employment

48% of people who are currently providing or have previously provided unpaid care said that caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their job and ability to work. 42% said that caring had a negative impact on their finances and savings while 14% said that caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their pension.

An estimated 217,000 current and former carers in Northern Ireland experienced a negative impact on their finances and savings as a result of their caring role and 248,000 experienced a negative impact on their job and ability to work.<sup>40</sup>

## Impact of caring on health and relationships

44% of current and former carers said that caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their physical health. 66% said it had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing, with a quarter (25%) saying it had a 'very' negative impact. 36% of current and former unpaid carers said caring had a 'slightly' or 'negative' negative impact on their relationships.



<sup>39</sup> Carers UK analysis using ONS population data and Yougov polling.

<sup>40</sup> Carers UK analysis using ONS population data and Yougov polling.

An estimated 340,000 current and former unpaid carers in Northern Ireland experienced a negative impact on their mental health as a result of their caring role and 227,000 experienced a negative impact on their physical health.<sup>41</sup>

## Public support for unpaid carers

YouGov Political Omnibus found that 76% of people in Northern Ireland said the next Government should provide more support for unpaid carers.<sup>42</sup>

The two most common areas which people thought the next Government should focus on to support unpaid carers were more financial support (64%) and investment in social care to allow unpaid carers to take a break (52%)

A higher proportion of people in Northern Ireland said the next Government should provide more financial support compared to people in England, Wales and Scotland.

A third (32%) of people said the next Government should provide better access to the healthcare system while a third (32%) said the next Government should help unpaid carers recognise their role so they can access better support.

29% of people said the next Government should provide mental health support. 29% of people said the next Government should support people's return to work/continuation with paid work – a higher proportion than people in England (20%), Wales (19%), and Scotland (19%).

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<sup>41</sup> Carers UK analysis using ONS population data and Yougov polling.

<sup>42</sup> Although the YouGov question asked about the next Government we understand that most areas of policy are devolved to Northern Ireland Executive.

# Conclusion

All of us have a 50:50 chance of providing unpaid care by the time we are 50 years old, and a 2 in 3 chance of providing care in our lifetime.<sup>43</sup> However, for many of us, the role is unavoidable.

Caring makes a vital contribution to our collective life as a society and to our economy. However, for the individual, providing unpaid care can also have a significant and profound negative impact on their life, especially if there is no choice in taking on a caring role and adequate support is not available. Women and those in their middle years often face a disproportionate impact of the negative effects of caring as a result of the greater amount of caring responsibilities these groups face.

Whether the impact is to do with unpaid carers' employment and career prospects, finances and savings or health and wellbeing, carers need better, joined up support and a safety net to catch them when they need to take on an unpaid care role. The impact of caring is felt to be negative across nearly all aspects of the unpaid carer's life because the right support is not available and, where rights and provisions exist, carers say they often have to fight to access for these.

It is clear that, as a society, we do not think the level of support currently on offer comes close to what is needed to support those in an unpaid caring role. The average voter and member of the public clearly wants to see governments across the UK doing more to support unpaid carers financially as well as with more opportunities for breaks, better workplace support and protections, opportunities of continuing education and tailored packages for health and wellbeing.

This support is vital to enable them to continue to provide care for others as well as being able to look after their own wellbeing and have a life outside of caring. The huge individual and collective contribution made by unpaid carers should be properly recognised and supported by future governments as well as by local services and by employers to ensure unpaid carers can hope to have similar outcomes to non-carers.

**2 in 3**

of us will provide care in our lifetime



<sup>43</sup> <https://www.carersuk.org/media/warllcph/carersrightsdaynov19final-2.pdf>

# Recommendations

## The next UK Government should:

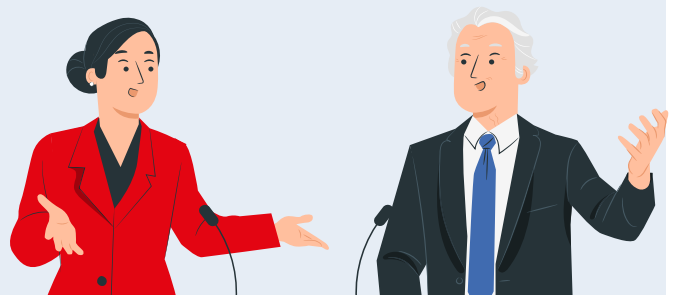
- Deliver strategic cross-Government action by introducing a National Carers Strategy for England and Wales to join up work between Government Departments and set a clear ambition to improve the lives of unpaid carers of all ages. The strategy should be backed by significant investment, set out future commitments to supporting unpaid carers, identify specific actions that focus on delivering tangible progress and additional support for carers, including young carers, their families, and those they care for.

### Support unpaid carers' health and wellbeing

- Legislate to place a new statutory duty on the NHS in England to have regard to unpaid carers and support their wellbeing, to ensure systematic identification of carers in all NHS settings.
- Invest an additional £1.5 billion in carers' breaks so that unpaid carers are able to access the breaks they need and improve their mental and physical health and wellbeing.
- Invest in a programme of activities to improve unpaid carers' mental health and address other factors which affect carers' mental health such as poverty, discrimination, housing and other related issues.

### Support finances and pensions

- Raise the level of Carer's Allowance and associated Carer Addition, Element and Premium for means-tested benefits and reform the eligibility rules for Carer's Allowance to enable more unpaid carers to access the financial support.
- Remove the 21 hour study rule from the eligibility criteria for Carer's Allowance in England and Wales to remove barriers to education for unpaid carers.
- Provide additional financial support to carers of State Pension age, including a new non-means-tested payment.
- Modernise and digitise the delivery of Carer's Allowance to simplify the system and reduce the burden on unpaid carers to protect them from overpayments.
- Take steps to ensure that unpaid carers' pension futures are more secure and compensate them for the negative effects of caring in the run-up to and during retirement. This includes ensuring that the State Pension age does not increase as this would significantly disadvantage unpaid carers.





## Support social care

- Develop a clear plan for social care reform and provide long-term, sustainable funding to ensure all unpaid carers and those they support can access high-quality social care services when they need them.
- Ensure that Local Authorities have sufficient and sustainable funding to enable them to fulfil their duties to carers under the Care Act 2014 and to young carers and parent carers under the Children Act 1989. Unpaid carers of all ages should also have access to local carer support.
- Develop a social care workforce strategy to ensure that there are enough skilled social care staff to provide social care, lessening the amount of unpaid care that family and friends are currently providing.
- Amend the Equality Act 2010 to include caring as the 10th protected characteristic.
- Provide dedicated funding to support carers to get back to work after time out to care and to support young adult carers to get into work.
- Produce guidance for employers on better support for unpaid carers in the workplace and encourage more employers to join carer positive schemes.

## Support to juggle paid work and unpaid care

- Build on the Carer's Leave Act 2023 and give those juggling paid work with unpaid care a statutory right to two weeks of paid Carer's Leave a year, provide employees with the right to take a longer period of unpaid Carer's Leave of up to 6 months, and further enhance peoples' rights to work flexibly.
- UK Government departments should formally support the Young Carers Covenant and set out what actions they plan to take to support its aims.
- Department for Work and Pensions should ensure that all staff delivering the youth offer understand and are able to respond to the specific needs of young adult carers.
- Ofsted should add young carers to their Education Inspection Framework.

## Support education and qualifications



## Health, local authorities and public bodies should:

- Ensure that carers' rights under health and care legislation are fulfilled.
- Ensure every local authority develops an active carers strategy and the needs of carers are specifically considered in other local strategies across health and social care.
- Ensure systematic identification of unpaid carers and that services are accessible and meet their needs.
- Proactively offer public health services such as free flu jabs and health checks to unpaid carers.
- Proactively raise awareness of unpaid carers amongst employees and via services.



## All schools, colleges and universities should:

- Appoint a Young Carers Champion or Student Carers Champion with strategic responsibility and oversight for identifying and implementing appropriate support.
- Have a young carer/student carer support policy.

## Employers should:

- Support their employees by implementing the Carer's Leave Act 2023 and going beyond it to offer a range of support.
- Benchmark practice against nationally recognised schemes such as Carer Confident in the UK or Carers Positive in Scotland.



## Specific recommendations for the nations

### Recommendations for Scottish Government

- Work with NHS Scotland and education bodies to develop and deliver ambitious plans (set out in the Carers Act 2016) to improve identification of carers within the NHS and primary health care and importantly during hospital discharge.
- Work with NHS Scotland and health and social care partnerships to deliver improved health and wellbeing for carers including annual health checks, access to flu and covid vaccinations and flexible health appointments. This work should include improving access to physiotherapy and counselling, aids and adaptations to prevent injury, alongside increasing funding for regular breaks from caring.
- Deliver transformational investment in social care as part of the development of a national care service. Increase social care funding year on year in advance of the implementation of the national care service to ensure that support that to carers, disabled and older people desperately need is adequate and does not wait or dependent on legislative and structural change.
- Deliver on the proposed National Outcome on Care, ensuring it is accompanied by robust National Indicators to transparently measure progress on a range of key issues, and in turn, ensure it drives the new actions that are needed to fully value and invest in care right across Scotland.
- Deliver the new Carer Support Payment (which will replace Carer's Allowance across Scotland) and set out a clear timetable for further improvements when the benefit is fully rolled out and all current Carer's Allowance recipients are safely transferred. As well as increasing the standard value of the payment, further improvements should include:
  - » An additional new payment for those caring for more than one person;
  - » Extending the run on when caring ends from 8 weeks to 6 months;
  - » Increasing and reforming the earnings limit to reduce complexity and ensure that in future Carer Support Payment better supports carers to sustain or return to employment without penalty;
  - » Develop a new Carer Recognition Payment for older carers.
  - » Expand eligibility of Carer Support Payment to young carers aged 16-19 in non-advanced education.
- Continue work to deliver, at speed, a new minimum income guarantee for carers and, in the interim, ensure that additional support is provided to alleviate the financial challenges carers face.
- Ensure that devolved employability programmes offer improved, person-centred support to unpaid carers to move towards and into work, while also improving workplace support by collaborating with employers across Scotland, including public bodies and through the public procurement process, to expand the Carer Positive award scheme and increase take up.
- Improve support for young carers and young adult carers including:
  - » Extending the Young Scot Young Carers Package from 11-18 year olds to 11-26 year olds.

- » Utilising Pupil Equity Funding to support young carers in their attainment goals and to help close the poverty related gap that young carers may experience.
- » Ensuring that all schools, colleges and universities have young carer/student support policies and appoint a Young Carers Champion or Student Carers Champion with strategic responsibility and oversight for identifying and implementing appropriate support.

### Recommendations for Welsh Government

- In the event the Welsh Government receives additional funding as a result of the UK Government Comprehensive Spending Review, the Welsh Government should:
  - » Increase spending on social care and set targets for local authorities pertaining to the number of care packages they are expected to fund.
  - » Commit to maintain and expand the National Short Breaks Fund beyond its scheduled end date of 2025.
  - » Create a dedicated financial support fund for unpaid carers who are struggling financially.
  - » Provide additional capacity and resource to create dedicated counselling and professional mental health support for unpaid carers across Wales.
- The Welsh Government should commit to responding in full to the Welsh Government commissioned evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, published in 2023.

- The Welsh Government should deliver on the commitment made by Vaughan Gething during the Welsh Labour leadership campaign, to create guidance to support professionals in the NHS to better identify and engage with unpaid carers.

### Recommendations for Northern Ireland Executive

- The reform of adult social care should be fully resourced in a multi-year Executive budget, with ring-fenced funding for the delivery of a new Northern Ireland Carer's Strategy and expanded provision of short break and respite services in every Health Trust.
- The Department of Health should examine options for delivering a new legal right to access regular breaks for unpaid carers.
- In the immediate term, the Department for Communities should introduce the Carer's Allowance Recognition Payment recommended by the independent review of welfare mitigations in 2022. In the longer term, the Department should work with the Department for Work and Pensions to undertake a full review of the value, administration and eligibility criteria of Carer's Allowance.
- The Department for the Economy should legislate for 5 days of paid carer's leave in the pending Employment Rights Bill.



## About Carers Week

Carers Week is an annual awareness campaign to recognise the vital contribution made by unpaid carers across the UK.

In 2024, Carers Week is made possible through Carers UK working together with seven other major charities: Age UK, Carers Trust, The Lewy Body Society, The ME Association, Motor Neurone Disease Association, Oxfam GB and Rethink Mental Illness.

Find out more and get involved at [carersweek.org](https://carersweek.org)



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