



# Health & Social Care Committee

## Inquiry into Improving Access to Support for Unpaid Carers

22/01/2026

This paper outlines our work in partnership with local authorities, health boards, and the third sector to improve the recognition and support for unpaid carers. Our priorities are outlined in our National Strategy for Unpaid Carers<sup>1</sup>, and we undertook extensive engagement with unpaid carers last summer to develop a refreshed strategy for 2026.

The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (2014) defines a carer as a person who provides or intends to provide care for an adult or disabled child, where this is not provided by contract or voluntary work. 'Young carers' refer to children and young people up to 18 years. 'Young adult carer' refers to those aged 18-25 years. The term 'respite' can have a negative connotation. We also use 'replacement care' to refer to arrangements for the person with care and support needs that enables the unpaid carer to undertake other tasks or have a break from the caring role.

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<sup>1</sup>[Strategy for unpaid carers | GOV.WALES](https://www.gov.wales/strategy-for-unpaid-carers)

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## **Main barriers for unpaid carers in accessing support**

The identification and recognition of unpaid carers is fundamental to carers feeling valued and accessing necessary information, advice and support.

### **Carer Aware**

Our Carer Aware programme, jointly delivered by Carers Wales and Carers Trust Wales, is focused on increasing carer recognition and support across health and social care settings. This programme is in its fourth year and has provided face-to-face and on-line training for social care workers and health care practitioners. E-learning training packages have been developed alongside the production of a hospital discharge guide and other materials. In 2024/25 the programme provided resources to 700 healthcare students and training to 268 students. We have invested £1.2m in the programme for 2022-26.

We funded a successful targeted social media campaign in June 2025 to inform young people about available support for young carers. This was estimated to have reached almost two thirds of 13-24-year-olds in Wales.

### **Older carers**

We fund Age Cymru to provide initial advice and support to older carers and raise awareness in GP surgeries and other community venues. Older carers are less likely to be recognised or self-identify as unpaid carers and therefore are less likely to seek support.

### **Charter for unpaid carers**

Our Charter for Unpaid Carers<sup>2</sup> outlines carers' rights, promotes the importance of co-production, and is a key resource for unpaid carers and professionals to improve recognition and raise awareness of carers' rights.

### **Improvement action**

We have supported the development of an action plan led by the Association of Directors (ADSS Cymru) via the Ministerial Advisory Group for Unpaid Carers<sup>3</sup>. This focuses on the improved delivery of information, advice and assistance to unpaid carers - in addition to carer's needs assessments, discussed more fully later in this paper. Prevention and early intervention are fundamental principles of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (2014). The action plan will deliver a more consistent and informed approach at the 'front door' of social services across Wales and is due to be completed in March 2026.

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<sup>2</sup> [Charter for unpaid carers](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Ministerial Advisory Group for Unpaid Carers](#)

## **Access to information across all communities**

We engaged extensively with unpaid carers and their representatives over the summer to inform the development of our new National Strategy for Unpaid Carers. Officials met with over 50 groups of carers or their representatives, and we particularly focussed on unpaid carers from minority and marginalised communities including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic unpaid carers, D/deaf unpaid carers, carers with learning disabilities, older carers, carers in rural areas and LGBTQ+ carers.

They highlighted the importance of the availability of information and advice in different languages and formats, including non-digital. They told us how important it is that information is presented in a way that is meaningful to them and shows awareness of their culture, identity or disability. For example, we met with a group of unpaid carers with learning disabilities who did not feel their role caring for elderly parents or partners with disabilities was fully recognised by professionals and that information was not available in 'easy read' formats.

It is crucial we, and our social care partners, engage co-productively with unpaid carers in a diverse range of communities in planning information and advice services and resources. This will be a priority in the new strategy.

## Respite

The provision of suitable respite, or replacement care, is a key area for unpaid carers. Without this, many carers cannot achieve balance in their lives.

We wrote to all Leaders of Councils in December 2025 to emphasise the importance of their duties under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act regarding respite provision and carer's needs assessments. We requested councils review their respite provision and highlighted there is merit in Regional Partnership Boards considering a regional approach.

### Short Breaks Scheme

We established the Welsh Government Short Breaks scheme in 2022. The purpose was to promote a more flexible and individualised approach to breaks for carers. This can include hobby equipment, leisure memberships, activity sessions and outings. It was not intended to replace the duties on local authorities to provide respite.

The scheme is delivered by Carers Trust Wales and Regional Partnership Boards. From 2022-2025, it delivered over 50,000 short breaks, significantly exceeding the target of 30,000. Eighty percent of those benefitting from the scheme were providing more than 50 hours of care a week and most carers had not had any other break in the previous 12 months. Almost half of those who accessed the scheme were previously unknown to services and could be signposted as a result of the contact. The scheme therefore successfully focusses on those providing the highest levels of care and not otherwise getting a break and has the additional benefit of providing a gateway to other forms of support.

Our annual investment is £3.5m and we have announced continuation of the scheme to 2029; an overall funding commitment of £24m. We commissioned an independent evaluation by Bangor University. Unpublished findings from 729 individual responses include:

- prior to the short break, 26% of carers said they rarely felt optimistic, this decreased to 8% after.
- prior to the short break, 27% of carers reported little social contact, this decreased to 11% after.

In addition, we provide £360,000 annually to the Take a Break programme through our Family Fund grant. This provides support to unpaid carers and disabled and seriously ill children. The fund provides sensory and play equipment and family breaks. In 2024/25, the programme supported more than 1,000 carers of disabled children.

## **Carers' support services**

### **Wellbeing support**

Our Carer Wellbeing and Empowerment Programme is delivered by Carers Wales with an annual investment of £260,400. This provides information and advice services and wellbeing sessions. It also includes support to empower carers to participate in co-production of services.

In addition, we fund Age Cymru and Carers Trust Wales to deliver support for older carers, with an annual investment of £155,000 for 2022-26. In 2024/25 this included supporting innovative approaches for older carers to build social connections which reached 735 older carers and in 2025/26 the establishment of a dedicated telephone advice line for older carers.

### **Financial hardship**

We appreciate the additional costs that can arise in households with someone with care and support needs. We welcome the independent review of Carer's Allowance Overpayments and the UK Government response published in November 2025. We are pleased to note the intention of the UK Government to undertake a reassessment exercise to correct the mistakes made that meant some carers were wrongly asked to repay Carer's Allowance. I have written to the Minister of State for Social Security and Disability and been assured we will be informed of the numbers of unpaid carers in Wales who have been affected, when this is identified.

We continue to support people experiencing extreme financial difficulty through our Discretionary Assistance Fund. Our Claim What's Yours benefit take-up campaign provides information on how people can check their entitlements.

#### Carers Support Fund

We established the Carers Support Fund in 2022 and have extended this to March 2029. Our annual investment is £1.75m with a total investment of £12.25m. The fund is managed on our behalf by Carers Trust Wales and provides emergency financial assistance to unpaid carers on low incomes for essential items or bills. Between 2022 and 2025, small grants were given to 29,500 unpaid carers, almost double the target of 15,000. Whilst this fund cannot address the determinants of poverty, it provides sessions on benefit entitlements and financial management, which can result in a sustained impact on household finances for some carers.

#### Carers and paid employment

We recognise the importance of unpaid carers remaining in paid employment or returning to it, wherever possible. This can have a significant positive impact on household finances and wellbeing, where appropriate balance with caring responsibilities is achieved.

Our Carer Wellbeing and Empowerment Programme referenced earlier in this paper also includes production of guidance on employment rights. In 2024/25 the programme provided 81 unpaid carers with direct support to help them re-enter the workforce and trained 145 job centre staff to ensure they could better support carers into employment. Carers Wales also engage with employers on our behalf and identifies workplace carers' champions to promote understanding of the Carers' Leave Act (2023) and 'carer friendly' workplace cultures.

Supporting carers into paid employment is a key priority and we are exploring means by which we can promote this further with our social care partners.

## Young Carers

While the role of young carers should be recognised and valued, collectively we must ensure this is not to the detriment of their education or other aspects of their young lives.

### Young carers in education

We are committed to equality of opportunity and equity of provision in education and supporting young carers is integral to our priorities of raising standards and improving attendance and attainment for all learners.

#### Data collection

While some schools have well-developed systems of support for young carers, data collection on young carers in Wales is currently inconsistent, making it difficult to provide targeted support where it is needed most. We have initiated a three phased approach to improving data collection which will be taken forward over a two-year period.

The first phase will be completed in the first half of 2026 and will collate data from the School Health Research Network (SHRN), providing a snapshot of a young carers' experience in school and their wellbeing. Phase two will link this information with Secure Anonymised Information Linkage (SAIL) data and enable comparison of educational attainment of young carers compared to their peers. We are also exploring a further long-term reliable method of data collection, including consideration of making legislative changes to the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) to include young carers.

#### School resources

We have worked with Carers Trust Wales to develop revised materials for education staff to understand more about young carers and engage with pupils. This information will be accessible to all education staff early in 2026.

#### Further and higher education

Our Targeted Employability Support Scheme enables Higher Education providers to support the employability of students from under-represented groups, including young carers and young adult carers. Young carers and young adult carers from low-income households can access the Education Maintenance Allowance, the Welsh Government Learning Grant and the Financial Contingency Fund where they meet eligibility criteria.

Medr funds and regulates tertiary education in Wales and expects colleges and universities to remove barriers to participation, retention, success and progression. We ensure Welsh universities include young adult carers in their programmes to provide financial and pastoral support.

### Young carer identification cards

We worked with Carers Trust Wales in 2022 to develop the Young Carer identification card and local authorities have operated card schemes independently from 2023. The identification cards are a key tool to help young carers identify in schools, colleges and pharmacies.

We sent out new materials in December 2024 to enable all local authorities to promote their card scheme and have engaged with local authorities about further action to maximise uptake, which are currently being explored.

### **Other forms of support**

Young carers can access our Short Breaks scheme and Carers Support Fund. Up to a quarter of recipients of short breaks and 18% of those accessing the Carers Support Fund are young carers. We continue to support the annual Wales Young Carers Festival and have agreed funding of £54,000 to support the next event in August 2026. The festival provides a three-day break for over 300 young carers, with important opportunities for them to receive information and support.

### **Representation of young carers**

Our Young Carers Advisory Board is hosted by Carers Trust Wales and is made up entirely of young carers. This valuable resource scrutinises and informs our work. Young carers are also active members of the Ministerial Advisory Group.

We have established a sub-group of the Ministerial Advisory Group to support policy development and promote dissemination of best practice. We engage Carers Trust Wales to facilitate the All-Wales Young Carers Professional Network of local authority and third sector young carer officers.

Welsh Government became a signatory to the Young Carers Covenant<sup>4</sup> in November 2025. The Covenant sets out ten key outcomes that young carers have said are key to improving their lives. We want local authorities, schools and other organisations to become individual signatories, which will promote a shared vision for young carers across Wales.

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**4 The Young Carers Covenant - Carers Trust**

## Regional Partnership Boards

Regional Partnership Boards have responsibilities to promote joint commissioning of services, based on their populations needs assessments. We require a minimum of 5% of the annual £146.8m Regional Integration Fund (RIF) to be used for carers' support services (£7.34m).

Within this, we provide £1m annually across health boards to provide a carer support service when the person they care for is in hospital. Our Hospital Discharge Guidance<sup>5</sup> for health and social care frontline staff highlights the importance of involving unpaid carers in discharge planning, which is key to safe and effective discharge.

We fund Carers Wales to provide support to the unpaid carer representatives on Regional Partnership Boards. It is important the voices of unpaid carers are heard in these fora.

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**5.Hospital discharge guidance: January 2025**

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## **Actions to improve the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014**

We commissioned the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS Cymru) to undertake a review of how carer's rights were being protected<sup>6</sup>. This review found too few assessments were being completed, carers were often waiting too long and there was inconsistency across Wales in how assessments were delivered. We have worked through our Ministerial Advisory Group and with unpaid carers, to understand the barriers and develop the basis of an action plan. This is now being led by ADSS Cymru, to be delivered by March 2026. We have provided an additional £47,235 this financial year to accelerate delivery and develop new resources to support improved practice and information to unpaid carers.

We wrote to all Council Leaders on 12 December to request information on the actions being taken within each local authority to deliver improvements in the provision of carer's needs assessments and we will review all responses when received at the end of January.

There is variation between local authorities in their approach to recording initial contacts by unpaid carers and this is included in the action plan being led by ADSS Cymru and overseen by the Ministerial Advisory Group. There is also indication from available data that local authority approaches to carers' support plans vary, and this could be the focus of further work.

We are developing a new National Strategy for Unpaid Carers which will be out for public consultation in January 2026 and be published after the election. This will highlight the duties of local authorities and health boards toward unpaid carers.

### **Data on unpaid carers**

Our most recent local authority data from Stats Wales<sup>7</sup> for 2023/24 indicates that regarding **adult carers**:

- Contacts seeking support increased from 6,841 in 2020/21 to 11,536 in 2023/24, with 77% receiving advice or assistance.
- The number of carer's needs assessments did not significantly alter, with 6,924 completed in 2023/24.
- Of these, 47% identified needs requiring a carer's support plan, 42% identified needs met by other means, and 10% had no eligible needs.
- Approaches to carers' support plans varied across local authorities and 18.5% also had their own care and support needs, a slight decline compared to the previous year.

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<sup>6</sup> Rapid review of how unpaid carers' rights have been upheld during and after the Covid 19 response ADSS Cymru 2023  
<sup>7</sup> StatsWales - Carers

- Among those with a support plan due for review, 70% received at least one review in 2023/24.

#### Young carers:

- The number seeking support doubled from 1,163 in 2020/21 to 2,366 in 2023/24.
- 1,468 assessments were completed and 60% resulted in a carer's support plan or in a care and support plan (due to their own needs).
- 1,728 young carers had a support plan at the end of 2023/24 and 18% also had their own care and support needs (data not provided by three local authorities).
- 2,119 young carer support plans were reviewed in 2023/24.
- There is considerable variation in the data being reported by local authorities.

The Social Services National Outcomes Framework 2024 Annual Report<sup>8</sup> uses National Survey for Wales<sup>9</sup> data collected via a randomised population survey.

#### Key findings are:

- A greater proportion of unpaid carers reported their support as 'poor' or 'very poor' than in previous year.
- Unpaid carers reported similar levels of life satisfaction to non-carers and higher than people receiving care and support.
- Unpaid carers report experiencing higher levels of loneliness than non-carers
- Unpaid carers report feeling less control over daily life compared to non-carers.

New data<sup>10</sup> available on adults receiving care and support submitted by local authorities<sup>11</sup> shows that

- 28% of adults receiving care and support on 31 March 2024 had at least one unpaid carer.<sup>12</sup>
- 5% of adults receiving care and support also had known caring responsibilities for an adult or disabled child (and 60% of these were receiving ongoing support due to being an unpaid carer).

We commissioned a new statutory annual data collection on carers who have received a carer's needs assessment via the Ministerial Advisory Group. The new Unpaid Carers Receiving Support census, which includes young carers, has been established with the local authorities and the data for 2025/26 will be collected in 2026/27 and should be available by April 2027.

Local authorities will be required to keep accurate records of all the unpaid carers who are assessed for support. For the first time, there will be a national individual-level dataset on unpaid carers which will allow an in-depth understanding of the demographics of unpaid carers (young and adult carers) being supported by local authorities.

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8. Social services national outcomes framework: annual report 2024 | GOV.WALES

9. National Survey for Wales | GOV.WALES

10. This data is considered as 'official statistics in development' and data quality will be improved in further years.

11. Adults receiving care and support: 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 (official statistics in development) | GOV.WALES

12. This will be an undercount of all adults with an unpaid carer as it only counts those carers known to the local authority.

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## Conclusion

The pressures on unpaid carers are considerable, and their value is immeasurable. We have outlined our programmes and the significant activity being undertaken to bring further improvement to the support for unpaid carers across Wales. This year, we have invested over £13m of additional funding.

There is more to do, and we will continue to work collaboratively with our social care partners and learn from the lived experience of unpaid carers. Our new national strategy will provide refreshed impetus to our shared priorities, and our Ministerial Advisory Group for Unpaid Carers will provide collective oversight.