



Good practice guide

Identifying and supporting older unpaid carers in hospital discharge



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

Contents

Introduction	3
Characteristics of older carers	4
Benefits of increased carer involvement.....	6
Carers' rights.....	6
Good practice.....	7
Links and sources of information:	7
Hospital discharge guidance	7
Guides and information for unpaid carers	7
Carers Support	8
Carer identification and support resources for professionals	8
Dedicated support for older people.....	8
Financial advice	9
Health related advice and support	9
Sensory loss	9
Housing	9
Transport.....	10
Wellbeing services.....	10
End of life care.....	10
Bereavement	10
Sources of help for older people and older carers by Health Board area.....	10

Acknowledgements

This project is jointly managed by Age Cymru and Carers Trust Wales and is funded by a Welsh Government Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant. The project aims to support the early identification of older carers and to help ensure that they receive timely and person centred information and advice. This includes older carers generally, as well as the carers of people living with dementia and carers of people who have moved to live in a care home.

Introduction

This guide focusses on the information specific to the needs and challenges of older carers, based on our engagement with older carers. At Age Cymru we are aware that older people seldom come to us when things are going well and for many cases discharges are planned. However, it is important to understand and bear in mind the issues faced by older carers so that discharge is safe.

“I have received very poor hospital communication while my husband was in hospital. It is impossible to get any factual information from medical staff members”

Age Cymru What matters to you? survey respondent, 2024

Unpaid carers are worth around £10.6 billion to the Welsh economy each year¹ and Social Care Wales estimate that carers provide 96% of care and support at home. Wales has a higher proportion of unpaid carers than England. There are an estimated 275,000 older unpaid carers in Wales.² Across England and Wales, 19% of unpaid carers aged 65 years and over and 23% of those aged 75 years and older provide 50 or more hours of care a week.³

Not everyone that is an unpaid carer recognises their caring status. Increasing identification is vital to giving unpaid carers the tools they need to continue their caring role. Earlier identification reduces the need for help in a crisis and so reduces pressure on health and social care services.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, defines a carer as someone who provides unpaid care to an adult or disabled child. The cared for person may be a family member or a friend, who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support. A carer could be a husband caring for his wife, a parent caring for their child who has care and support needs or a child caring for their parent.

This guide focusses on older unpaid carers and is not intended to replicate other good practice information already available. Relevant links to existing resources are included at the end of this resource. Details are included of sources of support for older carers across Wales that are up to date at the time of producing this resource.

A one hour training session accompanying this resource is available online. The link is at the end of this guide.



- 1 Carers UK, 2024: <https://www.carersuk.org/media/anpak31o/wales-carers-assembly-report-2024-eng-final.pdf>
- 2 Understanding Wales Ageing Population - Office of the older People's Commissioner for Wales <https://olderpeople.wales/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Understanding-Wales-ageing-population-July-24.pdf>
- 3 Kings Fund September 2024 What are unpaid carers, who are they and how often do they provide care? <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/data-and-charts/unpaid-carers-nutshell>

Characteristics of older carers

An older carer can be anyone with unpaid caring responsibilities who is over 50 years old. There is no upper age limit to being an older carer and the category includes several generations - each with their own life experiences and challenges. It is important that services consider the additional barriers older carers face.

The main characteristics of older carers that need consideration in how carers are identified and supported in their caring role are below.

Identification helps reach carers early so they can maintain their own health and wellbeing. Many older carers see caring as a duty, or as part of their relationship with that person and often prioritise the needs of the person they care for over their own. This can lead to emotional, mental and physical challenges. Increased exhaustion and stress can lead to difficulties in processing new information and that can affect their ability to care well, or carry on caring at all. Early identification can reduce pressures on health and care services for both the cared for and the carers health needs.

Research shows that unpaid caring adversely affects both physical and mental health.⁴

In terms of their own health, older people are **more likely to be living with one or more health conditions** and are at increased likelihood of living with dementia.

Almost a third (32%) of older carers responding to Age Cymru's annual survey in 2024 said they were **living with a disability** as defined through legislation. It is important to remember that disabilities are not always visible when considering a person's ability to provide unpaid care.

Older people are more likely to be living with **sensory loss**. 71% of people over 70 will have some or profound levels of **hearing loss** and the proportion increases with age. Older adults are disproportionately affected by **sight loss**. Around 1 in 5 people over 75 in Wales has a significant sight loss due to age related macular degeneration (AMD) and conditions like glaucoma, and untreated cataracts. This increases to almost 50% of people aged 90 and over, with increasing numbers registered as blind or partially sighted.

Older carers are more likely to be **sandwich carers**, which is caring for a partner, parent, sibling as well as providing childcare. Older couples are also more likely to be co-caring (providing care for one another). Any carer has a right to their own life away from caring, so it's vital that they have information and advice available on support for carers in the community that can help their wellbeing.

Older people are more likely to be **digitally excluded**, so it's important they have access to offline information and advice, and telephone contacts.



⁴ Public Health Wales – Unpaid carers in Wales: The creation of an e-cohort to understand long-term health conditions amongst unpaid carers in Wales <https://phw.nhs.wales/publications/publications1/unpaid-carers-in-wales-the-creation-of-an-e-cohort-to-understand-long-term-health-conditions-amongst-unpaid-carers-in-wales/>

For some **LGBTQ+ older people**, former negative experiences of attempting to access health and social care at a time when their identities were poorly or little understood may mean they don't ask for help until crisis point is reached.

For some older carers, **language barriers** affect their ability to get the help they need.

Financial advice needed for older people can have additional complexities. Some benefit entitlements have age related cut off points. Pension incomes vary, so having the right advice on income maximisation is important. And with those that need paid for services via social care, it's important that older carers have access to advice, information and support on maximising their finances.

It is important to understand that each carers' position is different. The older population in Wales includes several generations with ranges of experiences of life. Expectations of what an older carer is able to provide on discharge needs to be realistic.

A caller contacted Age Cymru after receiving a phone call from the hospital saying they were going to discharge their father to the caller's home address the following day. The caller is living with their own health conditions, often needs care from family members themselves and does not have the physical strength to carry out any personal care. They are also in paid employment. Despite their refusal to agree to this, the discharge happened as planned by the hospital. The carer tried to find some privately arranged care in their areas but there was a waiting list. They said, "I wish I could do more and feel like I'm letting people down."

In Age Cymru's 2024 annual survey, nearly half of older unpaid carers were retired. Changes in pension arrangements and huge increases in the cost of living that those of a pensionable age could not have foreseen as a need to plan for is driving more older people into poverty. Some older carers have had to give up work or had to reduce the hours they work because of their caring responsibilities. Some said how they needed to get back to paid employment as their basic pension isn't enough to survive. Others said they needed to retire earlier due to ill health. The reduced health of the nation post pandemic has put additional pressure on unpaid carers and it is important that discharge planning considers their position.

A caller to Age Cymru Advice needed help arranging care for their dad following hospital discharge. Our caller lived over an hour and a half away from their parents. A series of errors pre-inpatient care had already left them needing to use their annual leave for emergency care for their mum whilst dad was in hospital for scheduled care that became an emergency. Discharge plans for dad were very hurried and made assumptions on what the family could provide. Dad had wanted to get home as quickly as possible to look after and be with Mum and unpaid carers were not asked how much help they could give.

This resulted in the family having to source private care which was not available and so had to take unpaid annual leave whilst dad recovered enough to look after mum again.

Benefits of increasing carer involvement

Increasing involvement of older carers has many benefits.

They know so much more about the patient that isn't there in medical notes and this helps care for a patient more easily so that they can recover more quickly. For example, what routines do they use to help make sure the person they care for takes their medication? What will they be more likely to eat and drink to help them recover and leave hospital? Some carers may wish to continue to provide some of the help they usually provide at home during the hospital stay and this can ease some time pressures on hospital staff.

Involving unpaid carers helps reduce demand on health and social care services. Knowing what areas of ongoing care unpaid carers can give helps reduce 'overprescribing care' if planning considers wider community help from family and friends. If unpaid carers are involved early, it helps them plan better what they and the patients' community network may be able to help with.

Chances of readmission are reduced through more holistic planning. Understanding the needs of older carers is part of this. We hear from older carers who don't know where to go for advice and information on things like changes in medication and are worried they're doing the wrong thing, or who to contact about the care coming in from health or social care after discharge. If unpaid carers are better identified and involved, they can get help to keep themselves well and so provide better quality unpaid care for longer.

Putting all these aspects together, involving older unpaid carers improves their own and the patient's quality of life.

Carers' rights

The Charter for Unpaid Carers sets out the legal rights of unpaid carers under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014. The Act introduced new rights for unpaid carers. These include the right to:

- Information, advice and assistance to help carers in their role and to be able to carry on doing things that matter to them.
- Keep healthy and stay free from abuse, harm or neglect.
- Have access to a social life and a safe and secure home.
- Have access to employment, education & training.
- Be a valued part of community life.
- Have positive relationships with friends and family.

A link to the Charter is the resources section. In practice, this means there should be no expectation for unpaid carers to provide more care than they are comfortable giving.

This guide aims to help identify older unpaid carers and to help them get the support they need earlier, to help them carry on with their caring role if that is their choice.



Good Practice

Carers Trust Wales and Carers Wales have produced a helpful short guide for health staff on involving carers of all ages in discharge and care transfers that covers identifying, communicating with and supporting unpaid carers and information on preparing for discharge. It includes suggested actions to take to improve carer involvement.

Accompanying the above, their Good Practice Guide for hospital discharge has been co-produced by unpaid carers, health professionals and carer organisations.

The British Red Cross have produced a Five Part Independence Checklist designed to look at holistic needs and prevent hospital readmission, covering practical, social, psychological, physical and financial independence.

Links to these are included below.

Links and sources of information

Link to the training session recording accompanying this guide:

<https://www.agecymru.wales/our-work/carers/carers-reports-and-resources/>

Hospital discharge guidance

Welsh Government hospital discharge guidance:

<https://www.gov.wales/hospital-discharge-guidance>

Carers Trust and Carers Trust Wales – Good practice guide on involving patients in hospital discharge:

<https://carers.org/downloads/involving-unpaid-carers-in-hospital-discharge---policy-guide-for-service-planners-final-may23-eng.pdf>

British Red Cross – getting hospital discharge right report and good practice checklist:

<https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/we-speak-up-for-change/getting-hospital-discharge-right>

Guides and information for unpaid carers

The Charter for Unpaid Carers shows unpaid carers their legal rights in Wales:

<https://www.gov.wales/charter-unpaid-carers-html>

A One Stop Shop Guide for Older Carers in Wales:

<https://www.agecymru.wales/siteassets/documents/carers-project/carers-guide-eng-nov-22.pdf>

Age Cymru's carers reports and resources page has helpful information and guides for older carers:

<https://www.agecymru.wales/our-work/carers/carers-reports-and-resources/>

Information for working carers from Carers Trust:

<https://www.carersuk.org/media/ts3n2g4r/carers-wales-working-carers-guide-eng-final.pdf>

Making Relationships Count: A helpful guide for families, unpaid carers and care staff supporting a person moving to live in a care home:

<https://www.agecymru.wales/our-work/carers/making-relationships-count/>

Carers Trust – ‘care home options – a guide for family and friends who look after a person with dementia’:

<https://carers.org/downloads/wales-pdfs/4-care-homes.pdf>

Knowledge is Power – a Guide for carers of people living with dementia:

English: <https://dsdc.bangor.ac.uk/documents/knowledge-is-power-carers-en.pdf>

Welsh: <https://dsdc.bangor.ac.uk/documents/knowledge-is-power-carers-cy.pdf>

A series of booklets designed to support older carers and family members of people living with dementia. These resources provide guidance on various aspects of caring, from carers assessments, and understanding your legal rights to communication strategies, prioritising your own wellbeing and respite, and choosing a care home:

<https://carers.org/policy-and-influence/wales-dementia-carers>

Carers Support

Alzheimer’s Society:

support line 0333 150 3456

<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-us/wales>

Carers Trust Wales: information on Short Breaks Scheme, Carers Support Fund and more:

<https://carers.org/around-the-uk-our-work-in-wales/our-work-in-wales>

<https://www.shortbreaksscheme.wales/>

Carers Wales have a directory of local support services for carers:

<https://www.carersuk.org/wales/help-and-advice/>

Age Cymru local partners have information advice and support in different parts of Wales. Further information at:

<https://www.agecymru.wales/our-work/in-your-area/>

Carer identification and support resources for professionals

Resources for anyone who works with unpaid carers from Carers Trust:

<https://carers.org/resources/all-resources>

Carers Trust and Carers Trust Wales – Good practice guide on involving patients in hospital discharge:

<https://carers.org/downloads/involving-unpaid-carers-in-hospital-discharge---policy-guide-for-service-planners-final-may23-eng.pdf>

Carers Trust - Identification of carers in GP practices – a good practice document:

<https://carers.org/downloads/resources-pdfs/identification-of-carers-in-gp-practices/identification-of-carers-in-gp-practices-a-good-practice-document.pdf>

Dedicated support for older people

Age Connects Wales

A national network of 6 local and independent organisations who aim to provide people aged 50 and over in Wales with the assistance, support and services they need. Information on local branches is on their site:

<https://www.ageconnectswales.org.uk/>

Age Cymru

Age Cymru Advice provides confidential, impartial and expert information & advice to older people, their families, friends, carers and professionals throughout Wales. The Age Cymru Advice line also acts as a gateway to our local services.

Telephone advice service available Monday to Friday between 9am and 4pm:

Contact: 0300 3034498 or email advice@agecymru.org.uk

For those online information on a range of matters is available on the website.

Cost of living information pages:

<https://www.agecymru.wales/information-advice/money-legal/debt-savings/help-with-the-cost-of-living/>

Help with benefits, managing money, avoiding scams and dealing with legal issues:

<https://www.agecymru.wales/information-advice/money-legal/>

Financial advice

Citizens Advice Wales are the holder of the Single Advice Fund from Welsh Government aimed at maximising citizen's income with services across Wales:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/wales/benefits/>

Health related advice and support

Age Cymru – health and wellbeing information:

<https://www.agecymru.wales/information-advice/health-wellbeing/>

Age Cymru hospital discharge information pages:

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/information-advice/health-wellbeing/health-services/leaving-hospital/>

Sensory Loss

RNIB- creating accessible information for health and social care professionals:

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/living-with-sight-loss/independent-living/accessible-nhs-and-social-care-information/creating-accessible-information-and-communication-resources-for-health-and-social-care/>

RNID – communication tips for health and social care professionals:

<https://rnid.org.uk/information-and-support/support-for-health-and-social-care-professionals/communication-tips-for-healthcare-professionals/>

How to communicate with someone who is deaf or has hearing loss - RNID:

<https://rnid.org.uk/information-and-support/how-to-communicate-with-deaf-people-hearing-loss/>

Housing

Care and repair Care & Repair Cymru is a charity helping older people in Wales to live independently by providing repairs, adaptations and home maintenance:

<https://careandrepair.org.uk/our-services/>

Information on housing benefit for carers from Carers UK:

<https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/financial-support/help-with-bills-and-household-costs/housing-benefit/>

Older people's housing options:

<https://www.agecymru.wales/information-advice/care/housing-options/>

Housing for people with special requirements:

<https://sheltercymru.org.uk/housing-advice/finding-a-place-to-live/housing-for-people-with-special-requirements/>

Transport

Community transport services can help older carers get themselves or the person they provide care for to local appointments:

<https://ctauk.org/find-ct-provider/>

Non-emergency patient transport services:

<https://ambulance.nhs.wales/services/non-emergency-patient-transport-service-nepts/>

Alternative options if a patient is not eligible for NEPTS:

<https://ambulance.nhs.wales/services/non-emergency-patient-transport-service-nepts/alternative-transport-options/>

Wellbeing services

Community connector services across Wales can help people access community activities and support. Some are provided by Community Council Services. Search 'community connectors' in your areas.

End of life care

Marie Curie – help with end of life care at home:

<https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/professionals/commissioning-our-services/wales>

Bereavement

Marie Curie bereavement information and support service:

0800 090 2309

<https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/wales-bereavement-information-and-support-service>

Cruse:

0808 808 1677

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/>

Sources of help for older people and older carers by Health Board area

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

Age Cymru Gwent - Information and advice, help at home, respite service:

Information and advice line: 01633 240190
9.00am till 2.00pm Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday

information@agecymrugwent.org / www.agecymrugwent.org

Help at Home Team: 01495 360159

General enquire:s 01633 763330

Aneurin Bevan Health Board carers pages:

<https://abuhb.nhs.wales/hospitals/a-z-of-services/carers/>

Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations:
0800 470 1378

info@gavo.org.uk

<https://www.gavo.org.uk/>

Gwent Carers Information and Advice Service and hub:

01792816600

<https://adferiad.org/services/gwent-carers-hub/> info@adferiad.org

Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

Age Connects North East Wales supporting older people in Flintshire and Wrexham:

01352 753728

info@ageconnectsnewales.org.uk

<https://ageconnectsnewales.org.uk>

Age Cymru Gwynedd a Mon information guides and factsheets, home care, meals at home services, cleaning services and more:

01286 677711

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/gwyneddamon/>

Carers outreach service for North West Wales:
01248 370797

help@carersoutreach.org.uk

<https://www.carersoutreach.org.uk/>

North East Wales Carers Information Service:
01352 752525
enquiries@newcis.org.uk
<https://www.newcis.org.uk/>

Carers Trust North Wales Information guides,
respite care, dementia support, community
groups and carers grants:
01492 542212
<https://www.nwcrossroads.org.uk/>

Cardiff and Vale University Health Board

Health Board online carers gateway:
<https://keepingmewell.com/living-well-leading-a-healthy-lifestyle/carers-gateway/#peer-support>

Age Connects – Cardiff and the Vale – Volunteer
led support, information and advice:
02920683600
<https://www.ageconnectscardiff.org.uk/services>

Carers support in the Vale of Glamorgan:
https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/living/social_care/adult_services/Unpaid-Carers/Unpaid-Carers.aspx

Cwm Taff Morgannwg University Health Board

Health Board carers support services online
gateway:
<https://ctmuhb.nhs.wales/services/carers-support-services/>

Dedicated local authority carer information
pages:
<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/AdultsandOlderPeople/Caringforotherpeople/Supportforcarers/Supportforcarers.aspx>

Age Connect Morgannwg Information and
advice for older people and community
support:
01443490650
<https://www.ageconnectsmorgannwg.org.uk/community-outreach-services>

Hywel Dda University Health Board

3 county Carers support service:
01437 723660
info@carerssupportwestwales.org <https://carerssupportwestwales.org/>

Health board generic inbox for carers:
carersteam.hdd@wales.nhs.uk

Age Cymru Dyfed: Information and advice,
digital support, home cleaning services,
befriending, dementia advice:
03333 447 874
www.agecymrudyfed.org.uk

Powys Teaching Health Board

Age Cymru Powys Information and advice,
footcare, community helpers, rural advice van,
benefits checks, older farmers' support service,
veterans support service:
01686 623707
enquiries@acpowys.org.uk www.agecymru.org.uk/powys

Carers Trust – Ceredigion Providing information,
advice and emotional support to unpaid carers
of all ages throughout Powys:
01597 823800
carers@ceredu.cymru www.carers.cymru

Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations:
<https://www.pavo.org.uk/>

Community connector service:
01597 828649
10-4 Monday to Friday
<https://www.pavo.org.uk/help-for-people/community-connectors/community-connectors@pavo.org>

Powys Teaching Health Board carers' pages:
<https://pthb.nhs.wales/services/carers-services-and-support/>

Bereavement support:
Mid and north Powys Mind
<https://mnpmind.org.uk/bereavement-support-groups/> bereavement@mnpmind.org.uk
01597824411 / 07496870039

Cruse Bereavement Care Powys:
<https://www.ataloss.org/faqs/cruse-bereavement-care-78>
Powys@cruse.org.uk
01686 610220

Swansea Bay University Health Board

Age Cymru West Glamorgan Information and advice, dementia advice and support, home energy checks and more:

01792 648866

enquiries@agecymruwestglamorgan.org.uk

www.agecymruwestglamorgan.org.uk

Swansea Carers Centre:

01792 653344

<https://www.swanseacarerscentre.org.uk/>

Dementia Carers Project:

01792 653344

[Swansea Dementia and Carer Project | Swansea CVS](#)

Neath Port Talbot Carers Centre:

01639 642277

[Carers Service | Neath Port Talbot Carers Service | Wales](#)

Velindre University NHS Trust

Velindre Welfare Advice service offers a free, confidential welfare benefits service to people living with cancer and their carers:

02920 316 277 or

VCC.supportivecare@wales.nhs.uk

<https://velindre.nhs.wales/velindrecc/services-a-to-z/benefits-advice/>

Local support groups:

<https://velindre.nhs.wales/velindrecc/patient-information/local-support-groups/>

Contact Carers Trust Wales

Carers Trust Wales
Transport House
1 Cathedral Road
Cardiff CF11 9HA

Phone: 030 0772 9702
Email: wales@carers.org
www.carers.org

Contact Age Cymru

Age Cymru
Mariners House
Trident Court
East Moors Road
Cardiff CF24 5TD

Phone: 029 2043 1555
Email: enquiries@agecymru.org.uk
www.agecymru.wales