

Public Policy Statement Carers July 2024

Summary

Providing care has a significant impact upon the carer and can take multiple forms: health (physical and mental); finances (ability to undertake paid work whilst providing unpaid care; costs of getting to the person they care for; future financial security) emotional strain; and inadequate support. Reaching crisis point can have significant implications for the carer's future, as well as the potential health impact. It can result in short term decisions being made that can place future financial security at risk, for example, leaving a job or selling a house.

A health crisis for a carer can rapidly develop into a health crisis for both the carer and the person cared for. Contingency plans need to be in place in case the carer is unable to provide care to avoid the need for a crisis intervention e.g. double hospital admission. This reduces stress and disruption for both carer and cared for person, as well as avoiding increased costs to emergency services through admissions that could be avoided.

Providing care can have significant financial implications for carers. Effects on unpaid carer's ability to be in paid employment (if at all), increased utility bills and other costs including respite care, and reduced ability to save for retirement all impact on older unpaid carer's financial stability.

The current benefits system includes age related cliff-edges for claiming entitlements, the rigidity of regulations on hours that an unpaid carer can work and the complexity of financial support systems together mean many older people in Wales miss out on support that can reduce financial instability.

Getting the right support for older people to continue their unpaid caring role is proven to improve quality of life and feel more in control. However, many carers are not aware of their legal rights as carers and without this knowledge can't get the help they need. According to our annual surveys only a fifth of older unpaid carers have asked social care for help and of those that do, unpaid carers repeatedly feedback that their needs are not understood or their voices heard.

Through the pandemic and beyond, repeated feedback to Age Cymru from older unpaid carers is that they are left out of decision making and communications around hospital discharge. Poor communication, poor discharge assessment processes, a lack of community resources and poor advice and information for older carers and the cared for are all contributing to poor and unsafe discharges from hospital.

Carers of dying people face unique challenges. Caring needs increase towards the end of life, and following death, unpaid carers may need information and support through their bereavement. It is important that the wider needs of unpaid carers are understood and addressed with end of life care.

The contribution unpaid carers make often goes unrecognised. Many are left feeling invisible and unsupported by government, the welfare system, health and social care professionals, family and friends, as well as by society more broadly. More people risk being trapped in avoidable circumstances of poor physical and mental health, financial deprivation, with energy and money having been devoted to those for whom they care. In addition to the individual toll, the health, wellbeing and financial pressures being placed upon today's carers is storing up problems for society for the future.