

## Unpaid Carers (England)

February 2025

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**Carers must be valued and supported to live fulfilling lives alongside their caring roles. Their contribution to society must be fully recognised and their health and wellbeing protected.**

There are approximately 4.7 million carers in England, a disproportionate number of whom are female<sup>i</sup>. Carers in the most deprived areas of England constitute a higher proportion of the population than in the least deprived areas.<sup>ii</sup> The numbers caring for large numbers of hours a week increased between 2011 and 2021.<sup>iii</sup> There are more carers aged 75 and over providing 50 hours or more of care than in any other age group<sup>iv</sup>, many with their own health issues and needs.

The social care system in England has been unable to cope with the demand for care for many years, meaning that more people who need care and support in their daily lives are reliant on family, friends or neighbours to provide unpaid care. This underlies the vital role carers play in our society, contributing £162 billion a year to the economy in England and Wales.<sup>v</sup>

Being a carer can be very challenging. Our own research with people aged 50 and over has shown that older carers are really struggling with their physical and mental health. Nearly half (48%) of carers report experiencing anxiety, over a third (34%) feeling overwhelmed, and more than one in five (21%) feeling lonely as a result of their caring role.<sup>vi</sup> Even though most carers care willingly, caring can be stressful, frustrating and unrelenting, leaving you both mentally and physically exhausted.<sup>vii</sup> There aren't enough good, affordable social care services to go around and one of the results is that carers often have to fill the gap, minus the necessary support.

Caring has a substantial impact on someone's ability to stay in work, with delivering as little as five hours care a week meaning people are significantly less likely to be working.<sup>viii</sup> Between 2010 and 2020, over 1.9 million employees became unpaid carers each year, and 75% of carers who are working worry about being able to continue to manage both work and care.<sup>ix</sup> In 2024 the Government amended the right to request flexible working and introduced a right to carers' leave, to help people manage. Many carers face financial hardship; 44% of adult carers under state pension age are in poverty.<sup>x</sup>

Carer's Allowance is the primary benefit for carers, providing £81.90 per week (2024/25) for carers giving at least 35 hours of care, making it the lowest benefit of its type. Added to this, an

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older carer receiving the State Pension will not be able to receive the full amount of Carer's Allowance.

Many older couples care for each other, leaving some older couples in an incredibly precarious position, due to the risk that the main carer may be incapacitated by ill health or an injury. This makes it incredibly important that carers' needs are incorporated into needs assessments and care planning and that access to respite care is available. Health and care services must not make assumptions about the capacity or capability of carers to support others at home, for example following discharge from hospital. With more NHS care expected to be delivered in the home, services must be clear about the support and lines of responsibility required to do this safely, without over-burdening carers.

### Public Policy Proposals

- The Government should outline a long-term, sustainable solution for funding social care that fully incorporates the needs of carers.
- The Government must significantly increase access to respite services and practical support for carers that recognise the specific needs of older carers.
- The Government should introduce a minimum of five days statutory paid carers leave with the option of a further period of unpaid leave, as well as flexible working rights for carers.
- Employers should support their employees to help balance caring and work.
- Carer's Allowance should be substantially increased so that carers do not experience financial hardship, and while we welcome the 2024 change to the earnings rules they should continue to be reviewed so they do not serve as a disincentive to employment.
- NHS and social care services need to respond to, plan for and address the needs of older people and their older unpaid carers when both are in poor health. Co-caring relationships should be fully recognised and care built around the needs and preferences of both parties.
- Integrated Care Boards should ensure that sufficient and adequate bereavement support services are available for carers when a caring relationship ends.

### Want to find out more?

**Age UK has agreed policy positions on a wide range of public policy issues. Our policies cover money, health and care, housing and communities, and equalities issues. See**

**<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/policy-positions/> for more information.**

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<sup>i</sup> ONS (2023). Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales: Census 2021

<sup>ii</sup> ONS (2023). Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales: Census 2021

<sup>iii</sup> ONS (2023). Unpaid care, England and Wales: Census 2021

<sup>iv</sup> ONS (2023). Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales: Census 2021

<sup>v</sup> Petrillo and Bennet (2023). Valuing Cares 2021, England and Wales. Carers UK and the Centre for Care.

<sup>vi</sup> Age UK (2024) We have to take it one day at a time: Results of Age UK's research into the health and care of people aged 50 and over.

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vii Age UK (2024) We have to take it one day at a time: Results of Age UK's research into the health and care of people aged 50 and over.

viii Age UK, Carers UK (2016), Walking the tightrope: The challenges of combining work and care in later life

ix Carers UK (2022) State of Caring 2022.

x Petrillo and Bennet (2023). Valuing Cares 2021, England and Wales. Carers UK and the Centre for Care.

xi Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2022). UK Poverty.