



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

Strategy for unpaid carers

What we will do to improve the recognition of and support of unpaid carers.

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Ministerial foreword

Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services

The launch of the Strategy for Unpaid Carers marks one year since the first lockdown was introduced in Wales to control the spread of COVID-19. During this time, I have heard from many unpaid carers who have struggled to cope without their usual support networks. I am aware unpaid carers of all ages have faced new challenges, pressures and, in many cases, personal tragedy.

The pandemic led to a greater awareness and public appreciation of health and social care workers, but that appreciation should extend to unpaid carers - without their support, the pressure on Wales' health and social care system would have been even more acute.

Over the past 12 months, many of us may have taken on the role of an unpaid carer for the first time and struggled to balance work and leisure time with new or increased caring commitments. I hope that these experiences will raise awareness of all unpaid carers in our communities, from children or young

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people supporting siblings or parents, to older people caring for a partner, or the legions of neighbours and friends that spend fewer hours caring but still provide vital support to keep people well and safe in their own homes. Not all may need formal support from statutory services, but all deserve our thanks.

For many, supporting friends, families and communities can provide a sense of well-being. For others, caring responsibilities can have a major impact on every aspect of their lives and additional support is needed to manage the demands of the role.

We have a moral and legal obligation to support people who are providing significant levels of care or balancing care alongside other substantial commitments such as employment or education. Moral, because of our commitment to everyone's wellbeing in Wales. Legal, because carers' rights are enshrined in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

The delivery of this strategy will be guided by my Ministerial Advisory Group on Unpaid Carers and its supporting engagement group. We will publish a supporting delivery plan in autumn 2021 setting out clear actions, timescales and measures for monitoring progress.

Caring is everyone's business - it is likely that most of us will take on a caring role at some point in our lives. I hope this strategy and supporting delivery plan will guide partnership working towards a society that recognises, values and supports unpaid carers of all ages and backgrounds to live well and achieve their own well-being outcomes.

Introduction

This new Strategy for Unpaid Carers represents our renewed commitment to improving the recognition of and support to unpaid carers in Wales. It sets out our revised national priorities for unpaid carers, including the addition of a new priority on education and employment. It also notes our priority areas for action and will be followed by a more detailed delivery plan in autumn 2021.

This strategy is the result of engagement with unpaid carers of all ages and their

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representatives via the Ministerial Advisory Group for Unpaid Carers and its supporting engagement group, facilitated by Carers Trust Wales. Both groups will also guide the development of a delivery plan and monitor implementation.

We also received over 90 consultation responses from unpaid carers and professionals working in the public and third sectors. These responses illustrated the huge toll COVID-19 has taken on the physical, mental and financial well-being of unpaid carers. For many, the difficulties faced before the pandemic have been exacerbated, but new challenges have also emerged. Hours spent caring have increased and unpaid carers have taken on more or different caring tasks. The risk of catching COVID-19, particularly if the person being care for has complex health needs, or the unpaid carer has their own underlying health conditions, is stated as an overarching concern.

Each of our renewed four national priorities takes into account the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of unpaid carers and reflects that these experiences will shape support needs over the months and years ahead.

Our responses also clearly demonstrate that a more focussed and high profile approach to delivering support for unpaid carers is needed. It is also clear that support must span wider than health and social care - a coordinated response from the Welsh Government and the public, third and private sectors is vital.

The contribution of unpaid carers to the Welsh economy must be acknowledged and celebrated so that the well-being of carers is not overshadowed by concerns for the person or people they care for. However, it is equally important not to make assumptions that all unpaid carers are fully able or willing to take on or continue in a caring role.

A Healthier Wales: Our Plan for Health and Social Care sets out the vital role of unpaid carers within our health and social care system:

“ Our staff, their skills, experience and values, are fundamental to a successful NHS and social care system. Delivering a truly seamless system of health and care calls for a fundamental shift in our understanding of who constitutes the workforce and how we support the

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contribution that each individual makes.

“ This requires not only greater parity of esteem between health and care professionals, but also recognising and supporting the vital role played by the informal workforce of unpaid carers and of volunteers, without whom there would be no overall system. ”

In line with the vision set out in A Healthier Wales, we are continuing to work towards a whole-system approach to health and social care which focusses on keeping people well by anticipating health needs, preventing illness, and reducing the impacts of poor health. This approach has become more important in light of the impact of COVID-19 on individuals and communities in Wales.

The Welsh Government has set out a radically different way of working to deliver on the most fundamental challenges the nation faces. This recognises that integration and collaboration between services supported by early intervention and a people centred approach, is essential to delivering long term outcomes for social care.

Early intervention and prevention is critical and we need to embed the preventative aspects of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 more effectively in public services and move key providers of services, including the third sector, towards an improved model of support for unpaid carers. If we fail to address these key issues now, more unpaid carers and the people they care for, will reach crisis point before accessing vital support services. This will, in turn, increase the pressure on NHS and social services.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act places further duties on local authorities to embed a preventative approach by considering the long-term impact of their actions. Public bodies are required to adopt a more joined approach to service design and delivery. They must also work in partnership with individuals and communities. This approach supports the strategic direction and intention of this strategy.

Unpaid carers in Wales

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.

Carers Wales state that there are more than 370,000 unpaid carers of all ages providing care worth around £8.1 billion to the Welsh economy each year.

Social Care Wales estimate that 12 per cent of the population of Wales are unpaid carers and this figure could increase to 16 per cent by 2037. These figures include anyone caring for as little as an hour a week and most people who spend only very limited time on caring will not require any additional support. However, Wales also has the highest proportion of older carers and of carers providing more than 50 hours' care a week. Since, the start of the pandemic, the number of carers in Wales has increased – the **National Survey for Wales** issued a monthly report in June 2020, which showed that 35% of people looked after, or gave help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others. This has increased from 29% in the 2019-20 full-year survey.

Where are we now?

The Welsh Government has acted consistently to improve the lives of unpaid carers. The first Carers' Strategy for Wales was published in 2000, the Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure was published in 2010, and the refreshed Carers' Strategy for Wales and the Delivery Plan 2013-2016 were published in 2013.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 replaced the National Assembly for Wales Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure 2010, and strengthened the statutory rights of unpaid carers. For the first time unpaid carers had an equal right to an assessment and support as those that they care for. Unpaid carers no longer need to demonstrate that they provide a substantial amount of

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care on a regular basis to be considered as a carer. If unpaid carers have needs that are eligible for support, the local authority has a statutory duty to plan for and meet those needs by providing a 'Carer's Support Plan.' Where eligible needs for support are identified for the unpaid carer, local authorities must ensure these needs are met.

Local authorities in Wales receive substantial financial support from the Welsh Government through the annual local government settlement. This funding offers considerable flexibility for authorities to prioritise their services in line with the needs of their communities, including unpaid carers.

Given their entitlements under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, unpaid carers should be accessing and receiving support from mainstream health and social services budgets.

Welsh Government project funding provides additionality to statutory services, for example, we are providing £2.6 million over 3 years (2020-23) to Carers Wales, All Wales Forum of Parents and Carers, Carers Trust Wales and Age Cymru, via our Third Sector Sustainable Social Services Grant Scheme.

We facilitate engagement with unpaid carers and professionals from across sectors via the **Ministerial Advisory Group on Unpaid Carers** and its supporting engagement group which is facilitated by Carers Trust Wales. We also fund Children in Wales to host the Young Carers' Network. These mechanisms ensure the voice of the unpaid carer informs policy development and delivery.

In 2020 - 21 we provided £236,000 to take forward our national ID card project for young carers. We continue to fund the national young carers ID card project with £150k in 2021-22, working in co-production with local authorities and Carers Trust Wales. The pandemic demonstrated a pressing need for the roll out of a card to support young unpaid carers who were supporting someone, for example, to access food, or medicine. Carers Trust Wales produced a suite of nationally available resources to raise awareness amongst health and pharmacy professionals of the issues affecting young carers, and to help challenge misunderstandings about their role.

Launched in October 2020, Welsh Government is providing £1.25 million, for a national Carers' Support Fund in the context of COVID-19. Delivered via Carers Trust Wales and their local partners, it enables unpaid carers who are struggling financially to purchase essential items including food, furniture, white goods such as a washing machine, or a laptop. The current fund will end in March 2021.

Earlier this year, the Welsh Government published its first **annual report** on the Integrated Care Fund (ICF). The report shows that in 2018-19, £1.141m was spent on services directly supporting unpaid carers in Wales. This was in addition to the investment from other broader projects that support, for example, older people and children with complex needs, which can also have a positive impact on the lives of unpaid carers.

In 2019-20, £7.891m was spent directly on projects and services to support unpaid carers. Our next ICF annual report, due for publication in spring 2021, will showcase how unpaid carers are benefitting from this fund.

In November 2019, we launched a national all age unpaid carers' rights awareness campaign informing unpaid carers of their rights under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. This campaign will restart when circumstances permit.

We continue to work with Carers Wales as corporate members of the Welsh Employers for Carers programme. Their Employers' Hub Wales supports all employers to better understand and implement policies and practices to support their employees with caring responsibilities.

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Inquiry – Caring for our future

The Senedd committee opened their inquiry "The Impact of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 in relation to Carers" in 2018. The inquiry remit included:

- assessments of need

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- provision of support, including respite care
- provision of information, advice and assistance
- information collected by local authorities and local health boards on carers and their needs
- consideration of broader Welsh Government policy on carers

The Committee's report, **Caring for our future**, was published on 21 November 2019. The Welsh Government **responded** to the report's 31 recommendations in January 2020 and the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services sent a subsequent update **letter** to the Chair of the HSCS Committee, Dr Dai Lloyd MS, in July 2020.

Unpaid carers with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 places a general equality duty on Welsh public authorities to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, as well as to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Through our consultation on the national strategy for unpaid carers we wanted to understand how different groups of people with protected characteristics may need specific forms of support, so that the design and delivery of our strategy takes into account the needs of those groups. We know that collecting and analysing feedback from unpaid carers with protected characteristics is critical for us to understand their needs and experiences, and to inform us about what we need to do remove barriers and improve services for them. A specific equality question was therefore included in the consultation document. In order to obtain a wide response from unpaid carers with protected characteristics, the consultation was shared directly with a number of equality forums. This included:

- the Wales Race Forum
- the Faith Communities Forum
- the Ministerial Advisory Forum on Ageing
- the Disability Equality Forum

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- the Strengthening and Advancing Equality and Human Rights Steering Group

Under our Welsh specific equality duties we are required to carry out Equality Impact Assessments in respect of protected groups, across our proposed policies and practices, those we have decided to review, and any changes we intend to make. Our impact assessment arrangements are also a key part of meeting our equality duty under section 77 of the Government of Wales Act 2006.

As well as the feedback from the public consultation, equality evidence is continuously being gathered and analysed for the purposes of completing the Equality Impact Assessment on the Strategy for Unpaid Carers. We have reviewed the valuable equality evidence available to us regarding the different perspectives and experiences of being an unpaid carer living in Wales. This information has been assessed concurrently with the development of the strategy to identify its potential impact on those with protected characteristics or who are otherwise disadvantaged. Some of the equality considerations that we have been mindful of while developing this strategy include:

- We are aware that often the sample sizes of older people from ethnic minority backgrounds, although representative of the Welsh population, can be too small to make reliable comparisons with white Welsh or white British older people. There are, however, experiences and issues which are particular to or more pronounced for older people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.
- There are still often societal expectations of women as caregivers. The 2011 census showed that women make up the majority of unpaid carers – 57% of carers in Wales are women and women of working age (25 to 64) are significantly more likely than men to be providing unpaid care to someone with a disability or illness or who is older.
- As our society ages, the number of people living with complex needs is increasing. It is therefore inevitable that more older people will take on a caring role. Most older carers live alone with the person they care for and many also live with life limiting conditions. In response to Wales' ageing demographic, we launched a public consultation on our new **Strategy for an Ageing Society**. Given the increasing numbers of older and working age

people providing unpaid care, the effective integration of that strategy with this document is critical.

- Many unpaid carers report that caring results in a negative and often lasting impact on their physical and mental health, but as with the rest of the population, many people with existing disabilities or long-term conditions also take on caring responsibilities. The 2019 GP Patient Survey (England) found that unpaid carers are more likely to report having a long term condition, disability or illness than non-carers – 63% of unpaid carers compared to 51% of non-carers.
- Whilst there are no clear statistics on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT) unpaid carers, the Office of National Statistics (ONS) calculates this figure at 1.5% of the population (with 1.5% of men saying they are gay and 0.7% of women saying they are lesbian; 0.3% of men identifying as bisexual compared to 0.5% of women). Based on the estimates from Stonewall that 3.7 million people in the UK are LGBT, Carers UK estimates there are 390,000 LGBT unpaid carers in Britain. Unfortunately, to date, there has been a negligible amount of social work and social care research that examines specific issues for LGBT unpaid carers in accessing and receiving health and social services.

The equality evidence and engagement collated as part of the Equality Impact Assessment process is an important step towards understanding these challenges in more depth. Addressing these inequalities will be a key consideration when developing the more detailed delivery plan, due to be published in the autumn.

The Equality Impact Assessment, and wider Integrated Impact Assessment is being finalised and will be published shortly. The Equality Impact Assessment will then be monitored and updated regularly to assess whether the plan is having the desired positive equality impacts, and to determine whether it requires revision to mitigate any negative impacts.

Socioeconomic Duty

We will also consider any inequalities associated with socioeconomic disadvantage that might be relevant to the actions in the plan. This reflects our

responsibilities under the Socioeconomic Duty of the Equality Act 2010, which will come in to force in Wales on 31 March 2021. For example, we know from the 2011 Census that the majority of all unpaid carers are of working age and surveys and consultations completed by third sector carer organisations show that the majority wish to work, but many are unable to because of caring. Financial hardship can also disproportionately affect women because they are more likely to be providing care and providing more hours of care while at the same time balancing work or their own health conditions. Research from the London School of Economics in 2018 found that the costs to the UK government of unpaid carers leaving employment exceeded £2.9 billion a year. Our new Priority 4 in this strategy, supporting unpaid carers in education and the workplace, is intended to have a positive impact on working age carers by ensuring more support is available to carers in the workplace.

Young carers and young adult carers

There are approximately 30,000 unpaid carers under the age of 25 in Wales. According to the 2011 census, Wales has the highest proportion of unpaid carers under 18 in the UK. This number is likely to have increased during the pandemic.

Young carers are children or young people who take a significant role in caring for a family member. The family member could, for example, be suffering from a physical or mental health problem, a disability or drug and alcohol problems. Young carers may not recognise that their role within the family is different from other children and young people, but they often carry significant physical and psychological burdens. Young carers often have little or no “me time” and can lose parts of their childhood.

Some of the problems young carers might face are difficulties with school and doing homework; not enough time to see friends; worrying about the person they care for; feeling different from other young people and other people not understanding what it's like being a young carer. Despite these challenges, many young carers remain resilient and optimistic about their caring role, but may still require help and support.

Young adult carers are usually carers between 16 and 25 years old. They may be juggling their caring responsibilities with further or higher education; with looking for work or navigating the benefits system; with starting their working lives; with a serious emotional relationship or with thinking about leaving home. They can therefore face a different set of issues from young carers.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, many young and young adult carers were unable to access their normal support mechanisms, such as friends or wider family, and may have experienced increased emotional pressure as a result. Young and young adult carers may have been caring for more hours each week and undertaking tasks such as shopping for the household and collecting medication from pharmacies, as well as trying to learn at home when schools and colleges were closed.

A full Children's Rights Impact Assessment is being finalised and will be published as part of the wider Integrated Impact Assessment.

National priorities for unpaid carers

In November 2017, we announced 3 national priorities to support the delivery of the enhanced rights for unpaid carers under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Following the public consultation, these priorities have been refreshed and a fourth has been added relating to unpaid carers in employment and education. These four priorities will provide a cross governmental focus for the delivery of this strategy in collaboration with unpaid carers, their representatives and service providers.

Priority 1

Identifying and valuing unpaid carers - all unpaid carers must be valued and supported to make an informed choice about the care they provide and to access the support they need whilst caring and when the caring role comes to an end.

Unpaid carers must be recognised and valued for their contributions to society,

treated as equal partners to health and social care professionals and supported to have their voices heard in the language of their choice. Carers' needs assessments can offer a gateway to a person centred support plan, but without timely information about their rights and how and where to get support, both the health and well-being of the carer, and those they care for, could suffer.

We will take forward this priority by:

Valuing unpaid carers

We will continue to support annual events celebrating carers' rights and utilise ministerial messaging and media channels to ensure unpaid carers are valued and their contributions to local communities, the Welsh economy and the health and social care system are recognised.

Our communications will adopt the term 'unpaid carer' to avoid confusion with the professional workforce and we will encourage our partners to use the same terminology and to ensure all messaging is accessible to young and young adult carers.

We will work with partners to continue our Unpaid **Carers' Rights awareness Campaign** and work with key stakeholders to promote its messages to a broad range of carers.

The campaign will seek to inform unpaid carers of their rights and options for accessing support.

Raising awareness of unpaid carers

Early identification of unpaid carers is an important step towards ensuring they can access the support they are entitled to.

We will encourage more unpaid carers to self-identify by raising awareness amongst professionals who may have contact with them, across the statutory, private and third sectors. We will also work with partners to explore how statutory services can better identify and record information on unpaid carers.

This will allow the needs of more unpaid carers to be addressed at an early stage, but will also provide valuable data relating to the numbers and circumstances of unpaid carers in Wales.

Carers Trust and Carers Wales are currently working in partnership to transform carer recognition, respect and support across health and social care settings in Wales. This 3 year project is funded via the Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant and will strengthen and enhance implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, by raising awareness of unpaid carers, the impact of caring and carers' rights with the general public and relevant professionals.

The stigma attached to some types of caring can be particularly problematic for young carers who have expressed concerns that caring for a person with disabilities may be seen as more deserving of sympathy than caring for a parent with an alcohol addiction.

We will continue to work with unpaid carers and their representatives to challenge any stigma associated with their caring role.

We recognise the need to better identify and engage with unpaid carers from ethnic minority communities, older carers, LGBTQ+ carers, those with disabilities and unpaid carers whose first language is not English. Women Connect First are improving access to early intervention and preventative services for ethnic minority women aged over 50, many of whom have caring responsibilities. This 3 year project, funded via the Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant aims to equip participants with the skills and confidence to take preventative action to improve their present and future well-being. The project aims to create a model suitable for national roll out and showcases the importance of engaging with unpaid carers where they live and in their preferred first language.

Wales is a bilingual nation and therefore people should, and need to, be able to communicate in the language of their choice. Services must be designed to meet the needs of the individual which includes receiving treatment and care through the medium of Welsh. Older people, people with learning disabilities or mental health issues, some young people and those living with dementia can

experience difficulties in communicating their thoughts and emotions if not using their language of choice.

Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers is a strategy for the whole of Wales, and we want every part of the country to share in the vision of a million Welsh speakers. We need to ensure the future vitality of Welsh-speaking communities as places that facilitate the use of the language in every aspect of life. At the same time, we are committed to supporting people to use Welsh socially, at work, and when accessing services.

Our **active offer** means people should receive a service in Welsh without having to ask for it and seeks to ensure that the Welsh language is not treated less favourably than the English language when providing services to the public.

Working with local authorities to improve carers' assessments

We will use the data we collect via the evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the revised Performance and Improvement Framework to work with local authorities to develop a range of solutions that enable local authorities to deliver timely, effective statutory assessments that are responsive to individual needs of unpaid carers. Our Unpaid Carers' Charter will facilitate a move towards a common understanding of the language and terminology that should be used by professionals carrying out carers' assessments to ensure they are accessible to all. To inform this work, Social Care Institute for Excellence is supporting Welsh Government to understand individuals attitudes to and experiences of carers' assessments in Wales. This is initially being done through a review of current evidence but may lead to further qualitative work if it is considered to be needed.

We will work with and commission Social Care Wales to develop further **training and information resources**, as appropriate, for the **social care workforce**, to increase awareness of carers' needs and the caring role and improve service delivery.

Supporting unpaid carers' voices to be heard

We will continue to invest in mechanisms that support unpaid carers to have their voices heard at national, local and regional levels. Conversations are ongoing with our stakeholders about how to support unpaid carers on Regional Partnership Boards and in local communities to feel more confident in their representative roles.

Caring Communities of Change is an innovative project putting learning disability family carers and their relatives at the heart of collaboration in service design and delivery across health and social care in Wales. This 3 year project, funded via Welsh Government's Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant and led by All Wales Forum of Parents and Carers of People with Learning Disabilities, focuses on 3 key areas— transitions, respite and doing different things.

Priority 2

Providing information, advice and assistance - it is vital that all unpaid carers have access to the right information and advice at the right time and in an appropriate format.

Provision of appropriate information, advice and assistance (IAA) provides the vital first steps of a preventative approach. Many unpaid carers do not need to access formal statutory or specific social services or health provision but simply require the right information, in the right format, at the right time, in order to manage their caring role. Knowing where and how to access different forms of information, advice and assistance such as welfare benefits or more general rights, can also be preventative. IAA provided should be proportionate to the needs of the individual.

Under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, local authorities must publicise information about:

- how the care and support system operates in the local authority area
- the types of care and support available
- how to access the care and support that is available

- how to raise concerns about the well-being of a person who appears to have needs for care and support

IAA is intended to support prevention and early intervention and deliver a wider range of community-based services through partnerships and multi-agency working. Delivered well, and at the right time, IAA can enable unpaid carers, and those they care for, to live healthy and fulfilled lives for as long as possible. In order to avoid geographical variants in available services across Wales (a 'postcode lottery'), it is critical that all IAA services in Wales are high quality and easily accessible to all.

We will take forward this priority by:

Raising awareness of ways to access information, advice and assistance

We will work with partners to improve equal access to IAA across all parts of Wales whilst acknowledging that statutory bodies are not the only means of delivering this service - there is a need to raise awareness of alternative ways of accessing information such as GP surgeries, community services, or online resources such as [DEWIS Cymru](#).

Age Cymru is working with Carers Trust Wales to develop person centred service models to identify and better meet the needs of older unpaid carers and carers of people with dementia. This 3 year project, funded via the Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant aims will improve older carers' access to information, advice and support, and create opportunities for unpaid carers to influence and shape services.

We will explore how to further improve access to advocacy services for unpaid carers who find it hard either to access services, or find it difficult to talk about their problems. Via our Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant, we are also funding the HOPE project which aims to support older people and carers to access community based preventative services through a range of advocacy models led by peers, volunteer groups and citizens.

During the pandemic, both statutory and third sector providers adapted their

ways of working to ensure unpaid carers could continue to receive the information and support required. Our consultation responses stressed that getting information to unpaid carers quickly helped carers to access vital community support including food parcels, assistance with shopping and collecting prescriptions. Rapid and clear information was disseminated via social media and email, the roll out of new or expansion of existing telephone helplines and the use of age appropriate platforms, such as Tik Tok or Instagram, to reach young carers. Third sector organisations also realised that they needed to review formal guidance from Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and others, turning it into shorter and easily understood information for unpaid carers and service users. In this way they ensured the most essential information was shared.

We will continue to learn from the successful adaptation of services in response to the pandemic and recognise that social care and other services such as housing, transport, protective services and employability schemes all have a responsibility to provide information and support to unpaid carers.

Due to the link between caring and low incomes, benefits checks and information about entitlements can help unpaid carers to manage the stress of their caring role. However, we know that there are thousands of people in Wales who are not yet claiming the benefits that they are entitled to. Our integrated communications campaign **Claim What's Yours** aims to encourage people to check and claim the benefits they are entitled to.

Linking back to priority 1, through this and other methods we will continue to work with partners to increase the take-up and raise awareness of entitlements in accessing both devolved and non-devolved benefits.

Addressing the digital divide

The pandemic has also moved the majority of services online and many people have embraced technology through necessity, however a clear digital divide has been brought into focus which needs to be addressed.

Through our **Digital Strategy for Wales**, we are working to achieve a smarter, better connected society and economy by making sure everybody in Wales has

access to digital technologies, and knows how to use them. One of the strategy's six missions relates to digital inclusion in order to equip people with the motivation, access, skills and confidence to engage with an increasingly digital world, based on their needs. The strategy will also shape how we effectively harness digital, data, technology and AI now and in the future for the benefit of people in Wales, including unpaid carers.

Priority 3

Supporting life alongside caring - all unpaid carers must have the opportunity to take breaks from their caring role to enable them to maintain their own health and well-being and have a life alongside caring.

Unpaid carers provide a valuable service to the people they look after and society in general but can neglect their own needs. Unpaid carers should have equal access to different and innovative forms of short breaks and / or respite taken with or without the person they care for. Respite can include sport, leisure or cultural activities, as well as more traditional forms such as replacement care or an overnight sitting service for the person being cared for. Linking to priority 4, having a life alongside caring could also involve being able to work or undertake training.

We will take forward this priority by:

Improving access to short breaks and respite

We will continue to work collaboratively to develop a national model for respite in Wales.

Respite can take many forms, including time to 'switch off' and enjoy time with family and friends, take up a hobby or exercise class, pursue education and training or go on a short break with the person they care for or on their own. There is no specific definition of a respite service but it is not confined to an overnight stay in a care home or a sitting service for the individual with care needs, to enable their carer to have a break. It could be considered to be any

form of service, assistance or experience which allows unpaid carers to have sufficient and regular periods away from their caring routines or responsibilities. Respite and short breaks can be a vital part of the care and support young and young adult carers require to cope with their caring role.

As respite moves away from the “traditional” model of overnight care for the individual with care needs, we need to understand how services can be re-defined to meet individual need.

We will work towards a better understanding of how respite or a break from caring can be accessed, funded and delivered by a range of providers, including statutory bodies and the private and third sectors. To achieve this goal, we will work with unpaid carers and our partners to ensure the terminology used to describe respite suits the context and service on offer and to make it clear that respite can be preventative, not just something offered at a point of crisis.

We will explore how innovative approaches to respite, including the Scottish model of ‘**respitality**’ can be introduced in Wales. To achieve this, we are already funding All Wales Forum of Parents and Carers of People with Learning Disabilities, to develop a ‘staycation’ network, a ‘direct breaks’ scheme and a respitality model of support within rural communities.

Despite our aim to encourage more innovative models of respite, we acknowledge that post COVID-19, there will be an increased demand for day centres and more traditional sitting and replacement care services. We will prioritise this need alongside more innovative models of delivering respite over the coming year.

Extending access to psychological support

The pandemic has taken a huge toll on the mental health of unpaid carers of all ages. We have refreshed our **Together for Mental Health Delivery Plan 2019-22** to ensure the actions respond to the pandemic.

Any psychological support needs should be identified during a carers’ needs assessment and followed by a conversation to agree the most successful way that those needs could be met. Services on offer should be tailored to the

individual needs and circumstances of the carer. This can be especially important for young carers, parent carers and those caring for people with specific conditions such as dementia or mental health issues.

Funded via the Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant, the **Dementia Integration And Links** project (DIAL) supports people living with dementia and their unpaid carers in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. Activities to support mental health include carers' wellbeing programmes, counselling and complementary therapies for unpaid carers of people living with dementia. Similarly, during the pandemic, Carers Wales extended their Welsh Government funded '**Me Time**' sessions which provide a range of online activities ranging from 'group viewings of the great wonders of the world' to physical exercise, relaxation and mindfulness.

We also recognise unpaid carers may benefit from psychological support in the form of counselling for stress or bereavement. During COVID-19, we provided additional funding to Cruse Bereavement Care to extend their counselling and emotional well-being services. **Cruse Bereavement Care** is working to transform bereavement care in Wales. This 3 year project, funded via the Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant, aims to transform national and local bereavement services, by developing a Bereavement Hub; encompassing a single point of access 'The Gateway' to a personalised pathway of support.

We will continue to invest in a range of psychological support and to explore how emerging new models of support for unpaid carers during the pandemic can lead to improvements in the delivery of services in the future.

Priority 4

Supporting unpaid carers in education and the workplace – employers and educational / training settings should be encouraged to adapt their policies and practices, enabling unpaid carers to work and learn alongside their caring role.

Having the opportunity to work and learn is an important part of life. It can provide financial stability and bring the wider benefits of a fulfilling career, positive mental health and social interaction. Unpaid carers not in employment,

education or training should be able to access the right information, advice and support to develop the skills to gain suitable employment, whether re-entering the workforce, or getting a job for the first time. It is also important to recognise that an unpaid carer may also be self-employed, managing their own business or organisation, and therefore may face a different set of challenges.

We will take forward this priority by:

Encouraging local authorities to support state funded schools to identify young carers

All of the national priorities and their proposed actions relate equally to unpaid carers of all ages and backgrounds. However, most young carers are at school or attending college and therefore need to balance their learning and personal development with their caring responsibilities. Young adult carers (usually considered to be aged from 16 – 25 years of age) face different circumstances and may be in higher or further education or employment.

Research from **Carers Trust** shows that problems with school attendance or attainment can negatively impact on the future of young carers. The development of our new **Curriculum for Wales** contains a much stronger focus on well-being and on creating ambitious and capable learners and has the potential to address some of the barriers experienced by young carers.

We clearly recognise the need for a strong connection between schools and their local young carers' services so that young carers are fully supported. As part of this, we are aware that some schools have identified a lead for young carers to oversee the support young carers receive, and signpost to young carers services, but we recognise this can be applied more consistently.

Working with employers and their representative bodies to promote unpaid carer friendly workplaces

This work will align with our commitment to the Fair Work principles set by the **Fair Work Commission** for Wales and will aim to provide better support to the increasing number of older workers, unpaid carers, and young adult carers, in

our workforce

We will continue to work with and promote the **Wales Hub of Employers for Carers**, which helps organisations in Wales to support staff with caring responsibilities.

We will continue to support the proposal from UK Government for a new employment right of a week of unpaid carers' leave, for qualifying employees.

The current rise in redundancies, unemployment due to COVID-19 and the end of the UK Government's furlough scheme could impact negatively on the financial situation of many unpaid carers. The National Survey for Wales, July 2020, shows that the economic status of 25% of people in Wales has changed since the coronavirus outbreak. 74% said coronavirus has caused problems for their work life.

We will link this new priority to wider social and economic concerns including gender equality, low income and the impact of caring on poverty. Our Equality Impact Assessment will help us to understand and respond to the financial and emotional impact of caring on women, who are more likely to work part time or give up employment because of difficulties in balancing their employment with their caring role.

Promoting financial resilience

The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated, perhaps more than ever, the essential role that unpaid carers play in preventing statutory services from becoming overloaded. Yet many of these carers have low incomes and, due to their caring responsibilities, are unable to increase their income by working full-time.

We will therefore continue to urge the UK Government to increase the current payment rate of carers allowance to lift unpaid carers out of poverty.

Tackling poverty and providing help for those most in need is a top priority for the Welsh Government. The changes to the Welfare Benefits and Social Security system has raised its own issues here in Wales and Welsh Ministers continue to make representation over these changes and implement policy to protect those

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most at risk in our communities.

It is more critical than ever that all those eligible for support are aware of, and are accessing, the full range of entitlements available, including benefits and services funded by Welsh Government and those delivered by local authorities in Wales.

A charter for unpaid carers

Unpaid carers and their representatives have voiced concerns about a significant disparity in levels of support between different health boards and local authorities. In response to this, we are keen to work towards a shared understanding of the rights of unpaid carers and the level of service they should receive, particularly during common scenarios that carers encounter such as hospital discharge or emergency admission.

We want the charter to be the go-to resource for unpaid carers, but also professionals seeking to provide support. The charter will be co-produced with unpaid carers of all ages and will clearly define the roles and responsibilities of Welsh Government, local authorities, local health boards, third sector organisations and unpaid carers themselves.

The charter will help unpaid carers to self-identify and understand their rights under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. We hope the charter will help to challenge negative perceptions of statutory services. It will support local authorities to deliver their duties under the Act and clearly set out good practice standards that ensure unpaid carers are involved as equal partners and have a voice in policy development, planning, research and training.

Measuring success: data and research

Evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being of Wales 2014 Act

We will clearly set out the actions and timescales for the successful implementation of this strategy in a delivery plan which will be published in autumn 2021. The development of the plan will be led with advice and input from our Ministerial Advisory Group for Unpaid Carers and its supporting engagement group.

We will work with members of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Unpaid Carers to develop a clear set of metrics using the data outlined above and other sources relating to each of the four national priorities set out in this strategy.

The delivery plan will also set out the measures by which we will measure success which will include our independent, formal evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 led by University of South Wales, and due to run until 2022. This evaluation will help us improve the future of social care in Wales and will give insight into how the principles of the Act such as 'voice and control' have been applied and their impact on the well-being of unpaid carers. Findings from the evaluation will be used to support us to understand how we can further improve the lives of individuals and unpaid carers. The project will be starting fieldwork in April 2021 for the impact evaluation. This will involve engagement with key stakeholders and individuals, including unpaid carers and provide a means to benchmark the current situation of unpaid carers in Wales. Interim findings from this phase will be published at the end of 2021.

The 2014 Act was also measured through a different, but complementary approach, Measuring the Mountain (MtM), a co-produced project launched in January 2018 which analysed people's experiences of care and support. The MtM team collated around 500 stories in 2019/20 from individuals in Wales - around half of the stories were from unpaid carers. The most [recent findings](#) from the project were published in December 2020.

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Following extensive consultation with key stakeholders, the new Performance and Improvement Framework for local authorities that came into force, in April 2020, will be collected as planned for the 2020/21 financial year. Given the unprecedented circumstances of the last financial year, the collections will be a chance for local authorities to continue the developments necessary to fulfil the new requirements and allow Welsh Government to pilot the collections to understand the success of implementation. All data collected this year will be classed as experimental data and not official statistics.

Phase 2 of the performance and improvement framework will also commence shortly, including the commissioning of a partner to assist Welsh Government in developing guidance for the collection and analysis of data on experience and outcomes of people who receive care and support and unpaid carers who need support. Work also continues on the development of additional resources on utilising evidence to drive improvement, including undertaking and involvement in research projects on unpaid care.

Welsh Government has asked Social Care Wales to deliver the second phase of A Strategic Approach to Social Care Data in Wales, to continue the work carried out as part of the Discovery Report in December 2020. Social Care Wales will continue to work in partnership with Digital Health and Care Wales and with the assistance of KPMG to undertake this work with stakeholders from across the sector, including those with lived experience.

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