

ELGC COV 44

Ymchwiliad i COVID-19 a'i effaith

Inquiry into COVID-19 and its impact

Ymateb gan: Carers Wales

Reponse from: Carers Wales



**Response from Carers Wales, June 2020**

**Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee**

**Scrutiny of COVID19 and its Impact**

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Carers Wales welcomes the Committee's inquiry into the Covid19 outbreak and its impact.

Carers Wales is part of Carers UK. Established in 1965, we have led the unpaid carers' movement for over 50 years. We are a responsive, expert charity, led by carers, for carers and with carers. As the UK's only national membership charity for unpaid carers, we are highly respected in our field. Since our inception, we have been campaigning with carers, transforming understanding and winning critical developments in carers rights.

### **Carers in Wales**

According to You Gov polling in 2019, there were almost 400,000 unpaid carers in Wales<sup>i</sup> (at the 2011 census in there were 369,186 carers). Of these carers 87,173 were aged 65+ and 131,120 were aged 50-64. It is worth noting that carers are not a homogenous group and will have different needs depending on their caring situation and caring responsibilities.

Since the Covid19 pandemic, new research by Carers UK<sup>ii</sup> suggests that an additional 196,000 people are caring for an older, disabled or seriously ill relative or friends bringing the total number of carers in Wales to over 683,000.

112,000 women (57%) and 84,000 men (43%) have started caring for friends or relatives. Some have been supporting loved ones from afar, helping with food shopping, collecting medicine, managing finances and providing reassurance and emotional support during the pandemic, whilst others have taken on 24/7 care responsibilities, including providing personal care.

98,000 people in Wales (50%) who have started caring since the outbreak are also juggling paid work alongside their caring responsibilities. This highlights a need for working carers to be able to access support from health and social care as and when they return to work.

Furthermore, Carers UK's Caring Behind Closed Doors report April 2020<sup>iii</sup> highlights the reality that is being faced by carers across the whole of the UK and identifies the practical pressures and support that carers need from health and social care services.

Before the crisis, carers were already providing substantial hours of care but the Caring Behind Closed Doors report highlights that in Wales 79% of carers are now providing more care, with over a third 36% providing more care because of local services they have relied on have closed or reduced their hours.

For carers across Wales, the type of care they are providing has also changed due to changes in circumstances, changes in services they relied on or the needs of the person they care for. 73% of carers are providing more help with emotional support, motivation or 'keeping an eye on' or checking the person they care for.

57% of carers in Wales said that the pressure of being responsible and for keeping the person they care for safe agreed with the statement "I feel overwhelmed and I am worried that I'm going to burnout in the coming weeks".

Wales Equality Network report on unpaid care in Wales states

- Just half of female carers manage to combine their caring role with a paid job.
- Female carers who do have a job are nearly three times more likely to work part-time than male carers (46% compared with 16%)
- Female carers who work provide more hours of unpaid care than working male carers. The prevalence of unpaid care is such that 1 in 20 (5%) of the total female workforce provides more than 50 hours of care a week.
- Caring responsibilities also increase the likelihood of a female leaving her job – in the UK 17% of unemployed females left their last job to care for someone compared to only 1% of men.
- In Wales, more than half (53%) of carers who'd left their jobs said it was because of the stress of juggling everything<sup>iv</sup>.

## **Equality issues for unpaid carers**

### **More women than men provide unpaid care**

Carers, although not a protected characteristic in their own right, can claim discrimination due to their association with a disabled person.<sup>v</sup>

The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee undertook an inquiry into the impact of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, its findings were published on November 2019 and made 31 recommendations to Welsh Government. These recommendations should be taken forward immediately and would benefit all carers but potentially would help those carers with protected characteristics who are already disadvantaged because of their caring responsibilities. Now more than ever, carers need to be identified at the earliest opportunity and the recommendations around identification, the provision of information, advice and support. Carers Wales Track the Act Briefing 4 indicated that only 45% of people who responded to the survey had seen or been given information to help them care. During the current pandemic, given that our research suggests that 98,000 people have started caring we are concerned that the vast majority of these carers will not have seen or have accessed information.

We are hearing carers saying that since the pandemic they are feeling invisible and that their contribution is largely going unrecognised. There needs to be an urgent and clear distinction between the difference between a paid care worker and an unpaid family carer in

all messages coming out of Government and all relevant Government departments, including how unpaid carers can access support.

The Covid19 pandemic outbreak has brought into stark focus the need to support carers and the people they support. With the health and social care system under significant pressure, local services that carers have relied on have been closed and carers have had to, without choice, take on the extra caring responsibilities that have implications for their own health and well-being as well as employment.

Working carers who are shielding with the people they are for are likely to have been furloughed. Carers are now raising concerns with us about what will happen if they still cannot work and have no access to the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention scheme and whether carers will be discriminated against because of their association with disability if they cannot work.

Social Care Wales and Data Cymru report<sup>vi</sup> on the social care workforce shows that 82% of the social care workforce are female. Given that it is estimated that 1 in 7 people provide care, there will be many women in the social care workforce in Wales also providing unpaid care. Many of these women may be shielding with those they care for and 'furloughed' under the UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention scheme. This has obvious implications for the provision of care and without adequate support unpaid carers may also not be able to return to the workforce.

Caring also has long-term financial consequences, as carers' low incomes mean they are unable to make provision for their future needs. In Wales, more than a third of male and female carers (36%) who had left work to care said they would not be able to save for a pension. Carers unable to contribute to a pension through an employer's scheme or their own savings face older age reliant on a low state pension. In addition, nearly half of carers of both genders said they were unable to save for their own future care because of giving up their jobs.<sup>vii</sup>

■■■■ a carer *"Due to the fact that my brother needs 24hr care and cannot be left alone it means that I have to be available for every hour that we don't have carers working. I have carers for 48 hours a week and daycentre for 24hours a week which leaves the other 96 hours a weeks for me to have to be available to physically provide care for my brother.*

*I have no future plans because living on benefits means you live day to day, you are so busy concentrating on surviving and making sure you don't get into financial strife you really don't have the energy to look to the future, the future brings nothing but fear so I just live to survive another day providing the best I can for my brother while I'm able".*

Recent research carried out by the Universities of Sheffield and Birmingham in partnership with Carers UK, suggests that unpaid carers are twice as likely as the general public to have relied on a foodbank during the Covid-19 pandemic<sup>viii</sup> The research demonstrates how difficult life is for unpaid carers who are providing more care for disabled relatives and friends during the pandemic.

The Social Services and Well-being Wales Act states that where it appears to a local authority that a carer may have needs they should be offered an assessment. This assessment should include and have regard as to whether a carer works, wishes to work or undertake any leisure or education activities. From Carers Wales Track the Act Briefing 4 85% of carers said they had not had a carers needs assessment in the past 12 months with 7 in 10 saying they had not received an assessment since the Act's implementation. Additionally, only 45% had seen information to help with their caring role with 45% saying they had received advice. Having an assessment, or receiving information and advice at the most appropriate time can mean the difference between carers staying in employment or giving up work.

### **Pro-active work undertaken to represent carers needs and concerns**

Wales Carers Alliance is an alliance of Welsh charities that exists to uphold unpaid carers rights and champion the voice of carers across Wales. The Carers Wales Director is currently Chair and has written two letters to Welsh Government highlighting the key issues and concerns carers have raised with Alliance members as a result of Covid19. Many of the issues raised are in direct relation to social services and health – links to which can be found here - <https://www.carersuk.org/wales/news-campaigns/news/wales-carers-alliance-sends-letter-to-welsh-government-on-the-impact-on-unpaid-carers> and <https://www.carersuk.org/wales/news-campaigns/news/wales-carers-alliance-responds-to-welsh-government-response-to-covid-19-letter><sup>ix</sup>.

Our Director also wrote a letter on behalf of the Wales Carers Alliance to the Chief Medical Officer for Wales. Again, this summarises concerns raised by carers. The letter can be found here: <https://www.carersuk.org/wales/news-campaigns/news/wales-carers-alliance-responds-to-welsh-government-response-to-covid-19-letter>

### **Next Steps**

There needs to be a clear post lockdown strategy and real consideration of what happens to enable carers to transition back into some sort of a normal life, ensuring that they have all the emotional and practical support they need. Our Director has written a response to Welsh Government on their Roadmap document and considerations for unpaid carers. <https://www.carersuk.org/wales/news-campaigns/news/wales-carers-alliance-thoughts-regarding-welsh-government-recovery-roadmap>

Where issues continue to arise for carers we will highlight them to the Committee.

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<sup>i</sup> Carers UK – Getting Carers Connected – Carers Week 2019 research

<sup>ii</sup> Carers UK – The rise in the number of unpaid carers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

<sup>iii</sup> Caring behind closed doors – Forgotten families in the coronavirus outbreak April 2020

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.wenwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/6033-WEN-Unpaid-Care-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/work-and-career/other-rights-at-work/discrimination-under-the-equality-act-2010>

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vi Social Care workforce – workforce data collection 2017 - [https://socialcare.wales/cms\\_assets/file-uploads/Commissioned-services-final-report-2017-2018-Eng.pdf](https://socialcare.wales/cms_assets/file-uploads/Commissioned-services-final-report-2017-2018-Eng.pdf)

vii Carers Wales (2014) State of Caring 2014.

viii [https://www.carersuk.org/images/publications/Caring and COVID-19 Hunger and mental wellbeing.pdf](https://www.carersuk.org/images/publications/Caring_and_COVID-19_Hunger_and_mental_wellbeing.pdf)

ix The impact of Coronavirus on unpaid carers – Wales Carers Alliance letters - <https://www.carersuk.org/wales/news-campaigns/news/wales-carers-alliance-sends-letter-to-welsh-government-on-the-impact-on-unpaid-carers> and <https://www.carersuk.org/wales/news-campaigns/news/wales-carers-alliance-responds-to-welsh-government-response-to-covid-19-letter><sup>ix</sup>.