



# State of Caring in Scotland 2024

## **Paid work and access to employment for unpaid carers**

February 2025



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# Introduction

An unpaid carer is someone who provides care and support to a family member, partner, friend, or neighbour who is disabled, has an illness or long-term condition, who needs extra help as they get older or is affected by addiction. This support could be a few hours a week, or it could be round the clock care and can include, for example, assisting with daily tasks like bathing, dressing and eating, managing medication and providing emotional support.

Scotland's Census 2022<sup>1</sup> found that there are 627,700 unpaid carers in Scotland and that more carers are providing longer hours of care each week. Carers Scotland believe that this still underestimates the true number of unpaid carers. Often people do not identify themselves as a carer; many consider caring as part of family life and see themselves primarily as a partner, wife, son, sibling, cousin, parent or a close friend. As a result, they can miss out on vital support. With Scotland's population ageing and more people living longer with multiple health conditions, and at the same time, our health and social care systems struggling to meet demand, this carer population will inevitably continue to grow in years to come.

Being able to be in paid work alongside a caring role can provide important financial security for unpaid carers, not only to help with the day-to-day costs of living and additional costs they face in their caring role but also to support their health and wellbeing and give the ability to save for their future.

However, juggling paid employment and caring can be stressful without sufficient support from social care services and from employers. This lack of support also means that too many unpaid carers are forced to give up work to care or, for those able to remain in employment, having to substantially reduce their working hours or take on lower paid or less senior roles to fit with their caring responsibilities.

State of Caring is Scotland's most comprehensive annual research into the lives and experiences of unpaid carers and, in 2024, it heard from 1561 carers, including 801 who were of working age, and with 463 of those in paid employment<sup>2</sup>.

This report seeks to highlight the challenges for unpaid carers in paid employment and for those seeking to return to employment and makes a range of recommendations for governments, the public sector, and employers on action to better support unpaid carers.

## Thank you

Carers Scotland would like to thank every unpaid carer who contributed to this survey, from those who helped us develop and test the survey to every person who took the trouble and time to tell us about their experiences. Your experiences will be used to help Carers Scotland's work to campaign for a society that recognises and supports carers effectively.

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<sup>1</sup> Scotland's Census 2022 - Health, disability and unpaid care, National Records of Scotland (2024)

<sup>2</sup> A demographic breakdown of respondents can be found in Appendix 1.

## Caring and employment

In Scotland, an estimated 270,000<sup>3</sup> people manage paid work alongside their caring role.

However, the population of carers is not static. Every year the 340,000 people in Scotland become unpaid carers and a similar number of people will see their caring role come to an end. Of those that become a carer every year 150,000 will be in employment<sup>4</sup>.

Being unable to be in paid work can have significant and long-lasting impacts for unpaid carers, particularly for their financial security.

Research shows the profound impact of caring on unpaid carers' finances, and their ability to save for the future. This contributes to more than a quarter (28%) of unpaid carers living in poverty, 56% higher than those without caring responsibilities<sup>5</sup>. One of the major drivers of this poverty is that long hours of unpaid care without the right support make it difficult for carers to stay in paid employment.

Giving up paid work to care or reducing working hours often results in unpaid carers being at a higher risk of living in poverty and becoming reliant on social security benefits. Nearly six in 10 unpaid carers in receipt of Carer's Allowance/Carer Support Payment and 65% of those in receipt of income related benefits such as Universal Credit are living in poverty<sup>6</sup>.

The vital role of employment in reducing financial struggle is clear in State of Caring 2024. Unpaid carers in employment were 55% less likely to be struggling to make ends meet compared to carers who were not in employment. One in 6 (17%) unpaid carers in paid employment were struggling to make ends meet versus 30% of those who were not in employment.

However, the benefits of being able to be in paid work are not limited to financial security but also bring opportunities to meet carers' broader needs such as having a fulfilling career, positive mental health, and regular social interaction<sup>7</sup>.

Carers Scotland research found that many unpaid carers want to be in employment for a wide variety of reasons – both financial and non-financial - including to lead a life beyond their caring role, to put their



<sup>3</sup> Carer Positive: Carers and Employment: [www.carerpositive.org/carers-and-employment](http://www.carerpositive.org/carers-and-employment) from Scotland's Census 2011

<sup>4</sup> Cycles of caring: transitions in and out of unpaid care. Carers UK (2023)

<sup>5</sup> Poverty and financial hardship of unpaid carers in Scotland, Carers UK, WPI Economics and abrdn Financial Fairness Trust (2024)

<sup>6</sup> Poverty and financial hardship of unpaid carers in the UK, Carers UK, WPI Economics and abrdn Financial Fairness Trust (2024)

<sup>7</sup> Van der Noordt, M., Ijzelenberg, H., Droomers, M., & Proper, K. I. (2014) Health effects of employment: a systematic review of prospective studies

skills and education to use, to pursue their passion in a specific field, to meet new people and to increase their household income<sup>8</sup>.

Some of these positive benefits of being in paid employment are reflected in State of Caring 2024. For example, unpaid carers in employment were 32% more likely to be in good or very good mental health than those carers not in paid work (22% v 16%). However, a lack of flexibility and support from employers and social care services and reduced employment choices can undermine these positive outcomes, as can their caring experiences alongside their paid employment. Nearly eight in 10 carers in employment are still not experiencing good mental health, which can have significant consequences.

Caring responsibilities often can change, with responsibilities growing or reducing, for example, when a disabled child starts full-time education, or when a parent becomes frailer. This means that as caring roles begin, change and end, effective systems are needed for those in employment and for those seeking to return to employment.

The following chapters provide further detail and outline the challenges of remaining in and returning to paid work for unpaid carers.

## Unpaid carers and paid work in State of Caring 2024

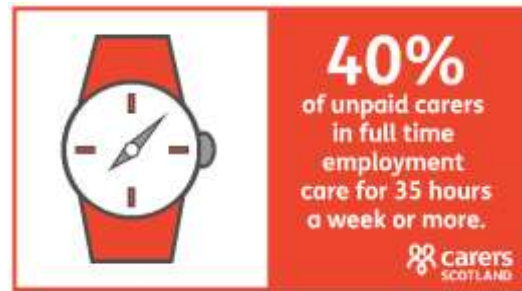
A total of 463 unpaid carers who responded to State of Caring 2024 were in paid employment and 801 were of working age.

Just over a quarter (29%) of all respondents to State of Caring 2024 were in paid employment. The remaining 71% of respondents were not in paid employment due to caring responsibilities, ill health or disability or were retired. Just over half (51%) of respondents were of working age. The majority of information in the following sections relates to unpaid carers in paid work and working age carers unless otherwise indicated. Table 1 below provides a breakdown of status for unpaid carers in paid work and carers of working age.

<i>Table 1</i>	Unpaid carers in paid work	Unpaid carers of working age
Full-time employee	51%	28%
Part-time employee	41%	22%
Self-employed (full-time)	3%	1%
Self-employed (part-time)	5%	3%
Retired	—	7%
Seeking work	—	2%
In full or part-time education	—	1%
Unable to work due to sickness or disability		9%
Looking after home, family, dependents full-time	—	27%

<sup>8</sup> Unlocking the door: How to make paid employment a meaningful choice for unpaid carers in Scotland, Carers Scotland (2024)

A significant number of unpaid carers in paid work were balancing substantial caring roles with their employment. Four in 10 (40%) carers in full time employment were caring for 35 hours a week or more the equivalent of another full-time job. A similar number (39%) of carers in part-time employment reported caring for an astonishing **90 hours or more** each week alongside their paid role.



The figures in Table 1 mask a difference in full and part-time employment rates for unpaid carers responding to State of Caring 2024 who were in paid work at the time. Carers in the survey were less likely to be in full-time employment and more likely to be in part-time employment the longer they cared. More than two thirds (69%) of carers who had been caring for up to 2 years were in full-time and 24% in part-time employment. However, this compares to just under half (49%) of the carers who had been caring for 10-19 years who were in full-time and 47% in part-time employment. For those who had cared for 20 years or more, just over a third (39%) were in full-time and 56% were in part-time employment.

A similar, though lesser, impact on rates of full-time and part-time employment emerged for the number of hours of care provided each week. Nearly three quarters (71%) of unpaid carers who were providing up to 20 hours of care were in full-time employment and 25% were in part-time roles. However, full-time employment reduced steadily. Half (55%) of those caring 35-49 hours were in full-time and 35% in part-time employment and 47% who cared for 50 hours or more were in full-time and 58% part-time employment.

With such levels of caring responsibility alongside paid work, ensuring that unpaid carers have the right support from social care services and their employers is vital to protecting their health and wellbeing.

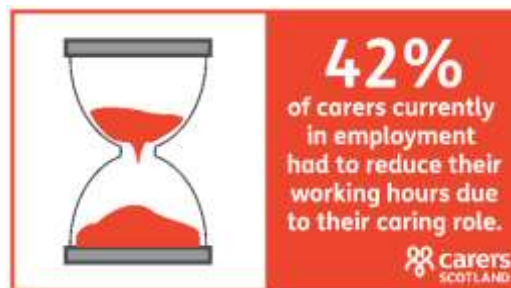
## The impact of juggling paid work and care

Often with significant caring roles, many unpaid carers are forced to reduce hours, give up paid work or retire early.

### Reducing hours of paid work

Many unpaid carers responding to State of Caring 2024 reported that they struggled to juggle work and care, especially when they are not given enough support. Four in 10 (44%) carers in paid work said they often felt overwhelmed by their caring role, with 72% saying they found it stressful to juggle work and care.

Facing these circumstances, some are forced to choose to reduce their working hours, with 42% of unpaid carers currently in paid employment saying they had reduced their working hours due to their caring role. Female carers in employment were 47% more likely to say they had reduced their working hours to care than male carers (45% compared with 28%). Over a quarter (28%) of working age carers said that they had reduced their hours at some point in their career.



Unpaid carers providing greater hours of care were also more likely to say that they had reduced their paid employment hours, with more than half (56%) of carers in paid employment who are caring for 35 hours a week or more saying they had reduced their working hours. This is 87% higher than those who are caring for less than 20 hours each week<sup>9</sup>.

And often unpaid carers in paid employment find that their opportunities to progress, increase their earnings and grow their careers are limited due to their caring responsibilities. One in 5 (21%) of carers in paid work said that they had to take on a lower paid or more junior role to fit around their caring responsibilities.

*“I now have two full time jobs - one work [and the] other caring, and no days off for three years”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

*“Hesitant to apply for promotion as it may affect my ability to care”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

## Giving up paid employment to care

When unpaid carers do not get the support they need to balance paid work and unpaid care, many are forced to give up paid employment completely.

A third (34%) of working age carers responding to the survey had given up employment at some point because of the challenges of juggling paid work with their caring responsibilities, with two thirds (65%) of those currently not in employment saying they had had to give up work to care. Another 18% of working age carers said that they have never been able to work because of their caring role. One in 7 (14%) said it was difficult to get a job because of their caring responsibilities.



Many of the carers who had given up work to care said it was because it was too stressful to combine caring with paid employment.

<sup>9</sup> 22% of carers caring for less than 20 hours have had to reduce their working hours.

*“My caring role significantly affected my health to the point I had to give up work”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

*“I had a mental breakdown trying to work and care.”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

There are obvious impacts to giving up paid employment, including on unpaid carers' income. More than a third (39%) of carers who have given up work to care said they were struggling to make ends meet, compared with 24% of all carers.

*“I expect to declare bankruptcy.”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

*“Life is tough. All I do is worry, living in a world of worry”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

## Retiring early

One in 14 (7%) carers of working age that responded to the survey had retired early and one in 5 (21%) carers in paid employment said they had changed their plans for retirement because of their caring role. Furthermore, a third (31%) of those aged 65 and over said that, in the past, their retirement plans had changed, as a result of their caring role

The intensity and, sometimes distance, of caring responsibilities were reasons given for retiring early but for some, the long-term impact of caring on their own health meant that they were forced to retire early on health grounds.

*“I retired 6 years early to care for my parents (at a significant distance)  
in addition to my daughter”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

*“I retired ages 55 due to my own health issues.  
Caring for my son has had a negative impact on my health”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

This impact of caring responsibilities on health is one that has been consistently highlighted by unpaid carers. For example, consistently around a quarter of carers in State of Caring surveys<sup>10</sup> have said their physical health and/or mental health were bad or very bad, with impacts including anxiety and depression and physical injury as a result of their caring.

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<sup>10</sup> Including State of Caring surveys 2021-2023



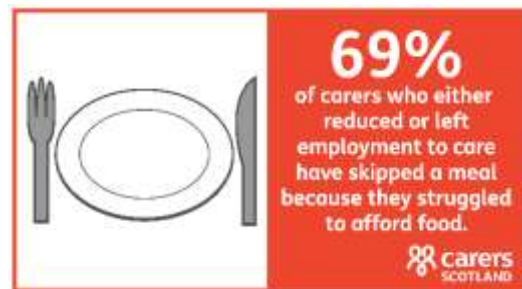
The House of Lords' 2022 inquiry<sup>10</sup> into the Labour Force found that earlier retirement, sickness and ill health were part of four factors that have made it harder for employers to fill. This can impact on growth and the economy but for unpaid carers, earlier retirement and giving up work to care, including on health grounds, has a clear personal and financial impact. It is crucial therefore for unpaid carers, society and economy, that governments and employers provide the right support at all stages of a carer's caring journey to prevent ill health and loss of employment, for the wellbeing of our society and economy, as well as the wellbeing of carers themselves.



## Impact on income and health

As noted earlier, reducing hours or having to give up work to care has obvious and negative impacts on carers' incomes. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation<sup>11</sup> estimated that unpaid carers experienced a loss of income after six years of caring of £628 per month, more than £8,000 per year.

The consequences of this income penalty are significant for many carers. The majority (69%) responding to this survey who had either reduced working hours or given up paid employment due to their caring role said they had skipped a meal because they have struggled to afford food. A further 67% said that they were worried about living costs and whether they could manage in the future.



Amongst the concerns that unpaid carers face is being unable to save for their future, for example, in an occupational or private pension. Over half (57%) of carers who reduced their paid employment hours and 34% of working age carers said that they have not been able to save as much, on indeed anything, for their retirement.

*"I have no savings, no pension plan, zilch"*  
[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

*"Our savings are getting depleted and my pension will be less than if I'd continued in paid work."*  
[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

There are a range of factors that contribute to the physical and mental health of unpaid carers including financial security, access to support including both health and social care services and social connections.

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation [estimated](#) that unpaid carers experience an average pay penalty of nearly £5,000 per year rising to nearly £8,000 per year after six years of providing unpaid care. (2023)

Being in paid employment may have positive outcomes for health and wellbeing for unpaid carers. An indication of this can be seen in some State of Caring 2024 results, which found that 22% of unpaid carers in paid work had good or very good mental health compared to just 8% of working age carers who were not in employment. A similar difference existed for physical health with 31% of those in paid work saying their health was good or very good compared to just 15% of those not in paid work.

National programmes which aim to tackle inequality and improve the health of the population must recognise and respond more effectively to the health impacts of caring responsibilities. This should include ensuring that those unpaid carers who wish to retain or return to employment are better supported to do so.

## Helping unpaid carers to juggle paid work and care

Each day around 1000 people in Scotland will become unpaid carers and 44% of those will be in paid employment.<sup>12</sup>

The number of unpaid carers is likely to increase as our society ages and with people reaching State Pension age later, more carers will be managing caring alongside paid work. Therefore, it is more important than ever that there is effective support for unpaid carers to remain in paid employment.

### Employer Support

In Scotland's Census 2022<sup>13</sup>, the biggest increase in unpaid carers was in those aged 50-64 years, which will often include employees who have built up valuable knowledge and experience over their working career. Employers can make a significant difference by supporting unpaid carers to juggle paid work and care.

However, a lack of support can make it difficult, if not impossible, for unpaid carers to do so. State of Caring 2024 found that almost one in 8 (13%) carers said they had difficulties meeting their employer's requirements because of caring responsibilities, Worryingly, nearly one in 10 (9%) carers currently in paid work said they have been treated unfavourably and a similar proportion (8%) had been excluded at work because of their caring responsibilities.

Given the criticality of receiving the right support, we asked unpaid carers what support in the workplace currently helps or would help to better balance work and care. Carers were able to select some or all of the options.

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<sup>12</sup> Carers UK (2023) Cycles of caring: transitions in and out of unpaid care. <https://www.carersuk.org/media/bgolg5u2/cuk-carers-rights-day-research-report-2022-web.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Scotland's Census 2022 - Health, disability and unpaid care, National Records of Scotland (2024)

### **Employer support that currently helps carers manage paid work and caring:**

- 74% said having an understanding line manager.
- 68% said flexible working.
- 61% said working from home.
- 58% said recognition from their employer of their caring role.

### **Employer support that carers would like but do not currently have:**

- 70% would like to have paid carers leave.
- 24% would like to have unpaid carers leave.
- 81% said they would like to have a carers passport, which is a record that identifies you as a carer in the workplace and sets out what support will be provided.
- 50% would like a peer support network.

Many employers, including organisations that are part of our [Carer Positive](#)<sup>14</sup> network, do recognise the importance of supporting employees who are unpaid carers and have already introduced policies to do so. The Carer Positive award is presented to employers in Scotland who have a working environment where carers are valued and supported. Carer Positive employers recognise the importance of retaining experienced members of staff, reducing absence, and cutting down on avoidable recruitment costs.



Over 520,000 employees in Scotland currently work for a Carer Positive employer. However, it is crucial that more workplaces consider how they can support their carer employees effectively, therefore improving wellbeing, reducing absence, retaining experienced staff and decreasing costs.

## **Wider eligibility for Carer Support Payment**

Carer Support Payment (CSP) is a new benefit that has replaced Carer's Allowance (CA) in Scotland. Currently all new claims are made for CSP, with existing claimants of CA transferred to the new benefit between 2024 and early 2025. It is the main benefit for unpaid carers in Scotland and is just £81.90 a week (2024-25 rates) to those who meet a range of eligibility criteria<sup>15,16</sup>. As part of this criteria, unpaid carers must be providing at least 35 hours of care each week.

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<sup>14</sup> Carer Positive is an award for employers who support employees who are unpaid carers [www.carerpositive.org](http://www.carerpositive.org)

<sup>15</sup> Carers in Scotland also receive Carer's Allowance Supplement which is a payment of £288.60 paid two times each year to people on Carer's Allowance or Carer Support Payment. [www.mygov.scot/carers-allowance-supplement](http://www.mygov.scot/carers-allowance-supplement)

<sup>16</sup> How Carer Support Payment works, Scottish Government (2024), [www.mygov.scot/carers-support-payment](http://www.mygov.scot/carers-support-payment)

The earnings threshold is currently £151 per week<sup>17</sup>. This means that carers can earn no more than this amount (after deductions). Just pennies more in earnings in a week means losing Carer Support Payment completely. This low threshold is equivalent to just 13 hours at the National Living Wage and can have a massive impact on carers in employment, including restricting them to low wage work.

Nearly three quarters (72%)<sup>18</sup> of unpaid carers in paid employment said that they had been unable to work more hours or take on higher paid work due to the earnings threshold for Carer Support Payment/Carer's Allowance.

*“I have never been able to claim Carer's Allowance due to earnings threshold. I'm considering giving up my job due to stress and then I could claim [Carer Support Payment].”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

Priorities for the Scottish Government for improving Carer Support Payment have initially focused on extending the benefit to most unpaid carers in full-time education and, in its next phase of improvements, aims to increase the time it is paid to a carer after the cared-for person dies and to deliver an additional payment for those who care for more than one person. It is clear, however, that action to ensure that the earnings threshold under CSP does not restrict the employment choices of carers.

## Social Care

The role of social care in supporting unpaid carers in employment has been highlighted over many years in our State of Caring research. Good quality social care can be the difference between being able to stay in employment or having to give up paid work. Nearly two thirds (64%) of respondents in employment said that having access to more affordable, accessible and reliable replacement social care for the person they care for would help them better manage paid work and caring.

Forty eight percent of unpaid carers said better quality services for the person they care for was one their highest needs and four in 10 (44%) carers in paid work said an increased choice of services was needed, with a third (32%) of carers saying that support services not being able to meet their needs was the biggest challenge they faced in the next 12 months.

Many unpaid carers in paid employment expressed frustration about social care services. More than three in 5 (64%) had experience of support services that were not available when they needed them and 59% had experienced long waits for assessments, reviews, care or support.

*“We have requested what we see as minimal support to allow me to work and no progress in 8 months.”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

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<sup>17</sup> The Scottish Government in its draft 2025/26 budget have committed to increase this to £196 per week which will be equivalent to 16 hours at the National Living Wage.

<sup>18</sup> This is a similar proportion (74%) for all respondents of working age.

*“The sheer mind-blowing complexity of navigating through social care red tape is soul destroying.”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

Four in 10 (41%) unpaid carers expressed concerns over the quality of care provided and nearly half (49%) said there was a lack of consistency in who is providing care.

*“Communication poor, appears to be no hand over between carers therefore no understanding of care needs”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

*“Social work difficult to contact and staff turnover is high”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

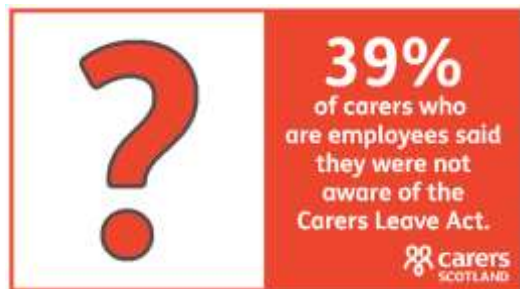
Recently, proposed legislative change which aimed to improve social care provision through the creation of a National Care Service failed to gather sufficient support in the Scottish Parliament. However, the Scottish Government has recently committed to work with others to develop key elements of in an amended Bill to seek improvements, including delivering a right to a break from caring for unpaid carers. This is welcome but it is clear from the results of State of Caring that significant investment and reform is needed to support all sectors to deliver the social care that unpaid carers and those they care for need.

## Carer’s leave and new rights around flexible working

The Carer’s Leave Act (2023) came into effect on 6 April 2024.

The Act gives employees in Scotland the right to take up to 5 days of unpaid leave each year if they provide or arrange care for someone. This legal right to take carer’s leave is available from the first day of employment.

We asked unpaid carers who are employees whether they were aware of this new legislation. Four in 10 (43%) said they were aware of the legislation and how it affects them, and 19% said they had heard of it but didn’t know much about it.



Given that this is a legal right for unpaid carers, it is concerning that 39% of carers said they were not aware of it. This shows that there is still much more that employers and governments need to do to ensure that there is much greater awareness of this new right.

The Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act (2023) was introduced at the same time as the Carer’s Leave Act. This gave employees new rights to ask their employer for flexible working from day one of their employment and to make two statutory flexible working requests in any

12-month period. State of Caring 2024 found that there was a similar level of awareness of these rights as for was for the Carer's Leave Act. Just under half (45%) of carer employees knew about these rights but 37% were not aware of them.

State of Caring 2024 also asked unpaid carers whether their employer had introduced any changes following the introduction of the new legislation on unpaid carer's leave and flexible working. More than a quarter (28%) said that their employer had updated the organisation's policy on unpaid carer's leave and 19% said that information or advice about unpaid carer's leave had been shared with employees. A similar proportion (26%) said that their employer had updated the organisation's policy on flexible working and 22% said that information or advice about flexible working had been shared with employees.

Whilst some employers had updated their policies and/or shared information about the new legislation, many employers had not done so. Nearly half (47%) of unpaid carer employees said that they were not sure what their employer had done in the wake of legislative changes. Perhaps more concerningly, one in 7 (14%) said that their employer has not introduced any changes. Some comments from carers suggest that some employers are not holding up these new rights effectively.

*"My employer has introduced these measures but my line manager is blocking them. I am being treated unfairly by a local authority employer. I can't take part time although many others do. I've been made to feel like I'm being the difficult one"*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

*"Can only get carers leave if this is an emergency situation"*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

## **Carers' experiences of unpaid carer's leave and flexible working**

Only 13% of carers in paid employment said they have taken unpaid carer's leave since it was introduced. We asked carers who had not taken unpaid carer's leave, what the barriers were that prevented them from doing so. More than half (53%) said that they could not afford to take unpaid carer's leave and needed paid carer's leave instead, with 7% saying that, when they had taken unpaid carer's leave, it had had a negative impact on their finances.

*"Took annual leave so I would not be impacted financially"*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

*"I used paid holiday when I had an emergency"*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

It is concerning that so many unpaid carers say they are unable to use this new statutory right to carer's leave as it is not financially viable for them to take unpaid time off to care. This highlights the need for paid carer's leave.

There is insufficient awareness of both the rights and non-financial barriers in place. One in 5 (21%) said they did not know they had a right to take unpaid carer's leave, while 8% did not know how to request this leave and 15% said they were worried their manager or colleagues would respond negatively to their request. A very small minority of carers said their employer said they could not take any unpaid carer's leave or didn't have any rights to unpaid carer's leave (2%).

These responses make clear that much more needs to be done to raise awareness of rights to unpaid carer's leave and flexible working **and** to reduce barriers for carers accessing in their rights.

## Supporting unpaid carers to return to paid employment

Some unpaid carers who have given up work to care are keen to return to work, either for financial reasons or because they feel it would improve their health and wellbeing.

However, there are barriers in place preventing them from doing so which include social care, support from social security and self-confidence.

### Replacement care and social care

State of Caring 2024 asked unpaid carers who are not in employment what, if anything, might prevent them from returning to paid employment. Nearly two thirds (64%) said that being unable to find suitable replacement social care was a fundamental issue to overcome. For some, the reliability of this replacement care had directly contributed to giving up paid work to care.

*“[I was} promised a lunchtime visit, then had it cancelled due to ‘[the] cared-for person’s ‘variable and complex needs. This meant I had to leave paid employment.”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

These findings are similar to previous research by Carers Scotland and the University of Strathclyde which considered employability support and help for unpaid carers to return to paid employment<sup>19</sup>. In this research, the critical role of social care in providing a foundation for carers to return to paid work was emphasised. This research, which included a survey of 320 unpaid carers, found that four in 10 (42%) carers said that a lack of access to social care and replacement care was a barrier to a return to paid work and a third (30%) said that not having the funding to pay for such replacement care was also a barrier<sup>20</sup>.

Almost a third (31%) of unpaid carers in State of Caring 2024 who had given up paid employment to care said that the person they care for did not want them to return to paid work. Four in 10 (42%) carers who had given up employment said this was due to the fact they had a

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<sup>19</sup> Unlocking the door: How to make paid employment a meaningful choice for unpaid carers in Scotland, Carers Scotland (2024)

<sup>20</sup> Unlocking the door: How to make paid employment a meaningful choice for unpaid carers in Scotland, Carers Scotland (2024)

long-term health condition or disability themselves. Some carers said the poor health they experienced had been exacerbated by caring and they simply did not feel well enough to return to work alongside their caring role.

*“Poor mental health due to my caring situation”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

*“I am too exhausted to return to work!”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

Again, these responses are similar to unpaid carers’ views in our previous research which found that the demands of the caring role and carers’ own health needs could be significant barriers to returning to, or managing paid employment<sup>21</sup>. In the research, nearly two thirds (62%) of carers identified that only limited hours of employment were possible due to caring responsibilities and carer focus groups identified many individual health barriers for carers including their own physical disabilities and poor health<sup>22</sup>.

## Social security

A third (37%) of unpaid carers in State of Caring 2024 said that they did not want to lose access to benefits such as Carer’s Allowance/Carer Support Payment (CA/CSP) by exceeding the earnings threshold. This concern is not surprising, given the earnings threshold for the benefit is just £151 per week – around 13 hours at the National Living Wage in 2024/25. Moreover, going over this limit by just a few pence means unpaid carers need to pay back 100% of their CA/CSP for that week.

Research by Carers UK on overpayments in Carer’s Allowance found that many unpaid carers went over the limit unwittingly and despite having the information on carers’ earnings, the DWP did not take swift action in many cases, leading to a build-up of overpayments into very large sums<sup>23</sup>. The average overpayment in the research was £4000 – a huge amount for a carer on low earnings to pay back. Latest data indicates there are 9,112 carers in Scotland with a Carer’s Allowance overpayment debt linked to the earnings limit<sup>24</sup>.

This is a similar theme to our previous research where concerns surrounding the financial impact of securing employment were brought up more frequently in the focus groups by both carers and stakeholders<sup>25</sup>. Carers were concerned about potentially losing access to benefits and not receiving any CA/CSP when going beyond the cap on earnings if they were employed.

Finally, one in 7 (14%) unpaid carers in State of Caring 2024 said that a lack of understanding of the rules around claiming benefits while working was a barrier to returning to paid work. It is

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<sup>21</sup> Unlocking the door: How to make paid employment a meaningful choice for unpaid carers in Scotland, Carers Scotland (2024)

<sup>22</sup> Unlocking the door: How to make paid employment a meaningful choice for unpaid carers in Scotland, Carers Scotland (2024)

<sup>23</sup> [Carer’s Allowance overpayments, Carers UK \(2024\)](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Carer’s Allowance: Overpayments - Question for Department for Work and Pensions](#), UIN 30604, tabled on 11 February 2025

<sup>25</sup> Unlocking the door: How to make paid employment a meaningful choice for unpaid carers in Scotland, Carers Scotland (2024)



therefore vital that Social Security Scotland and local advice agencies do more to support unpaid carers in paid work, or who are considering paid work, to navigate the benefit system.

## Confidence and skills

In State of Caring 2024, unpaid carers expressed a lack of confidence in their skills. A third of carers (33%) said they lacked confidence in their skills, a quarter (25%) said that they were worried that the skills they had gained while caring would not be recognised or valued and a similar proportion (22%) said that not knowing whether employers have policies in place for working carers was a barrier to returning to employment.

Unpaid carers can gain valuable skills when caring, yet many former carers also felt uncertain or unconfident about returning to paid employment, particularly when they had been out of paid work for a long time. State of Caring 2024 asked people whose caring role had come to an end what skills they had gained while caring<sup>26</sup>.



The most reported skills that former carers felt they had gained or improved was resilience (71%), and empathy (70%). Other skills gained included communication (56%), risk management (50%), time management (44%) and partnership working (34%). Several former carers said they have been able to use those skills outside their caring role in employment or by volunteering.

*“Yes, [I am] now a paid carer”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

*“I volunteer for Capital Theatres for people with dementia etc. about 5 times a month and thoroughly enjoy doing so.”*

[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

The skills that many unpaid carers gain as part of their caring role are also core to many paid roles – resilience, empathy, communication, risk management, time management and more – and there are clear opportunities for potential employers to recognise and utilise these skills gained by carers to enhance their paid workforce, and more could be done to support this.

Employability services also have a significant enabling role. This includes supporting unpaid carers to recognise their own skills and to support current and former carers to build confidence and learn new skills to access the paid workforce.

Carers Scotland research found that a majority of unpaid carers had a lack of confidence and a lack of support for their future employment prospects meaning that they had little confidence in

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<sup>26</sup> The 2024 survey was completed by 108 former carers and this section is based upon those responses.

their future<sup>27</sup>. This research found that 41% of surveyed carers felt ‘not at all confident’ for their future employability while 53% did not feel supported ‘at all’.

This research and State of Caring 2024 show there are gaps in support for employment; gaps through which unpaid carers fall. More support is needed to deliver pathways for carers and former carers into sustainable and fair work. These include the need to ensure that they have access to person centred and flexible employability services and skills training (including funded work placements), grants for training and opportunities to gain qualifications for employment.

Both national and local government have opportunities to ensure that they build approaches that include unpaid carers and former carers including ensuring that the barriers they face and the needs they have are reflected in [local employability services](#) and key initiatives such as the [Fair Work Action Plan](#), the [Parental Employability Support Fund](#) and the work of [Skills Development Scotland](#).

## Conclusion

The findings of State of Caring 2024 highlight a clear and urgent need for more support to help unpaid carers to balance their paid work and caring role.

With an estimated 270,000 people<sup>28</sup> in paid employment in Scotland providing unpaid care and 65% of working age carers not currently in employment or forced leave paid work due to their caring responsibilities, it is evident that existing support structures are insufficient.

Moreover, better support is needed for unpaid carers not currently in paid employment. Whilst some carers face barriers to work due to their own long-term health conditions or disabilities, many expressed a strong desire to rejoin the workforce but are hindered by significant obstacles.

Scotland’s Census 2022 revealed that over the past decade, the proportion of people providing over 50 hours of unpaid care weekly increased from 132,082 (2.49%) in 2011 to 152,082 (2.88%) in 2022<sup>29</sup>. As society ages, the demand for unpaid care and demands on the carers will only increase. Yet the urgency of need to more effectively support unpaid carers to retain paid work for their health, wellbeing and financial security **and** for the wellbeing of Scotland’s economy has yet to be fully grasped.

Investing in helping unpaid carers to stay in employment benefits everyone. Employers retain experienced and knowledgeable staff and unpaid carers have the opportunity to boost their

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<sup>27</sup> Unlocking the Door

<sup>28</sup> Carer Positive: Carers and Employment: [www.carerpositive.org/carers-and-employment](http://www.carerpositive.org/carers-and-employment)

<sup>29</sup> National Records of Scotland, (2022) Scotland's Census 2022 - Table UV301 - Provision of unpaid care

incomes and invest in their future. The introduction of the Carer's Leave Act and the Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act mark encouraging steps towards better workplace support for unpaid carers. However, these measures can be inaccessible, as financial constraints prevent many carers from exercising their rights.

State of Caring 2024 underscores the urgent need for a robust, well-funded social care system. Quality social care services would enable more unpaid carers to participate in the labour market and reduce the pressures they face. Currently, funding for social care is inadequate, leaving carers without the support they need.

Additionally, reforms to both the devolved and reserved social security systems are essential by the Scottish and UK Government. Unpaid carers who are unable to work require adequate financial support, and existing barriers within social security that restrict carers' employment options must be dismantled. Whilst raising the earnings threshold for Carer Support Payment to £196 in 2025/26 and uprating annually is a positive step, further action is needed to fully support unpaid carers.

Our research emphasises the need for a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to supporting unpaid carers across Scotland. Addressing this issue through better social care, workplace policies, and financial support will empower unpaid carers and strengthen the social and economic fabric of society.

## Recommendations

Employers across Scotland should:

- Become Carer Positive to grow knowledge and expertise and to show their commitment to supporting employees who are unpaid carers.
- Consider introducing at least 5 days of paid Carer's Leave, following examples of private and public sector employers.
- Collect data on unpaid carers in their workforce to understand the challenges faced by unpaid carers and promote solutions to these challenges.
- Continually raise awareness of the new Carers Leave Act and The Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act. This includes in induction and training of management at all levels.
- Take part in awareness days on caring including Carers Rights Day and Carers Week to promote a greater understanding of unpaid carers and showcase support for carers in the workplace.

The Scottish Government should:

- Review the eligibility rules for Carers Support Payment to ensure that the earnings threshold is reformed in such a way that it better supports unpaid carers to take part in paid work alongside their caring role. Ensure that systems established by Social Security Scotland to prevent overpayments are robust and reviewed regularly.

- Invest in and reform employability services so they are more visible and can better support unpaid carers, including former carers. Unpaid carers must be set as a priority issue for employability services.
- Deliver a Minimum Income Guarantee pilot for unpaid carers that helps carers balance their responsibilities alongside delivering a minimum income level below which they cannot fall.
- Require all public bodies and those in receipt of public contracts to become Carer Positive, in a similar way to requirements to pay the real living wage.
- Ensure that social care reform and investment are at the heart of health and social care reform in Scotland. It is vital the sufficient investment is provided to place social care on an equal footing with the NHS and deliver sustainable care for the future. This should include delivering a right to a break for unpaid carers to protect carers' health and wellbeing.
- Deliver a refreshed national public campaign aimed at increasing awareness, recognition and support for unpaid carers, so that carers can identify themselves and know how to access support and advice, including on rights around paid work and caring.

### The UK Government should:

- Build on the Carer's Leave Act 2023 and build the foundations for turning the existing statutory right to one week's unpaid leave to paid Carer's Leave, through the passage of the Employment Rights Bill.
- Explore opportunities to provide employees with the right to take a longer period of unpaid Carer's Leave of up to 6 months so people do not fall out of the labour market when they have particularly complex and intense periods of unpaid care – for example, when providing end-of-life care.
- Review and implement changes to the reserved social security system to better support unpaid carers to remain in work, removing any aspects that detriment carers.
- Make caring a protected characteristic by updating the Equality Act 2010. Introducing caring as a protected characteristic would strengthen carers' rights to protection from discrimination and harassment in the workplace, and because the protected characteristics are well-known it would further raise the profile of carers.

### Local authorities and health and social care partnerships should:

- Promote the Carer's Leave Act and unpaid carers' employment rights to local employers and business locally to help employers and carers understand their rights and entitlements.
- Consider how the economic potential of investing in social care and in carer support locally can help boost local economies and help unpaid carers remain in paid work.
- Make unpaid carers a clear part of local growth plans, including development of support for local labour markets, bringing together social care and health support, skills support and other interventions to support unpaid carers to remain in and return to work.

## Appendix 1: Demographic breakdown of respondents

The demographic breakdown of carers responding to State of Caring 2024 is as follows:

- 84% of respondents are female, 15% male with the remaining 1% preferring to self-identify as either non-binary or transgender.
- 3% were aged 18-34, 10% are aged 35-44, 24% were aged 45-54, 38% were aged 55-64, and 26% were aged 65+.
- 30% have a disability
- 98% of respondents were white Scottish, Irish or other white; 2% of respondents were black, Asian or minority ethnic.
- 92% of respondents were heterosexual, 4% gay, lesbian or bisexual, the remainder preferred not to say or skipped this question.
- 40% were in some form of employment and 27% were retired.
- 17% also have parental responsibility for a non-disabled child under 18.
- 3% have been caring for less than 1 year, 25% for 1-4 years, 23% for 5-9 years, 25% for 10-20 years and 23% for more than 20 years.
- 17% provide 1-19 hours of care per week, 10% provide 20-34 hours of care per week, 15% for 35-49 hours and 13% for 50-89 hours, 44% provide 90 or more hours of care per week.
- 71% care for one person, 21% care for two people, 6% care for three people and 3% care for four or more people.

### The people unpaid carers care for

Carers responding to State of Caring 2024 provided information about who they care for and the conditions the person(s) live with:

- 35% are caring for a parent/parent-in-law, 32% were caring for a spouse or partner, 39% for a son/daughter/in-law), 9% for another relative and 3% for someone else eg. a friend or neighbour.
- 18% care for someone aged under 18, 23% for someone aged 18-34 years, 25% for someone aged 35-64 and 56% for someone 65 or over

### Respondents were caring for people with a range of health conditions and/or disabilities:

31% Autism, ADHD, or another neurodiversity

26% Mental health condition

24% Neurological condition

21% Incontinence

20% Learning disability

18% Arthritis

11% Other

8% Cancer

7% Urinary disorder

4% Blood disease

3% eating disorder

2% Palliative or end of life care

2% Long COVID

26% Needs that arise from being older

25% Physical disability

24% Dementia

20% Sensory impairment

18% heart disease

13% Diabetes

11% lung disease

8% Bowel disease or disorder

4% kidney disease

3% Addiction

3% ME or chronic fatigue syndrome

2% Liver disease



**Carers Scotland** is Scotland's membership charity for unpaid carers. We work to represent and support the approximately 800,000 people in Scotland who provide unpaid care for ill, older or disabled family members or friends – fighting for increased recognition and support for all carers and to ensure they have a voice in the issues that affect them.

[www.carerscotland.org](http://www.carerscotland.org)

[info@carerscotland.org](mailto:info@carerscotland.org)



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