

# Coalition of Carers Organisations member's statement on the reopening of day centres, short breaks and respite support in Northern Ireland

---

As Carers Week 2022 begins, members of the Coalition of Carers Organisations NI are issuing a joint call for the full reopening of day centres, short breaks and respite support in every Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland.

It is estimated that there are over 290,000 people providing unpaid care in Northern Ireland, and our carer population is very heterogeneous. It includes carers across the age spectrum, from child and young adult carers through to parent carers and carers in older age groups. It includes carers of people with learning disabilities, life-limiting illnesses, mental ill-health and more.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, many of these carers have seen their caring role increase significantly due to the reduction and closure of vital HSC support services. Research in November 2020 estimated that the value of care provided by carers in Northern Ireland during the pandemic was [£19 million per day](#), which equates to a staggering £6.93 billion for a full year.

Despite the enormous contribution they make, many of our carers have spent the last 2+ years struggling through with little-to-no support. Nearly half of carers have faced a [reduction in day services](#) and over a-third have experienced [reduced access to short breaks](#). These services provide a lifeline for many carers, helping them to take a much-needed rest from their caring roles, recharge their batteries and tend to their own health needs.

While life has largely returned to normal for most people in Northern Ireland, many carers are still waiting for the services they desperately rely on to return to full pre-pandemic levels. Their physical health and mental wellbeing continues to suffer, and many are being pushed to exhaustion, burnout and breaking point as a result.

We also know that, in many families, the pandemic meant young carers increasing their caring role for siblings in order to fill the gap left by the lack of family access to respite services. This can have a long-term impact on their education and wellbeing.

This situation is unsustainable. Northern Ireland’s health and social care system would collapse without our unpaid carers, so we need to do everything we can to give them the support and respite they need. Members of the Coalition of Carers Organisations are calling for urgent action to ensure the full reopening of day centres, short breaks and respite support for carers across Northern Ireland. This should be done in a standardised and co-ordinated way across all Health Trusts, with clear timeframes published for the reopening of these services.

