



Carers' Rights Charter

The rights of unpaid carers in Northern Ireland

June 2024



Acknowledgments

Carers NI is indebted to the unpaid carers, carer groups, community and voluntary sector organisations and other expert stakeholders from across Northern Ireland who co-designed this Carers' Rights Charter.

Introduction

There are over 220,000 people providing unpaid carer for sick or disabled family members or friends in Northern Ireland – representing around 1 in 8 adults. ^[1]

Unpaid carers are a diverse population, encompassing child and young adult carers through to carers of pension age – and support people with health conditions like cancer, stroke, progressive neurological conditions and visual impairment, mental ill-health, learning disabilities, terminal illnesses, and more.

For some, their caring role may be for a few hours per week, but for many it is much more and often involves caring around the clock.

Unpaid carers play a pivotal role in the wellbeing of the person they care for and provide savings of £5.8 billion to our Health and Social Care system every year. ^[2] In return, far too many are living lives defined by burnout and ill-health, poverty, stifled education and employment opportunities, a lack of support and uncertain futures. They need a holistic, cross-departmental approach to address these challenges and ensure they enjoy the same rights and opportunities as everyone else in society.

Carers NI worked with unpaid carers and other expert stakeholders to co-produce this Carers' Rights Charter. It outlines the rights which should be afforded to all unpaid carers in Northern Ireland.

¹ Census 2021.

² Carers NI and the Centre for Care (2023). The economic value of unpaid care in Northern Ireland.

Carers' Rights Charter



Every unpaid carer in Northern Ireland should have the right to:

- take regular breaks from caring and wider opportunities to protect their health and wellbeing
- live free from poverty
- be treated as equal partners in the Health and Social Care system
- have equal access to education and employment opportunities
- be given the information and advice they need
- have the right to choose to be a carer.

The right to choose

People should be able to choose if they wish to take on an unpaid caring role and should not feel pressured to do so. They should have choice over the amount and type of support they are able or want to provide.

The right to be proactively recognised as a carer

Unpaid carers should be proactively identified by health and social care practitioners, with recognition of the key role they are undertaking. This will allow the additional rights listed below to be enacted.

The right to information and support

Unpaid carers should be given information, support, and training to assist them in their caring journey and enable them to undertake their caring role. This should be given throughout their caring role and include their rights and entitlements as carers.

The right to maintain your own health and wellbeing

Unpaid carers should be given information and support to maintain their own physical and mental health and wellbeing, social connections and to engage in activities outside of their caring role. This should include the ability to access healthcare for their own health needs, including mental health support.

The right to a break from caring

To maintain their own health and wellbeing, unpaid carers should be given regular, appropriate and timely access to respite services, including short breaks, day care and sitting services.

The right to reliable, accessible, good quality social care for the cared for person

To enable carers to choose whether to take on a caring role, and to maintain their own health and wellbeing and have a life outside of caring, reliable, good quality, accessible support from Health and Social Care services must be available for the cared for person.

The right to an assessment of needs and for identified needs to be met

Unpaid carers should be proactively offered an assessment of their own needs across areas such as health and wellbeing, support, training, finances and future planning. Any needs identified should be met in a timely manner via a support plan.

The right to financial support

Unpaid carers should not suffer financial hardship as a result of their caring role. Support should be provided via the social security system to enable carers to maintain a good standard of living for themselves and the person they care for. Employers and Government should ensure opportunities and support are available to enable carers to enter and maintain employment while caring if they wish to do so.



The right to be treated as expert partners in care

Unpaid carers should be recognised as expert and equal partners in the Health and Social Care system and in all decisions involving the cared for person, including hospital discharge arrangements.

The right to education and further education

Young carers should not be disadvantaged in accessing education. They should be proactively identified in educational settings and supported to maintain their education. Similarly, carers should not be disadvantaged in accessing higher education because of their caring role. They should be supported to progress to higher education via flexibility in the education system and financial support, such as bursaries.

The right to employment opportunities and career progression

Unpaid carers should have the same access to employment opportunities and career progression as their peers – rather than having to take on less qualified jobs, turn down promotion or leave employment because of the demands of caring. The support necessary to facilitate this – including flexible working and paid carer's leave – should be provided on a statutory footing.

The right to specific support at transition points

Timely information and support should be provided to both the cared for person and the carer during transition points, such as moving from child to adult services and from adult to older people's services.

The right to a plan for the future

A plan for the future should be proactively developed with both the carer and the cared for person. This should include an emergency plan for unforeseen circumstances and an anticipatory plan to ensure continuity of care when circumstances change eg when the carer is unable to provide further care or when the cared for person moves to independent or supported living.

The right to equality of provision of support across Northern Ireland

Service provision and support for unpaid carers, as outlined in this charter, should be consistent across Northern Ireland.



Carers NI is Northern Ireland's membership body for unpaid carers. We're here to listen, to give carers expert information and tailored advice. We champion the rights of Northern Ireland's 220,000 carers and support them in finding new ways to manage at home, at work, or in their community. We're here to make life better for carers.

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