

First Minister of Wales
Welsh Government
5th Floor
Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Dear Mark,

I hope this finds you well.

As you will know, today is Carers Rights Day and as the membership and campaigning body for unpaid carers in Wales, we wanted to take the opportunity to write to you directly regarding this year's theme - Your Rights: today, tomorrow and in the future.

According to our research there are nearly 450,000 people in Wales who provide unpaid care to ill, older or disabled family and friends. This is nearly 1 in 6 of the population of Wales. Research from the University of Sheffield shows that unpaid carers saved the Welsh Government £10.6bn in 2021 by providing care which would otherwise have to be provided by the NHS or local government. Unpaid carers choose to provide their assistance as a necessary sacrifice to empower their loved ones to get the most out of life. Caring can be a rewarding experience, but for many unpaid carers in Wales, it is also tough, lonely and bewildering.

We know that, unfortunately, many carers in Wales are not having their existing rights upheld under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. This was clearly illustrated in the Welsh Government commissioned independent evaluation published earlier this year, in the Senedd Health committee's 2019 *Caring for our future* report and has also been repeatedly reflected in Carers Wales's Track the Act research.

In addition to these reports, our recent State of Caring in Wales 2023 research paints a picture of unpaid carers in Wales having reached rock bottom. Over 1,100 carers responded, and more than 1 in 3 are struggling to make ends meet, 85% of carers said they feel stressed or anxious and more than three quarters of carers are worried about being unable to provide care in the future.

The data from these reports is shocking but pales in comparison to some of the written contributions of the nearly 1,200 unpaid carers in Wales who responded to the survey. I just wanted to draw your attention to two responses in particular:

"Days just merge into one and there is no sign of light at the end of the tunnel."

"I cannot afford to live. Sometimes I feel it would be less stressful if I wasn't here. But then I think what would my adult child do?"

I'm sure you will find those statements as harrowing and upsetting as we do.

While Carers Rights Day provides an opportunity for us to reflect on the challenges carers in Wales face every day, and how difficult life is for so many of them, it also provides us with the opportunity to consider how we can work to solve those issues and make life better for carers.

There are interventions that can be made and support put in place, which can help enable carers to continue their caring responsibilities without this pushing them into financial distress; impacting their health and wellbeing; and causing so many carers to give up work.

We believe that the Welsh Government can help uphold and extend carers' rights tomorrow and in the future, if you are willing to work with us and carers, to take bold action today.

As outlined in our State of Caring in Wales reports, there are tangible steps that can and should be taken to alleviate some of the pressure carers in Wales.

- Repeating the £500 carer payment on an annual basis to give much needed support to carers on Carers Allowance, in receipt of the caring top-up of universal credit and those who have the underlying entitlement for Carers Allowance.
- Create a new and substantial financial distress fund for unpaid carers, accessible for any carer experiencing financial hardship.
- Recognising unpaid carers as a priority group when developing anti-poverty interventions and prioritising unpaid carers as a target group for pre-existing financial advice and debt management.
- Using carer feedback, improve and expand the national short breaks scheme.
- Work with the NHS to improve carer identification in health settings and improve mental health support for unpaid carers.
- Allocate at least £1m to Health Boards in the 2024/25 financial year to improve the experience of unpaid carers when the person they care for is admitted to or during hospital discharge, based on the £1m funding allocated in 2023/24

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your officials to discuss the difficult situation facing unpaid carers in Wales. And in the meantime, we urge the Welsh Government to commit to showing more leadership in promoting carers rights, today, tomorrow and in the future.

Cofion Cynnes,



Claire Morgan
Director, Carers Wales