

A commitment to carers

A manifesto to support unpaid carers in Northern Ireland (2022-2027)



Carers are people who provide unpaid care by looking after someone who is older, disabled or seriously ill.

These people are called carers, but they would probably say they were just ‘looking after someone’.

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The case for action

Prior to the COVID pandemic there were about **220,000 unpaid carers in Northern Ireland**, with over a quarter **providing more than 50 hours of care per week**. Many do not get the care and support they need to enable them to live, full and meaningful lives alongside their caring role. **Carers' support in Northern Ireland was valued at £6.93 billion** for a full year during the pandemic, yet support to enable carers to continue to care lags far behind what they need.

Almost **half of carers are struggling financially** with the increased cost of living and out of pocket expenses created by caring. **Over 60% of carers have not had any breaks** from caring during the pandemic. 6 in 10 carers are worried that services they rely on will not return to pre-pandemic levels.

Many carers go years without being recognised as carers, and so miss out on vital support and services. **A quarter of people who work are also now juggling a caring role** and will need some support from their employers.

A third of carers describe their mental health as poor and a quarter describe their physical health as poor, a growing trend of poor health and wellbeing

The number of carers in Northern Ireland is expected to grow to at least 400,000 carers by 2037. Action is needed now to ensure today's carers get the support they need and to ensure that the growing demand on unpaid carers is met year on year.

For further information and to pledge your support to Carers NI Commitment to Carers visit carersuk.org/northernireland

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Calling all candidates

Carers NI is calling on all candidates and parties to commit to delivering the following policy proposals in the next mandate of the Northern Ireland Assembly:

- Carers must be at the heart of the proposed Adult Social Care Reform. Carers NI **supports proposals for a new Carers Strategy and the appointment of a new Carers Champion**. These must be priorities in the first Programme for Government.
 - **A new Carer's Allowance Supplement** (similar to Scotland) should be introduced to help build financial resilience for carers as the cost-of-living crisis deepens.
 - **Carers need a break from caring**. The Executive needs to invest in social care funding including ring fenced funding for short breaks for carers. **Ensuring day care services and domiciliary services are returned to pre-pandemic levels** must be an urgent priority to ease the pressure on carers.
 - **A focus on identifying carers**. The Executive must invest in services and support systems to encourage those who are caring to recognise themselves as carers and come forward for help and support if needed.
 - Working carers need to be better supported to continue to work and care if that is their choice. **New legislation to guarantee 5 days unpaid leave for all carers and first day rights to request flexible working should be introduced** early in the new mandate.
- New employability support should be made available for carers looking to return to work.**
- Many carers struggle in isolation or consider themselves to be lonely. Isolation and loneliness can increase mental health issues and impact on a carer's health and wellbeing. **We support the introduction of a new isolation and loneliness strategy for Northern Ireland.**
 - The voice of unpaid carers must be heard by Government, and so we are calling for **the introduction of an annual Carers Assembly**, to be attended by carer representatives from across all constituencies to be heard by relevant ministers including the First and Deputy First Ministers.
 - The digital divide is widening and those without access to digital services and technology are being left behind, including many carers. Digital tools and provision have the power to positively change lives. **We would like to see a fund to support carers to access digital resources and technology** to support digital inclusion.
 - We want to see **equalities rights for unpaid carers strengthened** to better tackle both direct and indirect discrimination.

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Carers Northern Ireland is part of Carers UK. Carers UK is the national membership charity for carers. We work to represent and support the 6.5 million people in the UK who provide unpaid care for ill, older or disabled family members, or friends.

We will continue to fight for increased recognition and support for all carers, and to ensure they have a voice. Our mission is to make life better for carers by delivering lasting change.

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