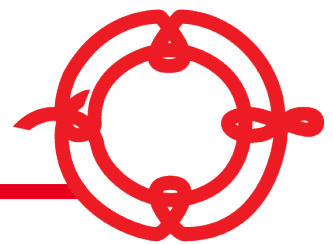


# Assessments

Your guide to getting help and support in Northern Ireland



Many carers find it easier to continue in their caring role if they can get some help. Health and Social Care Trusts can provide help and support for people who need care, and their carers. The way they make a decision about the help and support that they can provide is by carrying out an assessment. This factsheet applies to people living in Northern Ireland.

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## What assessments are available?

Many carers find it easier to continue in their caring role if they can get some help. Health and Social Care Trusts can provide help and support for people who need care and support and their carers. The way they make a decision about the help and support they can provide is by carrying out an assessment.

Some people decide to buy in their own help without going through an assessment from the local Trust. If you want to do this, Trusts usually have a list of local care agencies or you can contact the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA), Northern Ireland's independent health and social care regulator.

There are different assessments for carers, for adults with care needs and for parents of children who need support. This factsheet explains how these assessments can support you in your caring role. We have also provided contact details for the Health and Social Care Trusts at the end of this factsheet and these are often abbreviated to 'local Trusts' throughout this factsheet for ease of reference. The names of assessments can differ depending on your Health and Social Care Trust so you may alternatively hear a carer's assessment referred to as 'a Carer Support Plan', 'a Carer's Needs Support Plan', 'Carer Conversations' or 'a Carer Support Needs Assessment'.

### For carers

A carer's assessment is a way of identifying your needs as a carer. It looks at your role as a carer: how being a carer affects you, how much caring you can realistically do (while still allowing you to be involved in other activities outside of caring), and any help you may need.

Carers have the right to an assessment of their needs whether or not the person they are caring for receives help from social services.

The Carers and Direct Payments Act (2002) also gives Health and Social Care Trusts greater freedom to help support carers by providing services directly to them. Social services can provide a break from caring and other services. They can help you make contact with other carers or help you to

find other ways of maintaining your health and wellbeing so you can continue to care for the person you are looking after.

They can give you direct payments so that you can arrange the service for yourself. The Carers and Direct Payments Act places an obligation on Health and Social Care Trusts to inform carers about their right to an assessment.

Guidance on the Carers and Direct Payments Act emphasises that child carers should be treated as children first and carers second.

- Young carers under 16 will be assessed under Children (NI) Order 1995 using a process called UNOCINI – Understanding the Needs of Children in Northern Ireland.
- 16 or 17 year olds may be also assessed under the Children (NI) Order 1995. They may alternatively, at their request, be assessed under the Carers and Direct Payments Act (2002) although guidance suggests this will only ‘rarely’ be in the young carers’ best interests.

### **For adults with care needs**

Community care assessments are for adults who feel they need help because of a disability, ill health or old age. A community care assessment looks at the help the person needs to be able to live independently. While the focus of a community care assessment is the person who has care needs, in most cases the role and views of their carer should also be taken into account during the assessment.

### **For children with care needs and their parents**

A Children (NI) Order or UNOCINI assessment looks at the needs of children with care needs and their families as a whole and can also provide services for young carers. The assessment should consider all the help that the child needs, the needs of any other children in the family and the help that you may need to care for them.

There is specific guidance for local Trust staff on how to carry out a carer’s assessment using UNOCINI. If you feel that a UNOCINI assessment has not addressed the help that you need as a carer you can still ask for a separate carer’s assessment.

## Important information to cover during an assessment

If someone needs support, and all of the help they need is being provided by a carer who is happy to continue providing this help, the local Trust might decide that their care needs are being met. In this situation, the local Trust would not need to provide any additional help.

It is therefore very important that you tell the local Trust, at both your carer's assessment and at the community care assessment of the person you are looking after, about any difficulties you have with your caring role. It is important to be clear about the support needs of the person you care for, explaining those that you can meet and those that you cannot. It is also important to be clear about any support you need in order to meet their needs.

### How will help be provided?

Following an assessment, if the local Trust decides that you are eligible for help, they will do their best to help:

- > provide you with services themselves
- > provide you with services through another organisation
- > provide you with money so that you can arrange and pay for your own services.

There are sometimes different names for the money paid to you so that you can arrange your own services or support. These payments may be called 'self-directed support' which includes 'direct payments' and 'personal budgets'. In this factsheet, we will call these payments direct payments.

The local Trust can provide you with services or direct payments or a combination of both services and direct payments. A carer can be awarded direct payments in their own right, although carers often also help the person they are looking after manage their own *direct payments*.

Any direct payments you are given have to be used to pay for the services the local Trust has agreed to fund. You will need to account for how the direct payments have been spent. Your Trust can also provide help with managing direct payments if you or the person you are looking after need this. Some voluntary organisations also offer a payroll service.

You could consider using the complaints system or taking legal advice if you are not happy about the way in which help is going to be provided or if you think the money you are offered is not enough.

### **The sort of help available**

Each local Trust will have its own limits in the support they are able to offer. If your level of need is considered high enough, they may be able to offer some support services and if not, they should direct you to suitable sources of support to ensure your needs don't escalate. Following a **carer's assessment**, some carers have received their own direct payments that have allowed them to have:

- driving lessons
- help with taxi fares
- help with housework and gardening
- a mobile phone
- a short holiday for the carer to enable them to have time to themselves
- a computer for a carer who could not access the computer service from a local library because s/he felt unable to leave the person s/he was looking after
- repairs and insurance costs for a car, where transport was crucial to the caring role
- gym membership
- massages
- leisure classes to relieve stress.

You are the best person to decide what help you need. You will need to identify what support would make a difference to you personally. You should not be expected to choose from a 'shopping list' of options if these options will not help you in your caring role. Following a **community care assessment**, people with care needs have been able to benefit from:

- changes to their home to make it more suitable for them
- equipment
- holiday play schemes for disabled children
- care workers to help provide personal care at home
- short or long term stays in residential care
- meals delivered to their home
- laundry services
- assistance with travel
- respite care.

These are just examples of the sort of support that may be available following an assessment. Think about the sort of things that might help you and the person you are looking after and discuss them at your assessments. Remember that an assessment is not a test – it is an opportunity to discuss your caring role with someone outside the family and to see what support might be available.

## **Arranging an assessment**

Carers' assessments, community care assessments and UNOCINI assessments are all the responsibility of the social services team from the local Trust of the person who needs support.

The best way to request a carer's assessment is to write to or email the social services team responsible for your relative or friend. Even if you do not live in the same local Trust area as them, it is their local Trust that will be responsible for carrying out your carer's assessment.

You can also request a carer's assessment by phone, but it is a good idea to follow up this request in writing.

If you are looking after an adult, much of the help that you receive as a carer will be provided as help for them following a community care assessment.

It is therefore always a good idea to ask for a community care assessment as well as a carer's assessment.

To arrange a community care or UNOCINI assessment if you are looking after a child with extra needs, contact the social services team of their local Trust. You can find their contact details towards the end of this factsheet on page 14.

To arrange a UNOCINI assessment if you are a young carer under 16, contact the local Trust where you live.

## Carers' assessments

### Who can have a carer's assessment?

The law says that anyone over 16 years of age who provides a substantial amount of care on a regular basis can have a carer's assessment. No definition of 'substantial' is given, so if you feel you devote a lot of time to caring for someone and you do this regularly, you can have a carer's assessment.

Even if you do not provide a lot of hours of care, you can still have an assessment if your caring role has a big impact on your life. The assessment is not linked to Carer's Allowance.

Young carers between 16 and 18 years old can also have a carer's assessment. A child younger than this will have their needs assessed through UNOCINI. The Carers and Direct Payments Act guidance states that 'Children should be supported to avoid them assuming responsibility for levels of caring that could impact on their health and well-being, education and development'.

You don't necessarily have to live with the person you are looking after or be caring full time to have a carer's assessment. You may be juggling work and care and this is having a big impact on your life. It is up to you when you ask for a carer's assessment. You can ask for the assessment before you take up caring or at any point when you are already caring for someone.

If you share caring responsibilities with another person, or more than one person, you can each have a carer's assessment so long as you are each providing a substantial amount of care on a regular basis.

You can have a carer's assessment to look at the help that you need even if the person who requires support does not want to have a community care assessment to look at the help that they need.

### **Who will carry out the carer's assessment?**

The carer's assessment will be carried out by a social worker or a healthcare professional nominated by social services. Social services should explain who will carry out the assessment.

### **Where will the assessment take place?**

The assessment should be carried out in a convenient and private place. For example, this could be at a social services' office or at your home. Assessments can be done over the phone if this is the best method for you, for example if it fits in with your routine or offers more privacy. The social worker carrying out the assessment should discuss this with you beforehand.

### **Who will be there?**

The carer's assessment can be carried out with or without the person you are looking after being present. It is up to you. You can also have a family member, a friend or a professional person such as a Carers Support Worker with you if you wish. Having someone with you should be discussed when the assessment meeting is being arranged.

### **What kind of questions will I be asked at the carer's assessment?**

Your carer's assessment should cover the following areas: your caring role; your health; your feelings and choices about caring; work, study, leisure and housing.

Even if you are not asked questions about these issues, you can raise them in the assessment meeting. By answering the following questions, you should get a much clearer idea of your needs and you can then discuss with your social worker the services that might be most helpful to you to meet these needs.

### **Time**

- How many hours a week do you provide care? Include all the time you spend with the person you care for, the things you do for them and how long they take you.

Do you help the person you are looking after with:



- housework?
  - shopping?
  - bathing?
  - going to the toilet?
  - cooking?
  - other personal care?
  - keeping an eye on them?
  - dealing with money, eg collecting pension?
  - laundry?
- 
- Do you have to help during the day or night, or both?
  - Does anyone else help? If so, for how long?
  - Would you like some help (or extra help) with these jobs? List the tasks you would like help with (putting the most important first).
  - Are you able to spend enough time on other family responsibilities, eg, being with your children?

### **Health**

- Does the person you care for have any health problems you find hard to deal with? Describe them as fully as you can.
- Do you have any health problems? If so, are they made worse by your caring role? Describe them as fully as you can.
- Are you getting enough sleep?
- Do you feel you are suffering from stress or depression?
- Is caring having a negative impact on your health?
- Feelings and choices about your caring role
- Do you feel that you do not have a choice about providing care?
- If you feel that you cannot carry on at all, or can only carry on if you reduce the amount of caring you do, tell the social worker. It is not unusual to feel this way and it is important they know how you really feel.
- What would you most like to change about your situation?

### **Work/study/leisure**

- Do you work? If so, for how many hours a week?
- Does your employer know that you are a carer – do you know your rights, eg, to time off in an emergency?
- Do you feel you can manage to work and provide care? If you cannot manage or are at risk of not managing – do explain this.

- What would make working/caring easier for you?
- Would you like to start work/study?
- Are there things that you find enjoyable and relaxing that you cannot do any more because of your caring responsibilities? (e.g. a hobby, visiting)
- When was the last time you had a whole day to yourself to do as you pleased?

## **Housing**

- Do you live with the person you care for? Is the arrangement satisfactory? If not, why not?
- Does the person you care for have any difficulties moving around their home? (e.g. can they climb the stairs, or have a bath on their own?)
- Do you have to help them? If so, are you able to do this safely and without causing yourself any pain or injury? Special equipment could make life easier for the person you look after and caring easier for you.

It's important that you give as complete a picture as you can about your caring role and are as honest as you can be about the care that you provide and how you feel about being a carer. Remember, this is your chance to talk about your needs and how you feel, so use it!

Once any problems with caring have been identified, you and the person carrying out the assessment can discuss what sort of help may make it easier for you to take up caring or continue in your caring role. You can ask your local Trust to consider anything that could support you in your caring role – so feel free to think creatively!

## **Planning for emergencies**

During your carer's assessment, there should also be a discussion about planning for emergencies, e.g. to make sure the person you care for would be looked after if you were taken ill and had to go into hospital. You should speak to the Carer Co-ordinator for your local Trust about this and make sure it is discussed at your carer's assessment.

## **Deciding what help to provide**

The person carrying out the assessment should collect all the information they need to be clear about the care the carer is providing and any difficulties they have providing that care, using the sort of questions above.

The assessment should focus on the outcomes the carer would want to see to help them in their caring role and to maintain their health and well-being. It should take a holistic approach to the need for support of the person cared for and the carer, identifying the outcomes desired by both.

Once the local Trust has decided that help is going to be provided, there are two ways that this can be done.

Firstly, support could be provided directly to the person who needs care, which in turn could benefit the carer. This help is provided under the community care assessment. An example of this is respite care which gives the carer a break, even though the person needing care is receiving the service.

Secondly, direct support can be given to the carer, which is provided under a carer's assessment.

If the person requiring support is a child, then help for the child and the carer should be provided through a Children (NI) Order assessment or UNOCINI. If the needs of the carer have not been properly addressed under this assessment then the carer can ask for a carer's assessment for their own needs and help can then be provided through the carer's assessment.

## **The help you can get**

### **Notifying you about the outcome of your carer's assessment**

Following the assessment meeting, the person carrying out the assessment should notify you in writing of the support needs that have been identified. You should be notified about how these support needs will be addressed.

The support that will be provided to you as a carer should be included in the care plan of the person being cared for. Their care plan is a written document that contains information about the services that can be provided for them. If, for reasons of confidentiality, you do not want information about the support that you will be getting to be written in their plan, you can ask for your own carer's plan.

As your carer's assessment can also affect the community care assessment of the person you look after, some of your assessed needs may be reflected in their care plan. Therefore, help may be provided for them instead of directly to you. For example, if you are having difficulties lifting the person you care for, they might be provided with specialist lifting equipment which would be mentioned in their care plan, but the equipment will naturally help you in your caring role.

With the agreement of the person you look after, you can be given a copy of their care plan.

### **Choosing to accept or reject the help you are offered**

You can accept some or all of the help you are offered. If you do not feel the help you are offered is necessary or appropriate, you can refuse it. Before refusing help please do talk to social services about your concerns – it may be that more suitable arrangements can be made.

You may also refuse services because of the charges you are asked to pay for them.

### **Charging for help**

In Northern Ireland the Carers and Direct Payments Act allows for charges to be made for services to carers following a carer's assessment. However, to date this is not common practice.

If help is provided for the person you are looking after through a community care assessment, they can be charged separately for this help.

## **Reassessments and reviews**

You should have your carer's assessment reviewed annually. You can also ask for a re-assessment of your carer's assessment and any community care or UNOCINI assessments at any time if your circumstances change or the circumstances of the person you are looking after change. This could be, for example, if their conditions gets worse and they need more care.

When you have a carer's assessment, there should be an opportunity for you to agree the likely point at which your assessment should next be reviewed.

## Complaints

### Assessments

If you are not happy with the way you have been treated, or with the outcome of any of the assessments, you can complain to social services. All Health and Social Care Trusts should have a complaints procedure that you can follow – ask social services for a copy.

If you are not happy with the outcome of your complaint, you may be able to take a complaint to the Northern Ireland Ombudsman. (See 'Further help' section for details). If social services have acted unlawfully (e.g. have refused to carry out a carer's assessment without good reason), you may be able to take them to court. This is called a judicial review. You will need to seek legal advice if you are thinking about taking the local council to court. An application for judicial review must be made within a maximum period of three months so it's important to get legal advice as quickly as possible.

### Services

If you are not happy with the services provided after an assessment, you can complain to social services. If services are provided by an agency or care home, you may also be able to complain directly to them through their own complaints procedure.

### Patient and Client Council

The Patient and Client Council represent the interests of the public and services users of health and social care. Its advocacy and advice services are available to people who are making or intending to make a complaint relating to health and social care. (See 'Further help' section for details).

## Further help

For information and advice contact the Carers UK Helpline on **0808 808 7777** (open Monday to Friday 9am - 6pm) or email [advice@carersuk.org](mailto:advice@carersuk.org). Please initially mention where you are from so that you can receive tailored guidance. Information is also available on our website – visit [carersni.org](http://carersni.org).

## Health and Social Care Trusts

### **Belfast Health and Social Care Trust – Carers Coordinator**

028 95042126 | <https://belfasttrust.hscni.net/service/carers-services/CarerSuppSvcs@belfasttrust.hscni.net>

### **Western Health and Social Care Trust – Carers Coordinator**

028 66 34 41 63 | <https://westerntrust.hscni.net/service/carers-support-service/> | Carers.Support1@westerntrust.hscni.net

### **South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust – Carers Coordinator**

02843 721807 | <https://setrust.hscni.net/service/carers-support-service/> | carer.support@setrust.hscni.net

### **Northern Health and Social Care Trust – Carers Coordinator**

028 27 66 12 10 | <http://www.northerntrust.hscni.net/services/carerhub/> | carers.coordinator@northerntrust.hscni.net

### **Southern Health and Social Care Trust – Carers Coordinator**

028 3756 6284 | <https://southerntrust.hscni.net/involving-you/community-development-and-user-involvement/carers-information/> | Carers.coordinator@southerntrust.hscni.net

## Other organisations

### **Age NI**

The charity for older people in Northern Ireland.

0808 808 7575 | [ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland](http://ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland) | [info@ageni.org](mailto:info@ageni.org)

### **Centre for Independent Living**

Promotes principles of independent living and provides a range of services for people using or considering using Direct Payments and / or Self-Directed Support: 028 9064 8546 | [cilni.org](http://cilni.org) | [info@cilni.org](mailto:info@cilni.org)

### **Children’s Law Centre**

Works to protect the rights of all children living in Northern Ireland: 0808 808 5678 | [childrenslawcentre.org.uk](http://childrenslawcentre.org.uk) | [chalky@childrenslawcentre.org](mailto:chalky@childrenslawcentre.org)

### **Contact – for families with disabled children**

A national charity that supports the families of disabled children: 0808 808 3555 | [contact.org.uk](http://contact.org.uk) | [helpline@cafamily.org.uk](mailto:helpline@cafamily.org.uk)

### **Disability Action**

A charity providing a range of services and projects, which are aimed at improving the quality of life of people with disabilities, their families and carers: 028 9029 7880 | [disabilityaction.org](http://disabilityaction.org) | [hq@disabilityaction.org](mailto:hq@disabilityaction.org)

### **Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman**

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman looks at complaints about authorities and organisations: 0800 34 34 24 | [nipso.org.uk/nipso](http://nipso.org.uk/nipso) | [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)

### **Patient and Client Council**

Helps with complaints about any part of health and social care: 0800 917 0222 | [patientclientcouncil.hscni.net](http://patientclientcouncil.hscni.net) | [info.pcc@hscni.net](mailto:info.pcc@hscni.net)

### **Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA)**

Northern Ireland’s independent health and social care regulator: 028 9536 1111 | [rqia.org.uk](http://rqia.org.uk) | [info@rqia.org.uk](mailto:info@rqia.org.uk)

This factsheet is designed to provide helpful information and advice. It is not an authoritative statement of the law. We work to ensure that our factsheets are accurate and up to date, but information about benefits and community care is subject to change over time. We would recommend contacting the Carers UK Helpline or visiting our website for the latest information.

Please email us your feedback on this factsheet by sending your comments to [info@carersuk.org](mailto:info@carersuk.org)  
This factsheet was updated in April 2025. Next review due April 2026.

### **Carers NI**

028 90 439843

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

[carersni.org](http://carersni.org)

### **Carers UK**

20 Great Dover Street

London SE1 4LX

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

[carersuk.org](http://carersuk.org)

### **Carers UK Helpline**

For information and guidance about caring.

**T:** 0808 808 7777

(Monday – Friday 9am-6pm)

**E:** [advice@carersuk.org](mailto:advice@carersuk.org)

(Please note that you live in Northern Ireland so that our advisers can tailor their guidance for you.)

**Carers NI is part of Carers UK, working together to make life better for carers.**

Caring will affect us all at some point in our lives.

With your help, we can be there for the 6,000 people who start looking after someone each day.

We're the UK's only national membership charity for carers: join us for free at [carersuk.org/join](http://carersuk.org/join)

We're both a support network and a movement for change.

Visit us at our website to join us, help us or access more sources: [carersuk.org/ni/help-and-advice](http://carersuk.org/ni/help-and-advice)

**This information can be requested in large print or as a text file.**