

# Unseen and undervalued

The value of unpaid care provided to date during the COVID-19 pandemic

November 2020



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# Foreword



Released to mark Carers Rights Day 2020, this research briefing captures the incredible contribution that unpaid carers across the UK have made during this unprecedented year.

Whilst much has been done to rightly recognise the work of health and social care professionals, the role unpaid carers have played in the effort against COVID-19 is often forgotten. Many carers feel invisible and unrecognised for all that they do. With the recent increases in local lockdowns, carers will be continuing to provide high levels of care through the winter months. It is only fair that they are recognised for the invaluable role they play in the national effort at this time, but also that they receive the right support.

Research released earlier this year by Carers UK has shown the impact that the pandemic has had on carers' lives and health.<sup>1</sup> Having to care behind closed doors has been difficult for many carers, with the needs of the people they care for increasing and little support available.

Governments across the UK have taken some steps to help carers at this difficult time, but more must be done. Thanking carers for the contribution they make and providing limited support is important, but is simply not enough, and the figures in this briefing make the economic cost of not supporting carers clear. We need a New Deal for Carers that fully recognises, values and supports carers during the pandemic and beyond.

When the numbers reach the shocking heights that we're talking about in this briefing, it can be easy to lose sight of the individual. Behind these figures are all the parents, sons, daughters, partners, grandchildren, siblings and friends who are providing care and without whom the health and social care system would simply collapse. My message to carers this Carers Rights Day is that Carers UK is here for you, and we're doing all we can to support you, represent you and make life better for you.

Thank you to Barclays LifeSkills for supporting Carers Rights Day and helping us raise the profile of carers.

**Helen Walker**  
Chief Executive  
Carers UK

<sup>1</sup> Carers UK (2020) 'Caring behind closed doors' and 'Caring behind closed doors: six months on'

# Caring during the pandemic

Carers across the country were already providing an incredible amount of care unpaid for family or friends before the pandemic and our previous research has shown how this can have a profound impact on people’s lives.<sup>2</sup>

Our latest research into carers’ experiences during the pandemic found that four in five unpaid carers (81%) are currently providing more care than before the March lockdown. In addition, more than three quarters (78%) of carers reported that the needs of the person they care for have increased recently and most carers (64%) have not been able to take any breaks at all in the last six months.<sup>3</sup>

It is therefore unsurprising that more than half (58%) of carers have seen their physical health impacted by caring through the pandemic, while 64% said their mental health has worsened.<sup>4</sup> Should these carers burnout, or be otherwise unable to provide care the figures in this report show the significant cost to the economy and the impact on the health and social care systems.

## Value of care provided across the UK during the pandemic

Projections based on polling indicate that unpaid carers across the UK have provided an incredible £135 billion of care since the start of the pandemic in March. That’s £530 million of care every day!

**The value of care provided during the COVID-19 pandemic, to date, breaks down as follows across the nations of the UK:**

	Estimated value of care provided since the beginning of the pandemic	Estimated value of care provided daily during the pandemic
England	£111 billion	£435 million
Northern Ireland	£4.8 billion	£19 million
Scotland	£10.9 billion	£43 million
Wales	£8.4 billion	£33 million
<b>UK</b>	<b>£135 billion</b>	<b>£530 million</b>

For a full year, at these rates, we estimate the value of carers’ unpaid support to be £193 billion of care a year.

<sup>2</sup> Eg Carers UK (2019) ‘State of Caring 2019’

<sup>3</sup> Carers UK (2020) ‘Caring behind closed doors: six months on’

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

## Value of care provided in England during the pandemic by region

Further estimates have been calculated for each region in England.

	Estimated value of care provided since the beginning of the pandemic	Estimated value of care provided daily during the pandemic
South of England	£28.3 billion	£111 million
London	£18.7 billion	£73 million
Midlands	£20.3 billion	£80 million
East of England	£12.4 billion	£49 million
North of England	£31.1 billion	£122 million

## Methodology

These estimates are based on polling completed with YouGov, which found a nationally representative estimate for the prevalence of caring amongst the population as well as the number of hours of care being provided.

Using population figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and an hourly rate of replacement care from the University of Kent,<sup>5</sup> these polling figures were used to extrapolate an estimate for the number of carers across the UK, the hours of care provided across the UK and the value of this care.

We have assumed the highest hours of care provided by unpaid carers is 50 hours a week, this almost certainly an underestimation of the number of hours provided. This means that the true value of the care provided by unpaid carers is likely to be higher.

<sup>5</sup> Personal Social Services Research Unit at The University of Kent (2020) 'Unit costs of health and social care 2019' <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/79286/11/UCFinalFeb20.pdf>

# Conclusion and recommendations

The majority of adults will care for a family member or friend at some point in their lives,<sup>6</sup> but the impact on their health, finances and wellbeing is often underestimated. Even a few hours of care a week can have a significant impact on carers' lives, yet there are thousands of people caring around the clock. During this pandemic many have cared without access to any form of break.

The figures in this briefing clearly show the importance and economic value of the unpaid care family members and friends provide. There is no doubt that the NHS and social care system would collapse without this support.

The value of the care provided by families is not without its costs to carers, to their families, to employers, business, the NHS and social care and society. Centrica estimates that UK companies could save up to £4.8 billion a year in unplanned absences and a further £3.4 billion in improved employee retention by supporting working carers.<sup>7</sup> The public expenditure costs of carers leaving paid work have been estimated to be £1.3 billion a year, based

on the costs of Carer's Allowance payments and lost tax revenues.<sup>8</sup> Carers caring around the clock are twice as likely to be in poor health<sup>9</sup> and around 1.2 million carers are living in poverty.<sup>10</sup> Carers are now at breaking point.

Government needs to urgently put in place more support to help carers through the coming winter. It must also deliver a New Deal for Carers including bold and decisive action that delivers a new vision and action for carers. This New Deal for Carers needs to start with a tangible cross-cutting Government Action Plan and move to strong and robust delivery of support as part of the government plans for the future of social care reform in each of the nations.

## In terms of immediate action during the pandemic we need to see:

- Recognition by all Governments of the role and contribution of carers and backed up with practical action that improves their lives.
- Immediate payment of £20 a week to those with underlying entitlement to Carer's Allowance to match the rise in Universal Credit.
- Additional investment in breaks for carers over winter.<sup>11</sup>
- Targeted and up to date information and advice for carers including the support available if someone is deemed to be clinically vulnerable or caring for someone in this group.

<sup>6</sup> Carers UK (2019) 'Will I care?'

<sup>7</sup> [www.centrica.com/news/carers-uk-and-centrica-announce-new-partnership-improve-lives-carers](http://www.centrica.com/news/carers-uk-and-centrica-announce-new-partnership-improve-lives-carers)

<sup>8</sup> [blogs.lse.ac.uk/healthandsocialcare/2012/04/25/dr-linda-pickard-public-expenditure-costs-of-carers-leaving-employment/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/healthandsocialcare/2012/04/25/dr-linda-pickard-public-expenditure-costs-of-carers-leaving-employment/)

<sup>9</sup> Census 2011

<sup>10</sup> New Policy Institute (2016) 'Informal carers & poverty in the UK: An analysis of the Family Resources Survey' [http://www.npi.org.uk/files/2114/6411/1359/Carers\\_and\\_poverty\\_in\\_the\\_UK\\_-\\_full\\_report.pdf](http://www.npi.org.uk/files/2114/6411/1359/Carers_and_poverty_in_the_UK_-_full_report.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> In England, the Association of Directors of Social Services have recommended £1.2 billion to support breaks for carers caring around the clock over winter. This has Carers UK's full support.

## In the near future:

Each of the nation governments should also develop their own New Deal for Carers which focuses on devolved areas, working together across the UK to agree a shared approach to reserved issues such as employment. As well as a strategic vision, this should deliver tangible outcomes in an action plan which includes the following measures:

- Systematic identification of carers by health and social care professionals, and the introduction of a new duty on the NHS in each nation to identify carers and promote their health and wellbeing.
- Improving carers finances. Raising the level of Carer's Allowance and ensuring that carers do not face a financial disadvantage in retirement.
- Raising awareness of caring and the role of unpaid carers through a public awareness campaign.
- Enabling carers to juggle work and care, including promoting flexible working, introducing paid Carer's Leave and a longer period of unpaid leave.
- Supporting carers' health and wellbeing, including investing in mental health services for carers.
- Supporting carers to lead their own lives alongside caring, ensuring that carers are able to access breaks and support services.
- Introduce caring as a protected characteristic.

## Longer term reform of social care – carers must be placed at the heart of the Government's strong long term vision

In addition, any future reform of social care must have strong, clear and defined benefits and support for carers. Carers must be involved in the development of these plans as well as delivery. It is the collective nation governments responsibility to see that this is delivered as a priority; as longer-term social care reform is long overdue and extremely urgent. Carers must be at the heart of the reform of social care and that we build well-funded, good quality care that gives choice and independence to families. As well as providing positive health and wellbeing, it helps carers to juggle work and care and creates new jobs for social care workers. We would see this a way to kick start and to maintain the economy, providing employment and supporting families.

# About this research

The estimated value of unpaid care in this briefing is based on representative polling completed with YouGov in October and November 2020. Total sample size was 5,741. The survey was carried out online. The polling asked:

*Do you currently give unpaid support to someone who is older, seriously ill, or has a disability?*

Those currently providing unpaid care were asked

*Approximately, how many hours per week on average do you provide unpaid support? (Please select the option that best applies)*

- 0-9 hours a week
- 10-19 hours a week
- 20-49 hours a week
- More than 50 hours a week

Using the answers to these questions and ONS population estimates from 2019 mid-year population estimates<sup>12</sup> for over 18s. The number of hours of unpaid care provided on a weekly basis across the UK was calculated by using the mid-point of each category (ie 5 hours for 0-9 hours) except for the last category which was capped at 50 hours. This was then multiplied by an hourly rate of replacement care (£23), from the Personal Social Services Research Unit at The University of Kent (released in February 2020).<sup>13</sup> In many cases the care provided by family and friends would be far more costly if it were to be provided by health and social care professionals due to the complexity of care needs. We followed a similar methodology to ones we have used in the past and in partnership with the work carried out by the Universities of Leeds and Sheffield.<sup>14</sup>

The value of care provided since the start of the pandemic is based on this rate of care being provided across the country between 16th March and 26th November. This overall figure is almost certainly an underestimate given that polling conducted for Carers Week in June 2020 using the same first question found a higher number of people providing unpaid care earlier in the pandemic.<sup>15</sup> Previous research showing that some carers are providing substantially more care than 50 hours a week.

<sup>12</sup> Office for National Statistics (2020) Population Estimates - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates>

<sup>13</sup> Personal Social Services Research Unit at The University of Kent (2020) 'Unit costs of health and social care 2019' <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/79286/11/UCFinalFeb20.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Carers UK and the University of Sheffield (2015) Valuing Carers 2015: the rising cost of carers' support

<sup>15</sup> Carers Week (2020) 'The rise in the number of unpaid carers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak'

This polling indicated that there are the following number of adult carers in the UK

	Estimated number of unpaid carers
England	9.6 million
Northern Ireland	360,000
Scotland	950,000
Wales	540,000
<b>UK</b>	<b>11.5 million</b>

## Note about the numbers of carers:

In June 2020, we published a new series of figures for Carers Week which showed a staggering increase in the number of carers from 9.1 million to 13.6 million, with 4.5 million people starting caring since the pandemic.<sup>16</sup> The polling took place in May 2020 during restrictive lockdown. This second wave of polling has returned a lower number of carers at a time when services were slightly more open, and people had begun returning to their workplaces. This was true across all nations other than Northern Ireland where the second wave of polling found a slightly higher number of carers than the polling in May. This could be a demonstration that the level of carers will fluctuate according to the level of restrictions placed on society and the level of health, social care and community support.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid



Across the UK today millions of people are carers - supporting a loved one who is older, disabled or seriously ill.

Caring will touch each and every one of us in our lifetime, whether we become a carer or need care ourselves. Whilst caring can be a rewarding experience, it can also impact on a person's health, finances and relationships.

Carers UK is here to listen, to give carers expert information and tailored advice. We champion the rights of 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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