**An open letter to the Work and Pensions Secretary, copied to the Chancellor, regarding the level of Carer’s Allowance**

The Rt. Hon. Therese Coffey MP

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

Department for Work and Pensions

Caxton House

Tothill St

London, SW1H 9NA

03 November 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

As organisations representing unpaid carers, disabled adults and children, and older people, we wrote to you on 03 July 2020, calling on the Government to urgently increase the financial support available to unpaid carers. We are now writing to place on record our shock and disappointment that we have, to date, not received a response to that letter, from either yourself, or the Chancellor.

As we set out back in July, more than 1.2 million carers were living in poverty and financial hardship pre-coronavirus, and the crisis has now only exacerbated an already desperate situation for many. 81% of carers are having to spend more since the outbreak – through higher bills, paying for additional care services, and buying equipment and technology to help with caring – further squeezing already tight budgets. Without urgent support, carers, their families, and those they care for, will continue to struggle.

Further evidence now confirms that carers and those they care for are now facing even bleaker financial situations than before, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to inflict real financial hardship. We are extremely concerned about this with winter ahead and the impact of higher fuel bills.

Carers UK’s recent report (Caring Behind Closed Doors: Six months on, October 2020), based on a survey of over 5,900 current and former carers, reveals that over a quarter of respondents (28%) were “struggling to make ends meet”, while more than one in ten (11%) “were/had been in debt as a result of caring”. The situation worsens for those in receipt of Carer’s Allowance, with 36% reporting that they are “struggling to make ends meet”, with 15% “in debt currently, or in the past because of caring”.

Carers’ own comments also give a real insight into the pressures they currently face:

*“We are permanently struggling financially and are in debt.”*

*“I am constantly using my savings to make ends meet.”*

*“Food shopping has gone up, most nights I don’t eat so the children do, bills have gone up due to the children being at home more.”*

*“Carer’s Allowance is not anything like enough to pay my bills. Gas, electric, water, spare bedroom tax, takes much more than what Carer’s Allowance pays to me.”*

Carer’s Allowance remains the lowest benefit of its kind at £67.25 per week (2020/21 rates, England, Wales, Northern Ireland – the rate in Scotland is effectively higher because of the Carer Supplement – which was recently doubled by the Scottish Government in recognition of the additional costs borne by carers during the pandemic).

The amount of Carer’s Allowance barely reflects the support that carers currently provide, valued at £132 billion a year.

**To alleviate the financial hardship that many unpaid carers face, we are again urgently calling for the Government to:**

1. **Introduce an additional supplement to Carer’s Allowance, to match the recent increases in Universal Credit that have rightly recognised the challenges people on lower incomes have during the pandemic of additional costs.** We are also calling for accompanying rises to Carer Premium and Carer Addition, and for this payment to be made to carers with an underlying entitlement to Carer’s Allowance, so older carers on low incomes can also benefit. These payments should be backdated to recognise the lengths carers have gone to in supporting and caring for others during the crisis.

Post-crisis, as a minimum we would like to see a rise in Carer’s Allowance and associated premia, to at least match the effective rises we have seen in Scotland. This would stop Carer’s Allowance from being the lowest benefit of its kind – lower than Jobseeker’s Allowance, and would provide equity for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

1. **Raise the earnings limit for claiming Carer’s Allowance, to ensure those juggling work and care on low pay also receive support.** The current earnings threshold does not align with the National Living Wage (NLW), meaning a carer can only work for less than 15 hours per week without losing eligibility to Carer’s Allowance. The earnings limit should be raised from £128 a week to at least £139.52 for 2020/21 and should be linked to the NLW in future years.

It is not too late for the Government to recognise the vital role that unpaid carers play, and to put in place much needed financial support ahead of this coming winter. It can only be right that we give back to carers who have done so much for others during this crisis. Without this help, many will continue to face real hardship and suffering.

**We call on you to make Carer’s Allowance *Fairer for Carers* without delay.**

***Signed by:***

1. **Helen Walker, Chief Executive, Carers UK**
2. **Jamie Gault, Chief Executive Officer, Action for Carers Surrey**
3. **Steve Johnson, Chief Executive, AdviceUK**
4. **Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director, Age UK**
5. **Laura Price, Operations Director, Age UK Milton Keynes**
6. **Kate Lee, Chief Executive Officer, Alzheimer’s Society**
7. **Kate Hancock, Chief Executive Officer, Autism Anglia**
8. **Dr. James Cusack, Chief Executive Officer, Autistica**
9. **Tom McMurdo, Resources Director, Blackpool Carers Centre**
10. **Georgette Kay, Chief Officer, Bolton Carers Support**
11. **Kirsty Finlayson, Senior Carer Liaison Worker, Borders Carers Centre**
12. **Jennifer Twist, Chief Executive Officer, Care for the Carers**
13. **Liz Brown, Chair, Carer Support Dorset**
14. **Jill Attwell, Chief Executive Officer, Carers' Support East Kent**
15. **Liz Brown, Chair, Carer Support Wiltshire**
16. **Brian Terry, Chair of Trustees, Carers Choices**
17. **Michèle Stokes, Chief Executive, Carers in Hertfordshire**
18. **Sandra Ifield, Director of Carers Support and Advocacy, Carers Lewisham**
19. **Simon Hodgson, Director, Carers Northern Ireland**
20. **Debra Blakey, Chief Executive Officer, Carers Northumberland**
21. **Chris Whiley, Chief Executive Officer, Carers’ Resource, Bradford, Harrogate and Craven Districts**
22. **Gareth Howells, Chief Executive Officer, Carers Trust**
23. **Sonja Woodhouse, Chief Executive, Carers Trust Heart of England**
24. **Pauline Steele, Chief Executive, Carers Trust Tyne and Wear**
25. **Claire Morgan, Director, Carers Wales**
26. **George Plenderleith, Chief Executive Officer, Caring for Carers at Improving Lives Plymouth**
27. **Miriam Martin, Chief Executive, Caring Together**
28. **Anna Dixon, Chief Executive, Centre for Ageing Better**
29. **Lisa Ray, General Secretary, Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance**
30. **Rachel Kirby-Rider, Chief Executive Officer, CLIC Sargent**
31. **Amanda Batten, Chief Executive Officer, Contact**
32. **Dame Christine Lenehan, Director, Council for Disabled Children**
33. **Juliet Jeffrey, Chief Executive Officer, Crossroads Tendring & Colchester**
34. **Dr Hilda Hayo, Chief Admiral Nurse and CEO, Dementia UK**
35. **Billy Hartstein, Head of Carers Services, Devon Carers**
36. **David Laurence, Chief Executive, Disability Law Service**
37. **Kamran Mallick, Chief Executive Officer, Disability Rights UK**
38. **Dr. Dani Leslie, Chief Officer, Eden Carers**
39. **Philip Lee, Chief Executive, Epilepsy Action**
40. **Sam Smethers, Chief Executive, Fawcett Society**
41. **Craig Backhouse, Chief Executive Officer, Furness Carers**
42. **Alun Thomas, Chief Executive, Hafal**
43. **Christine Fewster, Chief Executive Officer, Hartlepool Carers**
44. **Deborah Alsina MBE, Chief Executive Officer, Independent Age**
45. **Susan Langley, CEO, Leicestershire Action for Mental Health Project**
46. **Hugh Fenn, Interim Chief Executive, Leonard Cheshire**
47. **Jackie O'Sullivan, Executive Director of Communications, Advocacy and Activism, Mencap**
48. **Sally Light, Chief Executive, Motor Neurone Disease Association**
49. **Nick Moberly, Chief Executive Officer, MS Society**
50. **Karen Walker, Chief Executive, Multiple System Atrophy Trust**
51. **Alan Markey, Chair, National Association of Welfare Rights Advisers**
52. **Caroline Stevens, Chief Executive Officer, National Autistic Society**
53. **Charlotte Augst, Chief Executive Officer, National Voices**
54. **Rachel Parsons, Acting Chief Executive, Newcastle Carers**
55. **Steve Ford, Chief Executive, Parkinson's UK**
56. **Bernie DeLord and Jenny Tarvit, Directors, Promas Caring for People CIC**
57. **Claire Robinson, Chief Executive Officer, PROPS**
58. **Mark Winstanley, Chief Executive Officer, Rethink Mental Illness**
59. **Jan Tregelles, Chief Executive Officer, Revitalise**
60. **Dr. Adrian James, President, Royal College of Psychiatrists’**
61. **Elizabeth McPherson, Chief Officer, Scarborough & Ryedale Carers Resource**
62. **Richard Kramer, Chief Executive, Sense**
63. **Kate Steele, Chief Executive Officer, Shine**
64. **Nik Hartley OBE, Chief Executive Officer, Spinal Injuries Association**
65. **Susanna Jones, Chief Executive, Swindon Carers Centre**
66. **Charles Huddleston, Service Manager, The Carers Centre (Leicestershire & Rutland)**
67. **Tom Lambert, Chief Executive Officer, The Carers Centre for Brighton & Hove**
68. **Adrienne Burgess, Joint CEO/ Head of Research, The Fatherhood Institute**
69. **Paddy Lillis, General Secretary, USDAW**
70. **Jonathan Senker, Chief Executive, Voiceability**
71. **Sue Whitehead, Chief Officer, West Cumbria Carers**
72. **Jane Evans, Chief Executive Officer, West Norfolk Carers**
73. **Angela Allison, Chief Officer, Wigan and Leigh Carers Centre**
74. **Jane van Zyl, Chief Executive, Working Families**
75. **Anela Anwar, Chief Executive Officer, Zacchaeus 2000 Trust**

***A copy of this letter has also been sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.***