

# **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.

**2. 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 Tending & 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.***