Carers Action Plan Q&A

What is the Carers Action Plan? What time period does it cover, which nations will it affect?

The Carers Action Plan is designed to deliver activity for carers across Government over the next two years ahead of the Green Paper on social care, due to be published this summer. The Action Plan is largely designed for carers in England, although there are measures that might impact positively on carers in other nations. Thousands of carers shared their experience to inform the development of this Action Plan, reflecting the strength of feeling among carers that much more support is needed.

What is Carers UK’s view?

Carers UK has submitted a great deal of evidence, and encouraged our carer members to respond since the development of a Carers Strategy was first announced on 1st July 2015. Carers UK welcomes the publication of the Carers Action Plan and the recognition from across Government of the need to put in place practical, short term measures to improve support for carers. It is disappointing, however, that the Carers Action Plan has not gone further to recommend or deliver any additional financial support for carers.

What's new?

There are several new elements in the Carers Action Plan. The first element is its cross-Government nature with several Ministers, led by Department of Health and Social Care, signed up to take action and agreeing to a core plan of delivery for the next two years. These departments span the Government Equalities Office, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Education.

Support for carers and employment – new measures

Importantly, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy are considering the question of dedicated employment rights for carers alongside existing employment rights such as the right to request flexible working. Carers UK has warmly welcomed this development as one of the key actions that we have been calling for. There are other mechanisms around returning to work and staying in work that we are pleased to see around the NHS workforce, one of the largest in the world, and other provisions already in train. This work will span 2018/19 and 2019/20. (Actions 2.3, 2.7, 2.4)
The Government will be looking at what information is provided through Jobcentre Plus to support carers. A piece of work will be undertaken by Government with Carers UK’s involvement to look at the effectiveness of information provided by Government for carers. This work with Jobcentre Plus is ongoing and the latter will be undertaken over the next 2 years. (Action 2.18).

Government will provide funding for research to better understand the barriers for carers remaining in, and returning to, employment. Research will also consider the drivers influencing the availability of carers, future projections of the numbers of carers, the economics involving the costs and benefits of unpaid care. (Action 2.6, 5.1, 5.2)

In terms of data collection and monitoring, Carers UK is also pleased to see that survey data on the experiences of carers in England will update the existing dataset from 2009/10 providing us with a 10 year comparison to see what has changed. This will be carried out in 2019/20. (Action 5.3)

Carer Friendly Communities

A Carer Innovations Fund of £500,000 will be launched to identify and promote creative and cost-effective models to develop carer friendly communities. This will be launched in Summer 2018. (Action 4.1)

What does the Carers Action Plan say about the implementation of the 2014 Care Act?

- The Department of Health and Social Care will work with local government on a sector-led improvement programme of work focused on the implementation of the Care Act duties for carers.
- There will also be a funded piece of work looking at project to support parent carers where their child is in transition from children’s to adults services.
- Another new funded project will look at best practice around carers’ breaks and respite care, including the use of personal budgets or direct payments. (Actions 1.11, 1.12, 1.13)
- Additional work with social workers to update resources on carers, share and promote best practice around carers (Actions 1.7, 1.8, 1.9) will be promoted.

New aspirations are clearly articulated for some existing pieces of work where carers will be a firm part. This includes three pilots testing an integrated single assessment process in Gloucestershire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire. All assessments and plans will take into account the role, health and wellbeing of their carers. This will happen through 2018/19 and 2019/2020. (Action 1.15)
The Action Plan includes a chapter on young carers with several new pieces of work including a funded piece of work on the transition for young adult carers and a piece of work on disadvantaged and seldom heard groups of young carers. New work will also be generated around the identification of young carers. (Actions 3.8, 3.3, 4.1)

How did the Carers Action Plan come about?

On 1 July 2015, the Secretary of State for Health announced that there would be a Carers Strategy, and the Department of Health asked carers, and organisations who work with carers, to input into a call for evidence as part of the Strategy. This closed on 31st July 2016 with over 6,000 submissions, around 80% of which were from carers. Since then, Carers UK has provided a significant amount of evidence along with carers.

Following June’s snap-election there was no commitment from the Government to respond to evidence provided by carers or publish a new Carers Strategy. With a Conservative Manifesto commitment to a wider consultation on older people’s social care the Government had said it was keen to bring carers’ views into this wider work.

Carers UK made these points directly when we met with the Minister responsible for carers, Jackie Doyle Price, stressing the huge numbers of carers who have given up precious time to tell the Government about their priorities for change and the support that they need.

In November 2017, the Minister announced that a cross-Government Action Plan would be launched in the New Year to improve support for carers informed by evidence from carers. Given the recently announced longer-term consultation into the funding and provision of older people’s care and a parallel process looking at the care of working age adults, she said the Action Plan would look at what can be done in the next two years to improve support for carers ahead of the outcome of social care proposals.

How does this fit with the Green Paper on social care?

Carers UK has welcomed the Government’s strong assurance that carers’ views will be at the heart of the social care Green Paper process. This is essential if we are going to achieve a fairer balance between the huge contribution of families and that of the state. It is very disappointing that the Action Plan does not commit to further financial support to carers and it raises greater expectations for more far reaching proposals on the funding and support provided to families and friends who care as part of the forthcoming Green Paper on social care.

Carers UK calls on the Government to include the following provisions in the Social Care Green Paper:
Carer’s Allowance should be raised significantly over the longer term and in the short term at least raised to the level of JSA – matching the pledges made in Scotland by all political parties to carers.

Increase the earnings threshold for Carer’s Allowance year-on-year in line with the National Living Wage and introduce a taper.

Increase funding for social care, putting in place a sustainable funding settlement for social care and ring-fencing funding for carers’ breaks.

A review of legal rights to support for those caring for disabled children under 18 with legal changes to bring rights into line with those caring for adults.

A new duty on the NHS to put in place policies to identify carers and to promote their health and well-being – helping to build a carer friendly NHS.

A new programme of work looking to support former carers – and support pre- and post-bereavement, including a review of benefits to give longer benefit run-ons and support with returning to work.

New and earlier access to advice and information for carers and a new awareness campaign around planning for care in later life.

A new programme targeted specifically at carers accrediting skills learned whilst caring.

A new focus on technological solutions to make life easier for carers.

How does this fit with the new 10 year strategy for the NHS?

The 10 year strategy for the NHS has to fit well with the Green Paper for Social Care and it has to embrace carers as a clear partner in care. From identification to clear monitoring and outcomes from the NHS, we need a systematic step change in the way that the NHS identifies and supports carers. Carers UK feels that this time, more than ever, this needs to be underpinned by a duty on the NHS to identify carers and to promote their health and wellbeing.

What about carers’ evidence submitted as part of the consultation?

Carers UK submitted extensive evidence to the call for evidence based directly on carers’ experiences. This included using data and feedback from our annual State of Caring survey, Adviceline and Members Summit. Central to the concerns that carers raised was the financial hardship that often occurs as a result of taking on a caring role. The consultation received 6,532 responses from individuals, 77% of which were from carers and former carers (5,007 responses).

It is very disappointing that the Action Plan does not address these concerns with a commitment to further financial support for carers. Given the cuts to local government funding and services, support for carers has never been more important. Increased financial support for carers must be addressed in the forthcoming Green Paper on social care.

What is Carers UK going to do next?

Carers UK will work with the Department of Health and right across Government to ensure the voice of carers is heard in the implementation of the Carers Action Plan. We will also work with our network partners and members to look at improvements. Carers UK will continue to press the Government to make sure that the Social Care Green Paper brings the wider changes to our social security, employment and health and care systems that carers need. This must include sustainable care funding to bring the lasting changes that carers and local services need to see.

Carers UK is working together with organisations representing older people and people with disabilities as part of the Care & Support Alliance to campaign for social care funding to be increased so everyone has access to the care and support they need.

**Contact**

To find out more, please contact:

Sharlene McGee, Senior Policy and Public Affairs Officer  
T: 02073784937    E: sharlene.mcgee@carersuk.org