

## **ABOUT CARERS NI**

Carers NI is Northern Ireland's membership body for unpaid carers. We work to represent and support the over 220,000 people who provide unpaid care for ill, older or disabled family members or friends – fighting for increased recognition and support for all carers and to ensure they have a voice in policymaking.

## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

1. Carers NI recognises, and is deeply concerned by, the severe financial pressure facing public finances in Northern Ireland. The last decade has seen a particularly rapid decline in our Health and Social Care system, with staff shortages, underinvestment and growing waiting lists leaving more and more people without the services they need – putting greater pressure on unpaid carers to cover gaps and keep the system afloat. This often comes at a severe cost to their own health, wellbeing and quality of life. <sup>[1]</sup>
2. Strategic policy reform and long-term investment are needed to transform services and create a Health and Social Care system that is fit for the future, although that ambition will never be achieved if Northern Ireland continues to be defined by near-permanent political instability.
3. The stifling impact of years of political stagnation are clear to see – for example, a fully functioning Executive has been in place for only around one-third of the time since the Power to People review of adult social care was published in 2017; Northern Ireland's last fully signed-off Programme for Government ended in 2015; and the last multi-year budget set by the Executive was in 2011. This situation is entirely un conducive to delivering root-and-branch reform of public services.
4. The revenue-raising measures being consulted on represent partial and short-term solutions that cannot compensate for the lack of stable government and local Ministers driving forward strategic reform; and in some cases, such as the pending proposals to introduce prescription charges, the available evidence suggests they would make only a nominal contribution to public finances. <sup>[2]</sup>

## **ARE THERE OTHER REVENUE RAISING MEASURES THAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED?**

### **ARE THERE SERVICES OR PROGRAMMES THAT SHOULD BE STOPPED OR REDUCED TO DIVERT FUNDING TO MORE CRITICAL SERVICES?**

5. Carers NI does not have additional revenue raising measures to propose, as we believe it would be irresponsible to do so without an EIA process and proper public debate and scrutiny.
6. We are concerned that, as has occurred in the past, proposals to divert funding from so-called 'non-critical' services will mean reducing access to the community care that patients rely on, and which provide one of the few sources of support for many unpaid carers. In 2017, for example, a mandated process to identify budget savings in each Health Trust saw widespread

---

<sup>1</sup> Carers NI (2023). State of Caring 2023: The impact of caring on health in Northern Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> NI Fiscal Council (2022). Sustainability report 2022: Special focus – health.

proposals to cut domiciliary care packages; proposals which were eventually dropped following public opposition.

7. While the details of the pending consultation on domiciliary care charges are still outstanding, Carers NI would be strongly opposed to any future reform which resulted in community care becoming less accessible to those who need it. While such a move would undoubtedly save money in the short term, it would also be entirely counter-strategic – leading to more unmet need, greater rates of delayed discharge from hospital and even more pressure on an unpaid carer population that is already at breaking point.
8. Carers NI's research shows that unpaid carers in Northern Ireland are now saving the health service close to £6 billion per year in care costs – an amount that has grown by over 40% during the last decade, due, in large part, to growing unmet need for statutory domiciliary care packages. <sup>[3]</sup> Providing these enormous levels of unpaid care comes at a severe cost of carers' health and wellbeing – 1 in 4 suffer mental ill-health and over half have suffered physical injuries due to caring <sup>[1]</sup> – so to make community care even less accessible would only compound the already unsustainable pressure facing local carers.

#### **ARE THERE PUBLIC SERVICES THAT COULD BE DELIVERED IN A DIFFERENT WAY?**

9. Carers NI fully endorses the principle of rebooting and reshaping health and social care services that has been set out in the likes of the Power to People and Health and Wellbeing 2026 reviews.
10. Transforming HSC services and investing to deliver these services in new and better ways is crucial to achieving savings and greater efficiency in the long term. If we do not, we will continue to find ourselves in difficult financial circumstances and unable to deliver the quality services people need.
11. It is this strategic reform that should be the priority for the NI Executive, not short-term measures that will, at best, provide temporary and bit-part relief to the financial pressures facing Northern Ireland.

**For more information please contact:**

**Craig Harrison**

Public Affairs Manager

Carers NI

[craig.harrison@carersni.org](mailto:craig.harrison@carersni.org)

---

<sup>3</sup> Carers NI and the Centre for Care (2023). Valuing carers Northern Ireland 2021.