

The information in this briefing is provided from State of Caring in Scotland 2023, an annual survey by Carers Scotland¹. It is Scotland's most comprehensive research into the lives and experiences of unpaid carers. The 2023 survey was completed by 1,771 unpaid carers.

About Unpaid Carers

An unpaid carer is a family member, partner, friend, or neighbour who helps a person with daily activities that they would not be able to manage if they did not have help. This could be a partner, family member or friend who has a long term or terminal illness, someone who is disabled, has a mental health condition, is affected by addiction or who needs extra help as they grow older. There are approximately 800,000 people in Scotland providing such unpaid care². It would cost an estimated £13.1 billion³ every year to replace the care they provide.

Key Findings:

1. A third of unpaid carers (30%) have been waiting over a year for NHS specialist treatment.
2. More than a third of unpaid carers (34%) reported they had attended A&E with the person they cared for. They often faced long waiting times with 29% waiting 2-6 hours for an ambulance and 33% of unpaid carers waiting 2-6 hours for triage.
3. More than three quarters (77%) of unpaid carers told us of the significant healthcare tasks they provide to support the health of the person they care for.
4. More than half (54%) said that their physical health had suffered because of their caring role and over a quarter of carers (28%) said their mental health is bad or very bad.

Carers Scotland Recommendations:

1. **The Scottish Government should** work with NHS Boards to ensure their plans for reducing waiting lists set out how they will consider the unique and individual needs of unpaid carers, including prioritising carers for healthcare support that will support their ability to care.
2. **The Scottish Government should** provide dedicated funding and planning to ensure that unpaid carers can access the health services they need to prevent the shocking levels of poor health they are experiencing.
3. **The Scottish Government should** develop and introduce an Unpaid Carers Health Plan, recognising that unpaid care is a social determinant of health, and setting out how they will in the short, medium, and long term not only maintain and improve the health of unpaid carers and young carers but prevent long term health inequalities.

¹ Carers Scotland is the Scottish nation office of Carers UK. Carers UK is a charity registered in England and Wales (246329) and in Scotland (SC039307) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (864097). Registered office 20 Great Dover Street, London SE1 4LX

² Scotland's Carers update release, Scottish Government 2022

³ National Care Service Financial Memorandum, Scottish Parliament 2022

Carers Experience

Providing care for someone is a highly challenging responsibility, frequently affecting the physical and mental health of those who are providing care. Throughout Scotland, unpaid carers provide high levels of care, often neglecting to look after their own health.

The findings of State of Caring 2023 indicate a worrying four in 10 (41%) of carers have put off healthcare treatment because of their caring role. This increases to 50% of carers with a disability. It is that a significant number of those who provide care are not receiving the necessary support to address their own health and wellbeing alongside their caring responsibilities.

“I have cancelled a hospital appointment twice as I had no one to assist me after an anaesthetic.”
[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

“I have been told I may have a tumour and need operation, got no offer of any assistance - have no idea what will happen if I am not able to manage.”
[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

When they do choose to take treatment 30% of respondents said that they have been waiting over a year for specialist treatment or assessment. A sizeable proportion of carers also reported that they have been unable to access mental health support. **A quarter (25%) of carers said that delays in NHS appointments was the reason they had not accessed mental health support.**

“I am on four different waiting lists and have been for a year”
[Unpaid carer, responding to State of Caring]

Due to a lack of NHS support, more carers are having to take on health care tasks. More than three quarters (77%) of carers told us of they have significant health care tasks they provide to support the health of the person they care for. Many carers said they had little choice but to provide this support due to lack of local primary and community health options for the person they care for, with four in 10 (41%) saying they needed more support from the NHS or healthcare professionals.

Cared For Experience

Issues in accessing health care for a cared for person can add to the physical and mental demands of caring and thus the impact on carers own health.

28% of carers reported that the person they were caring for had been waiting over a year for specialist treatment and 16% for more than 6 months.

A third of carers (34%) reported that they had attended accident and emergency (A&E) often facing long waiting times. 29% waited 2-6 hours for an ambulance and one in eight (12%) waited eight hours or more for an ambulance to arrive. 33% of carers waited 2-6 hours for triage.

For Further Information, Contact:

- Fiona Collie, Head of Policy and Public Affairs fiona.collie@carerscotland.org
- Joe McCready, Policy Officer joe.mccready@carerscotland.org

11/03/2024

www.carerscotland.org