

The Carer's Leave Act One Year On April 2025

About Carers Wales

Carers Wales exists to make life better for the more than 310,000 unpaid carers across Wales. We are led by our 5,000 members in Wales, the vast majority of whom are unpaid carers, and together we provide support for and campaign with unpaid carers to secure lasting change. We are part of Carers UK and have been leading the way on carers' rights for 60 years.

About Unpaid Carers

A carer is a person of any age who provides unpaid care and support to a family member, friend or neighbor who is disabled, has an illness or long-term condition, or who needs extra help as they grow older.

Research shows that the care provided by unpaid carers saves the Welsh Government more than [£10 billion](#) over a 12-month period. The human impact of unpaid care is immeasurable. Carers hold families together, enabling the people they provide care for to get the most out of life and making huge sacrifices to do so. In Wales there are around [140,000](#) people who combine their caring roles with some sort of paid work, too.

The Carer's Leave Act

[The Act](#) was passed by the UK parliament in 2023 and came into effect on the 6th April 2024. It applies to England, Wales and Scotland and provides all employees with a new right to carer's leave, including:

- Five days of unpaid leave per year (applied pro-rata) if providing or arranging care for someone with a long-term care need.
- This leave can be taken flexibly (in half or full days) for planned and foreseen caring commitments.
- It is available from the first day of employment.
- It provides the same employment protections to employees as other forms of family-related leave, including protection from dismissal.

The Flexible Working Act

The Act also came into force on the 6th April 2024. This new Act gives all employees the right to ask their employer for flexible working from day one of their employment if they live in England, Scotland or Wales.

- This could cover changes to an employees' working hours, times of work, or place of work.
- An employee will also be able to ask their employer for changes twice a year rather than once a year which is helpful if their caring circumstances change, for example.

- An employee will no longer have to make a case about the impact this will have on their employer.
- An employer will have to consult an employee if they don't think they can make the changes they need.

Impacts in Wales

During our 2024 State of Caring survey, we surveyed around 1,200 unpaid carers in Wales asking them about a range of areas, including new legislation on unpaid carer's leave and new rights around flexible working. These are the findings of that research.

Carers' awareness of unpaid carer's leave and flexible working

The Carer's Leave Act 2023 came into effect on 6 April 2024 and gives employees in England, Wales and Scotland the right to take up to 5 days unpaid leave per year if providing or arranging care for someone with a long-term care need. The Act provides carers with a legal right to take unpaid leave for planned and foreseen caring commitments from the first day of employment.

We asked carers who are employees whether they were aware of this new legislation. Only 37% said they were aware of the legislation and how it affects them. 29% said they had heard of it but didn't know much about it, and 34% said they were not aware of it. This shows that there is still more to do to ensure that awareness of the new rights are promoted to both employers and to employees.

We also asked carers who are employees whether they were aware of the new right to ask their employer for flexible working from day one of their employment and to make two statutory flexible working requests in any 12-month period. This right was introduced for employees in England, Wales and Scotland in Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023 which came into force at the same time on 6 April 2024.

There were similar awareness levels to the Carer's Leave Act 2023. Only 37% of carers who are employees said they were aware of the legislation and how it affects them. 22% said they had heard of it but didn't know much about it, and 41% said they were not aware of it. These results are similar to those outlined above in relation to awareness of unpaid carer's leave.

Carers' awareness of new legislation by size of organisation.

Size of organisation	New legal right to unpaid carer's leave	New legal right to request flexible working from day one
Micro (1-9 people)	5%	5%
Small (10-50 people)	25%	28%
Medium (50-249 people)	42%	42%
Large (250+ people)	44%	44%

We asked carers whether their employer had introduced any changes following the new legislation on unpaid carer's leave and flexible working. A quarter (25%) said they have updated the organisation's policy on unpaid carer's leave, and 20% said they have shared information or advice about unpaid carer's leave. 27% said they have updated the organisation's policy on flexible working and 21% said they have shared information or advice about flexible working.

16% of carers who are employees said their manager has encouraged them to use flexible working or unpaid carer's leave. Only 8% said their employer had chosen to introduce paid carer's leave.

Some carers said that their employer already had carer's leave policies in place before the legislation on unpaid carer's leave was introduced.

*"I have a mix of flexible time and fixed and they have been very accommodating when needed."
"My employer already allows 22hrs paid carers leave per year."
"Was already offering paid carers leave and flexible working."*

While it is promising that some employers have updated their policies and shared information about the new legislation, many employers have not yet done so. 50% of carers said they were not sure what their employer has done, and 15% said their employer has not introduced any changes. Whilst the latter might be because the organisation already had policies in place prior to the legislation being introduced, carers' comments also suggest that some organisations need to improve their knowledge, communication and internal policies.

"My line manager is really unsupportive. It has really affected my life. I work for a council and we have policies in place but it is ALWAYS up to the managers discretion."

Carers' experiences of unpaid carer's leave and flexible working

21% of carers who are employees in Wales had taken unpaid carer's leave since April 2024.

Carers working for a small organisation were more likely to have taken unpaid carer's leave since April 2024. 34% of those working for a small organisation had taken unpaid carer's leave, compared with 21% of those working for a large organisation, 17% of those working for a medium organisation, and 5% of those working for a micro-organisation.

We asked carers who had not taken unpaid carer's leave since April 2024 what, if any, barriers there were that prevented them from doing so. Over half (55%) said they cannot afford to take unpaid carer's leave and need paid carer's leave instead. 10% said that when they had previously taken unpaid carer's leave it had had a negative impact on their finances.

It is concerning that many carers say they are unable to use this right to unpaid Carer's Leave as it is not financially viable for them to take unpaid time off to care. This highlights the need for paid carer's leave. Our [analysis](#) of other countries' policies estimated that providing working carers in the UK with paid Carer's Leave of at least five days per year could save the UK economy around £3.5 billion a year. Our [report](#) on paid Carer's Leave also demonstrates the benefits for employers using examples from leading practitioners such as TSB, Centrica and the Phoenix Group.

29% of carers who had not taken unpaid carer's leave said they haven't needed to take it. 21% said they didn't know they had a right to take unpaid carer's leave, and 8% didn't know how to request this. 14% said they were worried their manager or colleagues would respond negatively to their request. A small minority of carers said their employer said they could not take any unpaid carer's leave (2%) or didn't have any rights to unpaid carer's leave (1%) and 0% said their employer had postponed their request.

Barrier	% of carers who responded
I cannot afford to take unpaid carer's leave – I need paid carer's leave instead	55%
I haven't needed to take unpaid carer's leave	29%
I didn't know I had a right to take unpaid carer's leave	21%
I was worried my manager or colleagues would respond negatively to my request for unpaid carer's leave	15%
When I have previously taken unpaid carer's leave it has had a negative impact on my finances	10%
I didn't know how to request unpaid carer's leave	8%
My employer said I could not take any unpaid carer's leave	2%
My employer said I didn't have any right to take any leave as a carer	1%
My employer postponed my request for unpaid carer's leave	0%

Conclusion

While both Acts undeniably represent a step forward for unpaid carers in Wales, it is clear that practice in employers still varies with regard to unpaid carers and that the current provision set out in law does not yet go far enough to adequately support unpaid carers to retain or return to employment.

Both the UK Government and the Welsh Government have spoken of the importance of supporting more people into work and economic growth. Ensuring that workplace rights and cultures are fit to support unpaid carers will be vital to achieving this and to future-proof the wider economy in the face of an ageing population with increasingly complex care needs.

While many of the legislative levers to better support carers to return to, or remain in, paid work rest with the UK Government, there are ways in which the Welsh Government can show greater leadership in this area.

In the meantime, Carers Wales stands ready to assist employers to better understand and support the unpaid carers in their workplace and to help unpaid carers across Wales remain in, and return to, good quality work where they can.

Recommendations

The UK Government should:

- Introduce a statutory right to paid carer's leave before the end of this Parliament.
- Encourage more organisations to become part of the Employers for Carers and Employers for Carers Wales membership forums, where the specialist knowledge of Carers UK helps employers support carers, retain talented employees and ensure that working carers have equal opportunities in the workplace.
- Encourage more organisations to become Carer Confident by undertaking our Employers for Carers benchmarking scheme. Encourage employers in Scotland to engage with the Carer Positive employer recognition scheme which is sponsored by the Scottish Government and operated by Carers Scotland.

The Welsh Government should:

- Make use of their relationship with the UK Government to call for the introduction of a statutory right to paid carer's leave before the end of the current UK Parliament.
- Encourage and support more organisations in Wales to become part of Employers for Carers Wales membership forums.
- Encourage and support more organisations to become Carer Confident by undertaking our Employers for Carers benchmarking scheme.
- Consider how to better recognise unpaid care and carers within the Fair Work agenda, and co-produce initiatives and support for unpaid carers within this area.

Employers in Wales should:

- Consider going above and beyond the statutory provisions of the Carer's Leave Act 2023 and implement paid carer's leave. A specific dedicated carer's leave policy or a wider carer's policy which covers all available support for carers in the workplace can also be hugely beneficial to encourage carers to come forward for support.
- Track how many employees in their organisation have unpaid caring responsibilities, either through an internal HR self-identification system or via a staff survey. A staff survey also provides an opportunity for employees to tell their employer about the policies and practices that they would like to have in place to best support carers. Staff surveys can also serve as a baseline to monitor carer trends within an organisation.

- Track usage of carer's leave and flexible working arrangements, as this will indicate whether there needs to be more promotion and awareness of policies and provisions.
- Provide thorough and informative training and awareness specifically to managers to ensure that they have knowledge about carers, carers' rights in the workplace and wider caring issues. This will allow managers to signpost and support their employees in more effective ways.
- Continue to promote awareness of carers and caring issues in the workplace, in addition to the promotion of policies such as a carer's leave policy or flexible working policy.
- Introduce or build upon an existing carers network or support group, either virtual or in person, where carers can benefit from peer-to-peer support and share experiences and insight. These networks can be used to gather feedback on where areas could be improved upon in the organisation to retain working carers.