

All Wales Carers Assembly 2025 Event Report



Introduction

Carers Wales's mission is to make life better for unpaid carers in Wales. We provide information and advice on caring, help carers connect with each other, campaign with carers for lasting change and use innovation to improve services.

The Annual All-Wales Carers Assembly hosted by Carers Wales, was held on Monday 10th February 2025. The Assembly brought together over 50 unpaid carers from across Wales, to discuss key issues and priorities. Attendees heard from and engaged with a range of speakers, including the Minister for Children and Social Care, Dawn Bowden MS, political representatives and policy experts. Carers also took part in our first manifesto creation session ahead of the 2026 Senedd elections, getting the first opportunity to help shape the Carers Wales manifesto for the upcoming elections.

This report offers a summary of the event, including the contributions from speakers and some of the powerful contributions shared by carers themselves. The Assembly and this report will be used to further put unpaid carers on the map, giving voice to the experiences and policy priorities of unpaid carers across Wales.

With Thanks

The All-Wales Carers Assembly could not have happened without the support of the Welsh Government and Cardiff Council, as well as our panel speakers who helped make such an engaging event. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone who supported and contributed to the event:

- The Welsh Government
- Cardiff Council
- Children in Wales and the Young Carers Advisory Board
- The Minister for Children and Social Care, Dawn Bowden MS
- The Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, James Evans MS
- The Baroness Smith of Llanfaes
- Cllr Leo Thomson, Cabinet Member for Adult Services and Public Health & Equality, Cardiff Council
- Cllr Ash Lister, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Tackling Poverty & Supporting Young People, Cardiff Council
- Katie Blackburn, Llais
- Dr Catrin Edwards, Carers Trust Wales
- Nick Andrews, Swansea University

A special thanks also to the unpaid carers who gave up their time to raise their voices and the voices of carers across Wales. Your experiences, ideas and determination to improve the lives of carers in Wales made the Assembly possible. We will continue to work to make life better

for unpaid carers across Wales and look forward to working alongside you to make these changes.

A Challenging Context for Carers

Unpaid carers in Wales face significant challenges as a direct result of their caring roles, being disproportionately impacted by poverty and facing worse health and wellbeing outcomes than the wider population. Research by [Carers Wales and WPI Economics](#) in 2024 show that over 100,000 unpaid carers in Wales are living in poverty, and the deep poverty rate for carers is 50% higher than the general population. Our State of Caring in Wales reports show that in 2024, more than [1 in 3 carers are cutting back on essentials](#), such as food and heating and that 2 in 3 carers say their financial situation is having a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. In the same reports, there was a [36% increase](#) in the number of carers reporting bad mental health since 2023 and 60% of carers reported feeling overwhelmed often or always.

In our State of Caring in Wales reports, more than 4 in 5 (82%) unpaid carers indicated that they felt undervalued by Governments.

There is a wealth of additional research painting a picture of alarm with regard to unpaid carers' rights, recognition and their lack of support in Wales. The need for carers' voices to be heard and acted upon feels greater than ever.

Keynote Speech – Minister for Children and Social Care, Dawn Bowden MS

The Assembly's keynote speaker was the Welsh Government's Minister for Children and Social Care, Dawn Bawden MS. The Minister spoke about the Welsh Government's commitment to supporting unpaid carers and explained some of their recent and ongoing initiatives for carers. The Minister spoke about the national Short Breaks Fund, funded by Welsh Government since 2022 to enable 30,000 carers to have a break from caring, and the Minister explained the funding for this scheme had recently been extended to 2026. She also spoke about the work of the Ministerial Advisory Group for carers, which includes carer representation, and her desire to review and refresh the Welsh Government's strategy for unpaid carers over the coming year to set longer term goals for carer support.

The Ministerial Advisory Group has established a Task and Finish group which has surveyed all local authorities to identify both barriers and good practice in the delivery of information and advice to carers and Carers Needs Assessments. In light of research findings shared by Carers Wales, the Minister acknowledged that too many carers currently find it difficult to access a Carers Needs Assessment.

Political Panel

A key function of the Assembly is to remove barriers for unpaid carers to engage with political representatives in Wales, ensuring carers' voices are heard by decision makers. We were delighted to be joined by:

- The Baroness Smith of Llanfaes
- Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, James Evans MS
- Cllr Leo Thomson, Cabinet Member for Adult Services and Public Health & Equality, Cardiff Council

James Evans, who is also the Senedd Member for Brecon and Radnorshire, explained the direction of travel he would like to see from the next Welsh Government following the 2026 Senedd elections. He called on Ministers to prioritise spending on carers and to ensure local authorities were more consistently meeting their obligations towards carers.

Baroness Smith spoke about her personal experience as a former young carer for her father, and how her experience of caring had informed her work in her career to date, including in the National Union of Students and now in the House of Lords. She pledged to continue to question Ministers at the UK level on issues affecting carers in Wales.

Cllr Thompson acknowledged the significant role of unpaid carers in the health and social care system and called for greater awareness of entitlements and grants so more carers know where to go for support. She explained several initiatives taken by Cardiff Council, including the Care'diff carers magazine to spread information about support.

Carers at the Assembly asked the politicians a number of questions on a range of topics including:

- How the Welsh Government can address the gap between carers rights in law and in reality.
- Tackling carer poverty.
- How to reduce waiting times for Carers Needs Assessments.
- Having dedicated information and support groups for parent carers.
- Supporting carers to have a better balance between work, life and caring.
- Improving carer identification through a carers' ID card.

Policy Expert Panel

In addition to a panel of key political stakeholders, we believed it to be important that carers had an opportunity to discuss key policy issues and priorities of the day in a non-partisan manner. As such, we were joined by:

- Katie Blackburn, Regional Director for Powys, Llais
- Dr Catrin Edwards, Head of External Affairs, Carers Trust Wales
- Nick Andrews, Research Officer for the School of Health and Social Care, Swansea University

Katie Blackburn from Llais, the Citizens Voice Body in health and social care, explained how Llais works with health boards and local authorities in local projects to address issues identified by citizens. She explained that Llais has recognised many issues in health and social care particularly affect carers and spoke about the needs of carers in rural areas such as Powys with added difficulties related to travel and accessing sufficient care services locally.

Catrin Edwards explained the work of Carers Trust Wales in coordinating a network of local carers' organisations across Wales. With third sector providers and charities relied on to provide many elements of carer support by councils, Catrin called for more sustainable funding for third sector services to reduce uncertainty but acknowledged that in many areas the level of resources are not sufficient to meet the level of need among carers.

Nick Andrews explained his involvement in a number of research projects related to carers over recent years and his particular interest in the legal rights of carers and how these are delivered in practice.

Carers asked the policy expert panel a number of questions with topics including:

- The shortfall in the availability of respite services.
- How to alleviate the additional financial costs born by carers.
- How to better integrate health and social care services so carers can navigate the system seamlessly.
- Addressing the well-documented implementation gap between the Social Services and Well-being Act and the actual delivery of services across Wales.
- Support into employment for adults with learning disabilities.
- Restrictive eligibility criteria for local authority provided care and support.

Manifesto Creation

With the elections to the Senedd approaching in 2026, we wanted to use the All-Wales Carers Assembly as an opportunity to kick start our engagement with unpaid carers around their top priorities for the next Senedd and Welsh Government.

We posed a series of potential policy interventions to the carers present and asked them to discuss and rank the options in front of them – with license to make amends and tweaks to the proposed options as well as the choice to include something different and original.

The options were:

- Support specifically for when a caring role ends;
- A more transparent support system to navigate with clear ways to challenge decisions and hold services to account;
- More secure and affordable housing for people with caring responsibilities;
- Improved pay and conditions for paid care workers;
- The Welsh Government to lobby the UK Government to reform Carer's Allowance;
- To be valued and consulted when planning treatment for the person(s) you provide care for;
- Quicker Carer's Needs Assessments;
- More statutory support for carers who are assessed as eligible;
- Better access to support services for unpaid carers, from information and advice through to support plans and respite;
- Greater work to promote carer awareness in areas other than health and social care – such as schools, community spaces and businesses;
- Training for unpaid carers – e.g. Dementia training, administering medicines, manual handling;
- Better support and more opportunities for carers to access leisure/hobbies/wellness activities;
- A basic income for unpaid carers;
- More support for carers to remain in, or return to, paid work;
- The Welsh Government to lobby the UK Government to implement paid carer's leave for carers balancing paid work and caring roles.

The subsequent discussion and process evidenced the variety of caring roles within the room and difference of context and circumstance and the impact this has on carers' preferences for support. That said, there were areas of commonality across the carers in the Assembly, with the highest-ranked and most-supported policy interventions being:

- To be valued and consulted when planning treatment for the person(s) you provide care for;
- Quicker Carer's Needs Assessments;
- More support for carers to remain in, or return to, paid work;
- Training for unpaid carers – e.g. Dementia training, administering medicines, manual handling;
- More statutory support for carers who are assessed as eligible;

It is perhaps unsurprising that carers' priorities from this session were focused on practical steps that can be taken to provide support, such as increasing recognition and involvement, as well as up-skilling carers with training to help them in their roles. When feeding back on their discussions, many carers recognised that governments are in difficult situations and that – whilst being supportive – ideas such as a basic income for carers would be near-impossible for the next Welsh Government to deliver on, compared to the proposals above.

Most interesting was the tone of the session. It is abundantly clear from the Assembly, and from existing research and engagement with carers, that change is needed. Many carers bravely spoke of having been pushed to breaking point by a lack of available support and how some of the policy proposals discussed would have prevented them from entering crisis. Carers spoke of their anger and frustration at feeling unsupported and unrecognized by statutory services and political leaders in Wales and wider, while consideration and measurement in their ideas to resolve the wicked problems of the day.

A huge thank you to all the carers who shared their stories, experiences and gave their energy and enthusiasm to this exercise, in the struggle to make life better for unpaid carers in Wales.



Carer Feedback

We asked all attendees on the day to share their thoughts and experiences of the event with us, this is what they said:

- 87% of attendees felt more knowledgeable after the Assembly.
- 79% said they felt that the event had helped carers' voices be heard and listened to.
- 68% felt inspired to be more involved in campaigning for carers' rights.
- 63% said they felt the event had helped carers to be acknowledged, valued and contribute to the decisions that affect their lives.
- 61% said felt empowered to use their voice to support carers.

We also asked carers to reflect on their feelings after the event, these are their voices:

- *"Unfortunately we just keep saying the same thing and nothing changes."*
- *"Have found out more about services that I had no knowledge about."*
- *"Feel as though it's the same story but little confirmed action."*
- *"Was able to understand how government departments work to do with caring etc."*
- *"Everyone acknowledges the problems but seem powerless to take action"*

We asked carers what topics they would like to see covered in any future events akin to the Assembly:

- *"What is innovative? What is working well?"*
- *"Multi generational caring and the impact on families."*
- *"Resources & support for working carers."*
- *"Mental Health; Life After Caring."*
- *"How to get basic rights met!"*

Our sincere thanks to carers who shared their views and perspectives of the event, and what they would like to see going forward. We commit to ensuring this feedback shapes our work and the 2026 All-Wales Carers Assembly.

Conclusion

It is clear that many of the issues raised at the 2024 All-Wales Carers Assembly persist across Wales, for unpaid carers. Too many carers are impacted by poverty, inability to access statutory support and feel invisible and unrecognized by decision makers in Governments and wider society.

If we are to make life better for unpaid carers in Wales, then there must be a step-change in our approach. There is no shortage of evidence and research indicating the various challenges

that carers face and potential solutions to those challenges. We must make 2025 the year in which we re-double our efforts, in governments, support services, carer-representative organisations and wider society, to get more carers the support they need and deserve.

Research shows that unpaid carers in Wales would cost over £10 billion per year to replace with the level of care they provide. Unpaid care is vital to tackling the Welsh Government's key priorities, relieving pressure on statutory services and keeping people healthier in their homes.

With an ageing population, ever-growing demand for services and increasingly complex care needs developing, it will never be easier to fix the issues in unpaid care than it is now. Carers need – and deserve – greater action to see their rights in Wales upheld and enhanced.