

Show Us You Care: A New Deal for Unpaid Carers

**Carers Wales Manifesto
May 2026**

What carers need for a new deal:



Ensure local authorities have the money and resources to implement carers' rights under the law

Introduce a carer supplement to increase the base rate for all carers on Carer's Allowance



Provide long-term and increased funding for carer grants

Provide long-term and increased funding for carer breaks



What carers need for a new deal:



Provide temporary respite care so carers can access medical treatment

Ensure health services have training and support to identify and support carers



Make unpaid care a key focus of the fair work agenda

Recognise carers as a key priority group when considering poverty reduction measures in Wales



Introduction

According to the 2021 census, there are over 310,000 unpaid carers in Wales. However, the actual number is likely to be significantly higher, with some estimates suggesting there are nearly half a million. Analysis by Carers UK and the Centre for Care shows that replacing the care provided by Wales's unpaid carers would cost over £10 billion per year, a figure comparable to the entire Welsh NHS budget.

Ensuring there is better support for carers is vital to tackling the key issues of the day in Wales. Without better support for carers, it will be nearly impossible to tackle unnecessarily long hospital stays and worsening treatment waiting lists. It will be incredibly difficult to support people who have been forced to leave the workforce back into employment, resulting in deepening poverty and hampering economic growth. Our ageing population and increasingly complex care needs mean that it will never be easier than it is today to fix the foundations for unpaid carers and start to give people the support they need to lead healthy, happy and fulfilling lives alongside care.

So why, when there are so many people providing unpaid care and when, without them, our health and social care services would simply collapse, are many carers pushed into poverty? Why are so many carers forced to provide round-the-clock care with little to no support and no prospect of a break? Why do a growing number of carers in Wales report poor health and wellbeing?

We believe carers in Wales deserve better.

The 2026 Senedd election comes at a pivotal time for unpaid carers in Wales. With research painting a bleak picture for carers' lives, the need for action in Wales has never felt more urgent.

During the 6th Senedd (2021-26), unpaid carers have grappled with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and the deterioration of services across Wales, which are meant to be there to support them. The impact of this upon unpaid carers has been, and continues to be, profound, as demonstrated by the findings in our 2024 State of Caring survey:

- Nearly 4 in 10 (38%) of unpaid carers reported bad mental health – an increase of 36% since 2023.
- More than 1 in 3 (34%) carers are cutting back on essentials, such as food and heating.
- 60% of carers reported feeling overwhelmed, often or always.
- 2 in 3 (66%) carers say their financial situation is having a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing.
- More than 9 in 10 (92%) carers who had experienced challenges with support services say it has made them worry more about the future.

Carers Wales exists to make life better for the hundreds of thousands of unpaid carers in Wales.

We do this by campaigning with carers on their issues and priorities; providing carers with information and advice relating to their caring role; and delivering support sessions to help carers take breaks from their caring roles. Everything we do is led by, and co-produced with, unpaid carers, and most of our small team are, or have been, unpaid carers.

This manifesto is a manifesto for unpaid carers in Wales. It is shaped by their voices and led by their lived experience. Its calls are their calls, informed by their issues and priorities and a desire for change.

We started the process by analysing data from our headline annual surveys, State of Caring and Track The Act, which are completed by over 1000 carers each year. Between February and May 2025, we surveyed and engaged around 200 unpaid carers via in-person focus groups and round table sessions, online webinars and our survey “A Manifesto for Carers in Wales”, where carers from across the nation made their voices heard.

We urge all candidates and parties to read the carers’ testimonies and messages to them set out below, – so that we can work together to make life better for carers across Wales in the next Senedd.

We asked carers “What is your message to the people seeking your vote in May 2026?”

“Unpaid Carers are a vital part of the support system. It's cheaper to support us than to cope without us!”

“Would you work 50 hours a week for £350 a month?”

“Just imagine that you will be needing care. How would you want the Welsh Government to support your carer?”

“Treat carers with respect and think how you'd cope if you were put in their position because becoming a carer can happen to anyone at any time. Appreciate how much they are saving the state by caring for someone.”

“Unpaid carers need better understanding and help. Suddenly being left with no job and no money after many years of caring for a loved one is extremely difficult.”

“Some carers live off £86 a week. Of course work would ease that but I'd need a carers assessment beforehand. My requests for one have been ignored. Basic carers income is needed. Close second but just as important, access to assessments, I need help and a break.”

Closing the Gap; Carers' Rights in Law Versus Reality

In Wales, all unpaid carers have rights enshrined in law. The main piece of legislation that pertains to these rights is the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, which has been in force since 2016.

It introduced new rights for unpaid carers, which are:

- The right to wellbeing: your local authority, local health board and Welsh ministers must promote the well-being of people who need care and support and carers who need support.
- The right to have information, advice and assistance: your local authority must provide information, advice and assistance about support services so you can find and access them.
- The right to an assessment: your local authority must offer you a carers' needs assessment. This assessment is to find out what support you need and how your local authority can help if you do need support. Your right to an assessment is not affected by how much money you have, but you may be asked to contribute to the cost of your support.
- The right to have your voice heard and have control over decisions about your support: during your assessment your local authority must ask you what matters to you as a carer or a young carer. You must be involved in all decisions about your support. Carers have a choice over whether they provide care and the type of care they may wish to provide.
- The right to advocacy if you are unable to fully take part in discussions yourself: an advocate is someone who can help make your voice heard when decisions are made about your support.

While the above goals are admirable and enjoy broad support, unfortunately, for many carers these rights are rarely realised.

Consistent research has shown a gaping chasm between carers' rights in law, and the reality on the ground. Despite all carers having a legal right to an assessment, a 2024 [report](#) by the Ombudsman for Wales showed that only 2.8% of the carer population in investigated authorities had their needs assessed, which is supported by our 2024 [Track the Act report](#) which found that only 6% of carers had their needs assessed. In addition to this, according to Track the Act, less than 1 in 3 (31%) carers received advice in 2023-24 and less than half (47%) saw any information relating to their caring role in the same time period.

The Welsh Government's Evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, published in 2023, also highlighted failures in the implementation of the Act.

One of the most effective ways to make life better for unpaid carers across Wales would be for the next Welsh Government to take control of this issue and close the gap between the rhetoric and the reality of unpaid carers' rights in Wales.

To achieve this, we call on the next Welsh Government to:

- Commit to the production of an Action and Implementation Plan for unpaid carers in relation to the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. This plan should:
 - Be fully co-produced with unpaid carers and carer representative organisations.
 - Utilise and address the findings of the Welsh Government-commissioned Evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, published in 2023, the findings of the 2024 Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Are we caring for our carers? report, and the 2024 Track The Act report from Carers Wales.
- Set out how the Government intends to ensure effective monitoring of the implementation of the Act in Wales and how this will be transparently reported on.
- Ensure that the next Welsh Government shows leadership in the successful implementation of the Act, ensuring a consistent minimum level of support across local authority areas in Wales.
- Address the inconsistencies in terminology relating to Carer's Needs Assessments and the carer journey through statutory support services across local authority areas in Wales.
- Include plans for a large-scale and coordinated awareness campaign, co-produced with unpaid carers and carer organisations, to improve carers' awareness of their rights and to help more people identify as unpaid carers.
- Ensure that there is sufficient capacity within statutory bodies to deliver on their legal duties as outlined in the Act. Consideration should be given as to whether additional, ring-fenced resources should be provided to local authorities to support unpaid carers.

Carers Said:

“Quicker needs assessments for carer and cared for and appropriate and “meaningful” social care package put in place.”

“Easier pathways to Direct Payments.”

“Provision of day centre services in house is by far the most effective way of giving carers respite. Yet, since covid they have been largely eroded and carers who cannot leave their loved ones are most affected.”

“Training for caring role. Did not know you could have training for dementia?”

“Value the fact that without unpaid carers things would be very different for the government and society as a whole.”

“Recognise the value of unpaid care, we save millions every year. Give us a basic income, include carers over retirement age, as their caring gets harder as they age and getting a state pension should not mean they no longer care.”



Carer Poverty

Research by Carers Wales and WPI Economics in 2024 showed that around 100,000 unpaid carers are in poverty in Wales and that the poverty rate for unpaid carers is 30% higher than the general population. The deep poverty rate – living below 40% of the median household income – is 50% higher for unpaid carers than the general population. Our 2024 State of Caring research shows that nearly 2 in 3 carers (64%) are worried about living costs and whether they can manage in the future. 15% of carers are in debt as a result of their caring role, with more than 1 in 4 carers having to use credit cards (27%) or their overdraft (26%) to help manage their finances.

It is simply unacceptable that unpaid carers – who save statutory services in Wales over £10 billion per year – are cut adrift and left to languish in poverty because of their caring role. Carers are struggling to afford the basics for themselves, risking their ability to continue providing unpaid care. Addressing this social injustice must be a top priority for the next Welsh Government.

We urge the next Welsh Government to:

- Introduce a Carer's Allowance Supplement, as was introduced in Scotland in 2018. The payment should bring eligible carers at least in line with the level of financial support available in Scotland
- Call on the UK Government to radically overhaul the Carer's Allowance system, improving the rate of the allowance, widening eligibility

criteria and ensuring a better fit with paid work to prevent overpayments.

- Provide long-term funding certainty to the Carer Support Fund and increase the amount within the pot, creating broad eligibility to ensure more carers benefit from financial support.
- Recognise unpaid carers as a priority group when devising future anti-poverty and cost-of-living policy interventions and co-produce these interventions with unpaid carer organisations and unpaid carers.
- Utilise the 'Claim What's Yours' campaign to inform and support unpaid carers to claim everything they are entitled to, including Pension Credit, social tariffs and other discounts on utility bills. The Welsh Government should utilise carer-focused promotional resources and the voices of carers to effectively target and inform unpaid carers.
- Encourage local authorities to embed greater flexibility into direct payments so families can use the funds in the ways that best meet their own needs and preferences.

Carers Said:

“A paid amount, however small, to help with the basics etc. I know that government finances today are tight etc.”

“More compensation to recognise the contribution unpaid carers make towards reducing the burden on social care.”

Carers' Health and Wellbeing

Our 2024 State of Caring in Wales report shows an alarming slide in carers' health and well-being in Wales, with a 36% increase in the number of carers reporting bad mental health compared to 2023. Of the majority (60%) of carers who report feeling overwhelmed often or always, 2 in 3 (66%) said they felt overwhelmed because they haven't been able to take a break from caring. Over half of carers (52%) who feel overwhelmed feel this way because they are struggling with their own health conditions.

There is not only a financial penalty for providing unpaid care, but a health and well-being one as well. Many unpaid carers report difficulties managing their own health and wellbeing as a result of their caring role. Our 2023 State of Caring in Wales report showed that 50% of unpaid carers in Wales had put off their own treatment to provide care.

Without ensuring unpaid carers across Wales are supported to maintain good health and wellbeing, we risk carer burnout and increased pressure on statutory support systems. Therefore, the next Welsh Government must prioritise carers' health and wellbeing by:

- Committing to long-term funding for the Short Breaks Scheme and increasing the funding level, to allow a greater number of carers to benefit from a break from their caring roles.
- Ensuring that in addition to the above funding, adequate local and regional services are in place to support carers to take breaks.

- Adequately resourcing local authorities and other statutory services to better fulfil their obligations under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act. Drive up the number of carers accessing support via information and advice, having their needs assessed and being supported via statutory services.
- Working to remove the barriers to unpaid carers accessing their own treatment and support. Increasing the temporary respite services available, prioritising carers for treatment and working with carers to ensure they receive the care they also need.
- Ensuring staff working in statutory services are trained and supported to better identify unpaid carers, signpost them to support and prevent them from reaching crisis.
- Working with Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) to better support their unpaid carer reps, so that they can better influence the work of RPBs to support unpaid carers in their regions.

Carers Said:

"Access to activities to alleviate stress on caring roles as this is what creates them to break down and/or the carer's health to deteriorate."

"Mental health support for Carers. Access to talking therapy, not group based."

Unpaid Care and Paid Work

Research shows that there are nearly 145,000 people in Wales balancing paid work with unpaid care, of which 121,000 are employees. Nearly 30,000 people in employment in Wales provide more than 50 hours of unpaid care per week.

Becoming, or being, an unpaid carer can have a significant impact on a person's relationship with paid work. Our 2023 State of Caring research showed that over half (57%) of carers who reduced their working hours in Wales did so due to the stress of juggling paid work and unpaid care.

The ability to combine paid work with unpaid care can be life-changing for unpaid carers, helping to prevent poverty, providing breaks from caring and giving unpaid carers purpose and identity beyond their caring roles – improving mental health and wellbeing. There are also huge benefits to governments, society and employers for supporting unpaid carers to remain in employment alongside their caring role. These include increased tax receipts, reduced social security demands, lower numbers of economic inactivity, increased levels of skilled staff in the labour market, and reduced recruitment and retention costs for organisations.

Combine these benefits with a clear direction of travel from devolved and reserved governments across the UK to support more people into work and grow the economy, and it's clear that unpaid carers have another huge stake in this story. We call on the next Welsh Government to:

- Continue to support the roll-out and benefits of new legislation, such as the Carer's Leave Act and the Flexible Working Act across Wales as well as the changes to the Carer's Allowance earnings limit;
 - Promote carers' new rights in law pertaining to flexible working, carer's leave and earnings thresholds to unpaid carers across Wales and ensure carers are informed and equipped to leverage benefits from these rights.
 - Support employers across Wales to better understand and implement these changes, helping them to recruit and retain skilled staff who are also unpaid carers.
 - Share good practice examples within workplaces and drive improvement of practice within employers across Wales in relation to supporting unpaid carers.
- Make supporting unpaid carers who are or want to be in paid work, a key part of the Fair Work agenda. Support more workplaces to recruit and empower Workplace Carer Champions to drive change and support carers in workplaces.
- Ensure public money is only provided to organisations fulfilling, or working towards fulfilling, the definitions and characteristics of fair work. This must include requiring employers to adopt carer confident practices.

- Establish a Fair Work Forum for carers in employment, bringing together government, employers, unions and carer representatives in a spirit of social partnership to share learning across sectors and drive up support in the workplace for employees with caring responsibilities.
- Call on the UK Government to implement paid carer's leave, to better support employees who are unpaid carers to balance their roles without fear of financial penalty.
- Ensure there is join-up between Health and Social Care and Economy and Social Partnership units within the Welsh Government, to promote cohesion and clarity when designing policy around paid work and unpaid care.

Carers Said:

"I would want carers to be able to work reduced hours and work part time, supported by the welfare system. At the moment you can either work and self sustain or not work and get benefits, there's no in between which either forces carers out of work or increases the risk of burn out by forcing carers to work unsupported."

"Financial support should be adequate for people who are forced to give up work to care for someone or alternatively support should be in place to allow the person to carry on working."

"Paid carers leave to cover the shortfall in having to go part time to be able to work, and still provide care for my disabled daughter."



Carers Vote

We asked carers if they intended to vote in the 2026 Senedd elections and to give us an insight into their decision.

93% of respondents said they plan to vote, saying:

“If I do not vote I cannot complain about incoming MSs. I will be looking for the party who shows commitment to carers by what they have done, not by what they say they are going to do.”

“Things MUST CHANGE for unpaid carers.”

“I hope my vote leads to better support.”
“I believe my vote to be wasted if I don't use it but feel like I've been failed.”

“Always vote as women haven't had the vote very long and it was an immense struggle for the women who went before us.”

“I think everyone should vote - my ancestors marched in the Chartist March and fought so that the working class could vote, and I believe it is a moral duty to vote.”

A small minority (7%) of unpaid carers said they did not plan to vote, and their reasons were:

“Nothing positive ever results from the lies told to get the vote.”

“I don't think our voices are taken into consideration for anything.”

“No faith left. Only a talking point for them during elections.”

What is clear is that despite cynicism and damaged trust with unpaid carers, the vast majority of unpaid carers intend to exercise their democratic right to vote. With between 310,000 and 480,000 unpaid carers in Wales, we would suggest that it is in the interests of all candidates and parties standing for election to be alive to carers' priorities and the issues they face.



A Call to Action

The status quo is no longer an option. The next Welsh Government must oversee radical change in the way it supports unpaid carers, or we risk condemning generations of carers to lives of poverty, ill-health and desperation.

Many carers recognise and are supportive of the work that is going into a more strategic reform of the health and social care system in Wales and across the UK. But this must be balanced with effective implementation of existing legislation, and delivery of support in the here and now.

Many simply want – and deserve – to get the basics done right and done well, which is only fair considering the care they provide saves services and governments over £10 billion per year in Wales.

It should serve as a mark of shame that so few carers are identified, have their needs assessed and go on to receive any sort of support. The next Welsh Government has a golden opportunity to shift the dial on this unacceptable situation and ensure that unpaid carers in Wales are better recognised and better supported.

We call on all candidates from every party seeking election to our Senedd to do right by unpaid carers in Wales. Listen to their calls, recognise their vital roles in our society and use your platform and power to make life better for unpaid carers in Wales.



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