

Manifesto: Supporting unpaid carers and young carers in 2026 and beyond



The National Carer Organisations want Scotland's unpaid carers to feel valued, included and supported as equal partners in the provision of care. We aim to do this by amplifying their voice at a national level and focusing on improvements in areas of policy and practice that are currently of greatest concern to unpaid carers: access to support, looking after their own health and wellbeing, and achieving financial security.

Scotland's unpaid carers face considerable challenges as the pressure on our health and social care system mounts. Cuts to budgets and services mean more unpaid carers are caring for longer and more intensively. We call upon all parties to make a commitment in the 2026 election to supporting unpaid carers. Three in five of us are likely to become an unpaid carer in our lifetime: supporting carers doesn't just make political and economic sense, it's a moral imperative.

Ensure unpaid carers are supported



Guarantee all unpaid carers can fully benefit from their right to a break by establishing a national task force to oversee a national short breaks improvement plan, and by ensuring there is sufficient investment to deliver this right.



Allocate at least 25% of Carers Act funding to local carers' support organisations in addition to the funding they currently receive



Introduce mandatory Young Carer Awareness Training to all education staff



Only 7.5%
of unpaid carers reported regularly or frequently receiving breaks from caring

96%
of local carer support organisations reported a risk to the sustainability of their organisation due to funding pressures with 40% reporting a substantial or catastrophic risk

1 in 10
children in every class has a caring responsibility but 49% of these young and young adult carers do not get help to balance caring with their education

Ensure unpaid carers can stay well



Invest in and deliver a dedicated 'Tackling Carer Health Inequalities' strategy for Scotland



Provide annual health checks, flexible GP and hospital appointments, and improved access to regular screening for unpaid carers



Ensure all unpaid carers can access support locally for their mental health and wellbeing, by investing in counselling and emotional support services, including those through local carer support organisations



80%

of unpaid carers said that the main challenge they will face over the next year is the impact caring will have on their physical and/or mental health

54%

of unpaid carers say that their physical health had suffered because of their caring role

86%

of adult unpaid carers and 91% of young carers experience an impact on their mental health and emotional wellbeing because of their caring role

Ensure unpaid carers are financially secure



Revise Carer Support Payment by increasing the rate and making it available to more unpaid carers, including introducing a payment for older adult unpaid carers

Deliver a Minimum Income Guarantee for unpaid carers



Require all organisations with public funding to be Carer Positive



End all charges for social care



More than one third

of unpaid carers on Carer Support Payment can't afford essentials like food and heating

More than one quarter

of unpaid carers are living in poverty

Nearly a third

of working age unpaid carers have given up work to care

In 2021, COSLA and the Scottish Government promised 'an end to charging for non-residential services as soon as possible'

