

# State of Caring 2021 in Northern Ireland

Each year, Carers UK carries out a survey of carers to understand the current state of caring in the UK. This report contains a snapshot of what caring in Northern Ireland is like in 2021, capturing the impact that caring has on carers' lives and evidencing the policy recommendations that would improve this.

## Finances

Caring often brings with it additional costs, from equipment and care costs to increased expenditure on fuel and transportation. When asked to describe their current financial situation, 29% of carers in Northern Ireland said they were struggling to make ends meet. A further 17% are or have been in debt as a result of caring and 4% cannot afford utility bills such as electricity, gas, water or telephone bills.

When asked about how their financial situation had changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, 35% of carers said that their financial situation had got worse since the start of the pandemic.

Caring can be expensive and 65% of carers are spending their own money on care, support services or products for the person they care for. The average monthly spend for carers in Northern Ireland is £120 and with high rates of inflation and a rising cost of living, this extra spend is likely to further disadvantage carers financially.

## Support and services

Carers often need practical and emotional support to enable them to care safely for people with complex needs, and too often they struggle to get the support they need. When asked about barriers to accessing support, the largest issue for Northern Irish carers was that they did not know what services were available in their area, with 44% of carers reporting this as a barrier. In addition, 40% of carers were concerned about the risk of catching COVID-19 and 28% say that the care and support services did not meet their needs.

Considering the future of services, 49% of carers were uncertain about what practical support they may be able to access in the next twelve months and 66% were worried that services will be reduced.

## Health

Caring can have a detrimental impact on someone's physical and mental health. 26% of carers described their physical health as bad or very bad. 34% of carers rated their mental health as bad or very bad.

Looking at wider indicators of wellbeing, 36% of carers reported that they are often or always lonely, otherwise known as being 'chronically lonely'. Carers also rated their overall satisfaction with life at an average of 5 out of 10 and their level of anxiety at 6 out of 10.

## Carer's assessments

The Carers and Direct Payments Act gives Northern Irish carers the right to a carer's assessment, which is usually carried out by local Health and Social Care Trusts. Despite carers' rights to assessments only 26% of Northern Irish carers reported having an assessment in the last 12 months of those, 24% waited more than 6 months for their assessment.

Of those who hadn't requested a carer's assessment, 46% stated that this was because they didn't know what it was and 14% stated it was because they didn't think it would be beneficial. 12% of carers said their assessment had been postponed or they were still waiting.

## **Technology**

When asked about their current use of digital technology, remote healthcare such as online GP appointments was the most popular technology listed, with 37% of carers stating that this made their caring role easier.

Looking to the future, 28% of Northern Irish carers would like to continue accessing support services digitally in the future and 39% stated they would like to continue accessing health and social care services digitally.

## **Work**

Working carers represent a significant proportion of the working population, and 273 respondents were in paid work. The pandemic is continuing to have an impact on working experiences, with 34% of working carers working from home part or full time.

The limited return of services continues to have an impact. 30% of working carers in Northern Ireland stated that if care services they used to rely on did not return, they would either need to reduce their working hours or give up work entirely.



Across the UK today 6.5 million people are carers – supporting a loved one who is older, disabled or seriously ill.

Caring will touch each and every one of us in our lifetime, whether we become a carer or need care ourselves. Whilst caring can be a rewarding experience, it can also impact on a person's health, finances and relationships.

Carers UK is here to listen, to give carers expert information and tailored advice. We champion the rights of carers and support them in finding new ways to manage at home, at work, or in their community.

We're here to make life better for carers.

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