

## **Response from Carers Wales, June 2020**

### **Health and Social Care Committee:**

#### **Inquiry into the Covid 19 outbreak on health and social care in Wales**

Carers Wales welcome the Committee's inquiry into the Covid19 outbreak on health and social care in Wales.

Carers Wales is part of Carers UK. Established in 1965, we have led the carers' movement for over 50 years. We are a responsive, expert charity, led by carers, for carers and with carers. As the UK's only national membership charity for carers, we are highly respected in our field. Since our inception, we have been campaigning with carers, transforming understanding and winning critical developments in carers rights.

#### **Context**

In Wales according to You Gov polling in 2019 there were almost 400,000 unpaid carers in Wales<sup>i</sup> (at the last census in 2011 there were 369,186 carers). Of these carers 87,173 were aged 65+ and 131,120 aged between 50-64. It is worth noting that carers are not a homogenous group and will have different needs depending on their caring situation and caring responsibilities.

Since the Covid19 pandemic, new research by Carers UK<sup>ii</sup> suggests that an additional 196,000 people are caring for an older, disabled or seriously ill relative or friends bring the total number of carers in Wales to over 683,000.

112,000 women (575) and 84,000 men (43%) have started caring for friends or relatives. Some have been supporting loved ones from afar, helping with food shopping, collecting medicine, managing finances and providing reassurance and emotional support during the pandemic, whilst others have taken on 24/7 care responsibilities, including providing personal care.

98,000 people in Wales (50%) who have started caring since the outbreak are also juggling paid work alongside their caring responsibilities. This highlights a need for working carers to be able to access support from health and social care as and when they return to work.

Furthermore, Carers UK's Caring Behind Closed Doors report April 2020<sup>iii</sup> highlights the reality that is being faced by carers across the whole of the UK and identifies the practical pressures and support that carers need from health and social care services.

Before the crisis, carers were already providing substantial hours of care but the Caring Behind Closed Doors report highlights that in Wales 79% of carers are now providing more care, with over a third 36% providing more care because of local services they have relied on have closed or reduced their hours.

For carers across Wales, the type of care they are providing has also changed due to changes in circumstances, changes in services they relied on or the needs of the person they care for. 73% of carers are providing more help with emotional support, motivation or keeping an eye on or checking the person they care for.

57% of carers in Wales said that the pressure of being responsible and for keeping the person they care for safe agreed with the statement “I feel overwhelmed and I am worried that I’m going to burnout in the coming weeks”.

## Action Required

Referring back to the Health and Social Care Committee report into the impact of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 in relation to carers, now more than ever, carers need to be identified at the earliest opportunity and the recommendations around identification, the provision of information, advice and support as well as other recommendations need to be expedited.

We are hearing carers saying that since the pandemic they are feeling invisible and that their contribution is largely going unrecognised. There needs to be an urgent and clear distinction between the difference between a paid care worker and an unpaid family carer in all messages coming out of Government and all relevant Government departments.

The Covid19 pandemic outbreak has brought into stark focus the need to support carers and the people they support. With the health and social care system under significant pressure, local services that carers have relied on have been closed and carers have had to, without choice, take on the extra caring responsibilities that have implications for their own health and well-being.

Wales Carers Alliance, an alliance of Welsh charities that exists to uphold unpaid carers rights and champion the voice of carers across Wales. The Carers Wales Director is currently Chair and has written two letters to Welsh Government highlighting the key issues and concerns carers have raised with Alliance members as a result of Covid19. Many of the issues raised are in direct relation to social services and health – links to which can be found here - <https://www.carersuk.org/wales/news-campaigns/news/wales-carers-alliance-sends-letter-to-welsh-government-on-the-impact-on-unpaid-carers> and <https://www.carersuk.org/wales/news-campaigns/news/wales-carers-alliance-responds-to-welsh-government-response-to-covid-19-letter><sup>iv</sup>.

Carers Wales has various examples of how carers have been impacted by COVID19. For example, an elderly carer, with considerable caring responsibilities, told us that since lockdown all day services he relied on have been cancelled. He has also had to cancel services via Direct Payments, which meant that all of the caring responsibility for his adult son now falls to himself and his wife. He stated that even though they are in the social care system, they were not given any information or advice and only through instigating a phone call themselves to their local authority did social services call. Following this, they now get a weekly call or text to see if they are ok. The carer stated to me that he concerned about:

- other carers in the same position who are not getting a call or any support at all and are forgotten about
- the lack of information coming from the local council about the situation now and plans for the future as lockdown eases (e.g. will the day centre open with social distancing in place?)

- unpaid carers being seemingly forgotten in the pandemic with no information forthcoming without them having to instigate it
- council staff being seconded elsewhere and also not being told about post lockdown plans
- he wants to see services such as day services that carers rely on re-open as a priority

Pre-lockdown support plans to carers and those they care for need to be re-instated as soon as possible.

In regard to health services, carers have raised concerns about being unable to visit loved ones in hospital settings due to the restrictions put in place since Covid19.

Carers continue to report that people are being discharged from hospital without adequate support in place. This was emphasised by one of our members, who reported that a carer had a loved one discharged from hospital to the home, without being informed that they had coronavirus. We would welcome a reminder to Health Board leads around the duty to fully engage carers in any discharge planning processes, and also follow up referrals in primary care.

Non-urgent clinic/medical appointments are being cancelled and unpaid carers are under additional pressure to care for their loved ones while the NHS capacity is depleted.

Our Director also wrote a letter on behalf of the Wales Carers Alliance to the Chief Medical Officer for Wales. Again, this summarises concerns raised by carers. The letter can be found here: <https://www.carersuk.org/wales/news-campaigns/news/wales-carers-alliance-responds-to-welsh-government-response-to-covid-19-letter>

There needs to be a clear post lockdown strategy and real consideration into what happens to enable carers to transition back into some sort of a normal life, ensuring that they have all the emotional and practical support they need. Our Director has written the attached response to Welsh Government on their Roadmap document and considerations for unpaid carers.

At the time of writing this response, Wales is still in lockdown and the situation regarding carers and the implications on health and social care services remain fluid.

Where issues continue to arise for carers we will highlight them to the Committee.

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<sup>i</sup> Carers UK – Getting Carers Connected – Carers Week 2019 research

<sup>ii</sup> Carers UK – The rise in the number of unpaid carers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

<sup>iii</sup> Caring behind closed doors – Forgotten families in the coronavirus outbreak April 2020

<sup>iv</sup> The impact of Coronavirus on unpaid carers – Wales Carers Alliance letters -

<https://www.carersuk.org/wales/news-campaigns/news/wales-carers-alliance-sends-letter-to-welsh-government-on-the-impact-on-unpaid-carers> and <https://www.carersuk.org/wales/news-campaigns/news/wales-carers-alliance-responds-to-welsh-government-response-to-covid-19-letter><sup>iv</sup>.