



National Carer
Organisations



General Election Manifesto 2024

A manifesto for unpaid carers in Scotland

Background paper

Manifesto for unpaid carers in Scotland



Together we have a shared vision that all Scotland's unpaid carers will feel valued, included and supported as equal partners in the provision of care.

The National Carer Organisations work with the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government to improve support for unpaid carers in Scotland on issues that are devolved to the Scottish Parliament – such as health and social care, some benefits and income tax. This manifesto focuses on key issues reserved to the UK Government and therefore has a particular focus on employment rights, equality and financial support.

The next UK Government must:

- » increase funding across the UK for social care to help deliver sustainable and quality local carer services.
- » commit to increasing the Carer Premium and Carer Element in Universal Credit.
- » provide additional financial support to unpaid carers of State Pension age.
- » change the social security system to better support carers to remain in work.
- » build on the Carers Leave Act and implement paid carers leave.
- » amend the Equalities Act 2010 to include caring as the 10th protected characteristic.

Unpaid carers contribute

£13.1bn

of care in Scotland each year¹

There are around

800,000

people in Scotland providing unpaid care each year²

Unpaid carers

An unpaid carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who, due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction, cannot cope without their support. This could be because of a long-term or terminal illness, disability, a mental health condition, addiction, or frailty.

¹ [Scotland's Carers update release](#), Scottish Government 2022

² [National Care Service Financial Memorandum](#), Scottish Parliament 2022

Increase funding for social care

The need for increased funding for social care across the UK is more urgent than ever. Scotland's unpaid carers are struggling with increasing responsibilities as support services are reduced due to public funding cuts.

Investing in support not only helps unpaid carers, but also reduces pressure on health and social care budgets. It helps sustain local carer support, provides essential breaks and leads to healthier, more resilient communities.

» **The next UK government must commit to investing more funding in social care and support for unpaid carers.**

Financial support for unpaid carers

The financial, physical and emotional toll on unpaid carers from the cost-of-living crisis and the lingering effects of the pandemic cannot be underestimated. Although there has been some improvement in inflation, the poverty and financial insecurity that unpaid carers face continues to grow.

The poverty rate among unpaid carers is higher than for those without a caring role with 29% of unpaid carers living in poverty. This is an increase from 24% in the previous year. The rate is higher still for those of working age and those in receipt of certain benefits. For example, the poverty rate for those in receipt of Carer's Allowance is now 34%⁵ and research⁶ by Carers Scotland found that 41% were struggling to make ends meet.

The Department for Work and Pension's Family Resources Survey⁷ found that one in five (21%) households in receipt of Carer's Allowance live with food insecurity – nearly three times the rate of the general population.

An estimated six in ten people live in families where someone is disabled and these households are often additionally disadvantaged, facing extra costs over and above their non-disabled peers. Extra costs can include: additional costs of heating for someone who has limited mobility; specialist diets for those with digestive or swallowing problems; the additional cost of accessible transport; and costs such as care services, products and equipment.

Many of these costs have been subject to significant inflationary increases, making even the basics of everyday life unaffordable for many households. A third of unpaid carers (33%) are cutting back on essentials such as food and heat to make ends meet.

3 [State of Caring](#), Carers UK, 2023

4 [Annual Scottish Health Survey](#)

5 [UK Poverty 2023](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation

6 [State of Caring in Scotland: The financial impact of caring in 2023](#), Carers Scotland, 2023

7 [Family Resources Survey: financial year 2021 to 2022](#), GOV.UK website, statistical release, Department for Work & Pensions (DWP), released 23 March 2023

More than a quarter

27%

of unpaid carers have bad or very bad mental health

rising to 31% of those caring for more than 50 hours a week.³

Only

3-4%

of carers report having breaks

For full-time unpaid carers, providing 35 or more hours of care a week, only 9-10% have access to breaks from caring.⁴

29%

of unpaid carers in Scotland are living in poverty



Financial struggles are often exacerbated by unpaid carers having to give up employment or reduce their working hours to provide care. Reduced incomes from paid work, the limitations of social security benefits, and the lack of availability of social care puts many unpaid carers in a precarious situation with few, if any, options to increase their incomes and financial security.

1 in 5

households in receipt of Carer's Allowance live with food insecurity

Double carer premiums and additions

In 2018, the Scottish Government introduced Carer's Allowance Supplement to equalise Carer's Allowance with other income replacement benefits. Today this is worth an equivalent of £11.10 per week.

- » **However, for those who remain in the reserved benefit system – primarily those on Universal Credit and Pension Credit – the next UK Government must commit to increasing the Carer Premium/Carer Addition and Carer Element in Universal Credit by at least an equivalent £11.10 per week to provide extra income.**



Address the overlapping benefit rule and support older adult unpaid carers

Unpaid carers who are of State Pension age or in receipt of another earnings replacement benefit can be entitled to Carer's Allowance/Carer Support Payment if they meet all other eligibility rules. This is called 'overlapping benefits'.

These benefits are normally set at a higher rate than unpaid carers benefits, which means they are not paid but instead establish what is called 'an underlying entitlement'. For some unpaid carers this means they can qualify for an extra amount under other income benefits such as Pension Credit but for many more no further financial support is provided.

- » **The next UK Government must provide additional financial support to unpaid carers of State Pension age, such as a non-means-tested payment. There should also be a review of pension rules for unpaid carers so that they are not disadvantaged in retirement.**



Universal Credit Work Allowance

The current Universal Credit system does not encourage unpaid carers to remain in employment, to try juggling paid employment and caring, or even to take on limited additional hours to ease financial strains. Some individuals receiving Universal Credit, including those with children or living with a disability or health condition that affects their ability to work, are eligible for a Work Allowance.



This means they can earn a certain amount (between £379–£631 depending on housing costs) before their Universal Credit is reduced. Unpaid carers do not receive such a Work Allowance and their Universal Credit is reduced by 55p for every £1 they earn.

» **The next UK Government must review and implement changes to the social security system to better support carers to remain in work, removing any aspects that act as a disincentive to work.**

Unpaid carers' Universal Credit is reduced by

55p
for every £1 they earn

Support in employment

Around 270,000 people in Scotland juggle paid employment with unpaid care. This is one in seven of the working age population⁸ and represents one in ten of those currently in employment.⁹

Research by the Centre for Care found that every year in Scotland between 2010–2020, more than 150,000 people in paid employment became unpaid carers. This equals 6% of the population who are in employment and almost 3,000 people every week.¹⁰ With the Scottish population projected to both age and to decline,¹¹ more and more people are likely to be combining unpaid caring with paid employment now and in the future.

Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.¹² Having the opportunity to work is an important part of life and it is recognised that, beyond financial security, employment brings wider benefits in terms of a fulfilling career, positive mental health and social interaction.

However, unpaid care, particularly without the right support, can have a fundamental impact on an unpaid carers' ability to maintain employment. Juggling paid work and caring responsibilities can be both challenging and stressful, with impacts on finances, physical and mental health. This balancing act also often leaves many unpaid carers unable to sustain full-time employment, faced with reducing hours, turning down opportunities or being forced to give up work entirely to care. Evidence shows that unpaid carers are less likely to work full-time (34% v 47%), are more likely to be in part-time work (16% v 12%) than non-carers¹³ and 17% have turned down promotion or taken a less qualified job in order to manage caring with paid employment.¹⁴ It is clear therefore that unpaid carers are still lacking the right support both at work and in their caring role.



Around
270,000
people in Scotland
are juggling paid
employment with
unpaid care

- 8 [Projected Population of Scotland \(Interim\) 2020-based](#), National Records of Scotland (2022) gives an estimated working age population of 3,550,000 people in Scotland
- 9 [Scotland's Labour Market: People, Places and Regions – Protected Characteristics](#). Statistics from the Annual Population Survey 2021, Scottish Government (2022) – 2,601,800 people (aged 16 and over) were estimated to be in employment in Scotland.
- 10 [Cycles of caring: transitions in and out of unpaid care](#), Petrillo, Bennett and Pryce (2022)
- 11 [Projected Population of Scotland \(Interim\) 2020-based](#), National Records of Scotland (2022)
- 12 [Article 23, Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)
- 13 [Family Resources Survey: financial year 2021 to 2022](#), GOV.UK website, statistical release, Department for Work & Pensions (DWP), released 23 March 2023
- 14 [Juggling paid employment and unpaid care: A State of Caring in Scotland report](#), Carers Scotland, January 2024

The National Carer Organisations want to ensure that unpaid carers can remain in paid employment should they wish to do so. There a strong moral and economic case for supporting unpaid carers. The peak age for caring is 45–54; a point at which employees are often at the peak of their career and experience. The UK and Scottish economy and productivity depends on retaining these skilled and knowledgeable staff.

- » **The next UK Government must recognise the importance of supporting unpaid carers to remain in employment and develop policies to do so.**
 - This includes building on the Carer's Leave Act 2023 and extending it to give working unpaid carers a right to at least five days of paid Carer's Leave a year.

Equality for unpaid carers

In the Equality Act 2010, there are nine protected characteristics that cover age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sex. The National Carer Organisations believe that caring, unpaid, for disabled, chronically ill or older relatives or friends who need support should become the 10th protected characteristic.

For example, when applying for jobs, equality monitoring forms do not ask whether someone has unpaid caring responsibilities and there is no requirement for simple reasonable adjustments for unpaid carers in the workplace. Unpaid carers say that this would make a difference to them.

Unpaid carers whose role as a carer intersects with the nine protected characteristics also face additional barriers.¹⁵ This includes overt discrimination such as racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism and ableism as well as systemic issues such as a failure to provide services appropriate to their protected characteristics or providing accessible information on these services. It is important that additional efforts are put in place to improve the equalities outcomes for unpaid carers in line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

- » **The next UK Government must amend the Equalities Act 2010 to include caring as the 10th protected characteristic.**
- » **The next UK Government must make progress on equalities outcomes for unpaid carers with protected characteristics, including promoting accessible communication and taking steps to improve equal access to services such as social security benefits.**



Only

19%

of unpaid carers from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities said they felt listened to by the UK Government

Compared to 39% of white unpaid carers.

¹⁵ [Using intersectionality to improve EQIA outcomes for unpaid carers, MECOPP \(2024\)](#)



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A manifesto for unpaid carers in Scotland by Scotland's National Carer Organisations: Carers Scotland, Carers Trust Scotland, the Coalition of Carers in Scotland, MECOPP, Shared Care Scotland and the Scottish Young Carers Services Alliance.

