

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol](#) ar [Gwella mynediad at gymorth i ofalwyr di-dâl](#)

This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care Committee](#) consultation on [Improving access to support for unpaid carers.](#)

UC35 : Ymateb gan: Llais | Response from: Llais



Llais response to the inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers

About Llais

Llais is the independent body that reflects the views and represents the interests of people living in Wales in their National Health Service (NHS) and social care services.

We operate locally, regionally, and nationally. We work with people and communities in all parts of Wales so that everyone's voice can be heard, and used, to drive the planning, design, development and delivery of health and social care services for everyone. We:

- reach out to hear from people within our local communities through an ongoing programme of engagement activities. We do this so that people know about and understand what we do, and to gather their views and experiences of NHS and social care services. We do this in lots of ways, face to face and digitally, including visiting places where people are receiving health and social care services
- use what we hear to help health and social care services better understand how those of us who may need, and use services think services are meeting their needs, in the way that matters most to them. We help make sure the NHS and social care services takes action to make things better where this is needed.

This includes working with health and social care services leaders when they are thinking about making changes to the way services are delivered, so that people and communities have their say from the start

- provide a complaints advocacy service that is free, independent and confidential to help people to raise their concerns about health and social services.

We have operated in Wales since 1 April 2023. Our response reflects what we have heard directly and through others, particularly from people:

Llais response to the inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers

- who have engaged with us at regional and national events
- who have used our complaints advocacy service to raise a concern about their experience as a carer
- took part in our regional unpaid carer projects in Powys and Neath Port Talbot and Swansea.

Background

Unpaid carers provide care for ill, older, or disabled family members or friends without pay.

There are over 310,000 unpaid carers across Wales¹. At least 22,500 of them are under the age of 25².

Carers Wales' report State of Caring 2024, published in March 2025 provides insights into the experiences of unpaid carers and highlights the need for urgent action to get them the support they need.

- Almost three quarters (69%) of carers say they need more support with their own health and wellbeing.
- Just under half (49%) need more support from NHS or healthcare professionals.
- Nearly two thirds (63%) of carers trying to access social care experienced long wait times.
- Just over half (57%) said services were unavailable when needed.

The [charter for unpaid carers](#)³ sets out the legal rights of unpaid carers in Wales under the Social Services and Wellbeing Wales Act 2014⁴.

The principles on which the 2014 act is based are:

- **voice and control:** giving people voice and control over the outcomes they want to achieve

¹ State of Caring in Wales 2024, Carers Wales, March 2025 [Carers Wales State of Caring 2024 The Impact of caring on carers health and wellbeing](#)

² 2021 Census [Census - Office for National Statistics](#)

³ [Charter for unpaid carers \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

⁴ [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#)

Llais response to the inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers

- **prevention and early intervention:** increasing support services in the community to help individuals as early in the process as possible
- **wellbeing:** promoting the wellbeing of those who need care and support and carers who need support
- **co-production:** encouraging individuals to become more involved in the design and delivery of services

Although the Act sets out clear expectations, carers' experiences show that it's not being applied consistently or effectively in practice.

There is a clear gap between statutory duties and delivery on the ground, particularly in:

- Timely and meaningful assessments
- Equitable access to support
- Recognition and inclusion of carers' voices.

The 2025–2026 Strategy for Unpaid Carers Delivery Plan⁵ sets out steps to help meet the law's requirements, including raising awareness, improving access to support and assessments, continuing funding for respite and financial help, and making sure carers have a stronger voice in policy decisions.

There are early signs that the 2025–2026 Delivery Plan is starting to have an impact, especially through its funding and outreach work. But wider, long-term changes will take time and continued effort.

We know that charities and community organisations, often called the third sector, play a really important role in helping unpaid carers across Wales.

One of the biggest ways the third sector helps is by running support programmes. For example, The Short Breaks Scheme, which gives carers time off through holidays or activities, and the Carers Support

⁵ Unpaid carers' delivery plan 2025 to 2026, Welsh Government Unpaid Carers Policy Team [Strategy for unpaid carers: delivery plan 2025 to 2026](#)

Llais response to the inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers

Fund, which offers emergency money for things like food, bills, or household items.

Local charities and groups help make sure these services reach carers in their communities and sometimes deliver services themselves.

They also provide information and advice, helping carers understand what support is available and how to apply for it.

This is especially useful for carers who might not know where to start or who face extra challenges; like young carers, carers from ethnic minority backgrounds, or those caring for someone living with dementia.

Charities also work to raise awareness. They create training and campaigns to help schools, hospitals, and workplaces recognise carers and understand their needs. This helps carers get support earlier and feel more understood.

Carer Aware, a Welsh Government-funded project run in partnership by Carers Trust Wales and Carers Wales, has worked with unpaid carers and health and social care professionals to help carers take an active role in decisions and services affecting them and those they care for⁶.

Third sector representatives sit on:

- The Ministerial Advisory Group on Unpaid Carers
- Regional Partnership Boards.

They help ensure carers' voices shape policy and service design.

The third sector are essential partners in supporting unpaid carers. They provide practical help, speak up for carers, and help make sure support is available where and when it's needed.

At Llais we have worked with unpaid carers and third sector partners to hear about their experiences, and we know how important it is to improve access to support for unpaid carers. Many of the unpaid carers

⁶ From Covid to Co-delivery: Carer Aware delivery and impact 2020-24, Carers Trust Wales and Carers Wales, July 2024 [carer-aware-impact-report---english---hr.pdf](#)

Llais response to the inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers

we have heard from have described themselves as being '*at breaking point*', '*exhausted*', and feeling '*invisible*'.

In our response we set out in more detail the experiences shared with us and how access to support for unpaid carers might be improved.

Main barriers faced by unpaid carers in accessing the support they need; including any specific challenges for carers based on factors such as age, ethnicity or where they live

Awareness and information: Many carers tell us they are unaware of available services or how to access them. This is especially true for those in rural areas, and those who are digitally excluded or from minority ethnic backgrounds.

As a result, too many miss out on help, respite or peer support available to them.

Emotional and mental health strain: Carers frequently report stress, isolation, and burnout, with limited access to mental health support or respite.

Those caring for more than one person find it especially difficult to prioritise their own wellbeing, often leading to worsening physical health. This strain is made worse when carers don't feel recognised or properly involved by services.

When carers are not seen as partners in care, it can leave them feeling undervalued and unsupported, which further impacts their emotional wellbeing.

Llais response to the inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers

Financial hardship: Carers tell us they struggle with insufficient financial support (e.g., Carer's Allowance or Universal Credit with Carer Element), complex application processes, and out-of-pocket expenses.

We have heard from people who are struggling to make ends meet. They are having to use their savings or credit to manage financially, and this makes them worry about how they will cope long-term.

Carers Trust Wales has highlighted that some carers are cutting back on food, using food banks, or even selling homes to cover essential costs⁷.

A Carers Wales report⁸ in 2024 estimated that 100,000 unpaid carers in Wales are living in poverty. Carers Wales also reported that the poverty rate for unpaid carers is a third higher (30%) than for non-carers.

Many working-age carers have told us that they have had to reduce their hours or could no longer work due to their caring responsibilities.

While Welsh Government schemes like the Carers Support Fund (grant funding to support unpaid carers who are facing such hardships with a £500 payment) have provided some relief, carers feel that this is a short-term solution to a long-term problem.

Navigation challenges: Carers have told us it's hard to find their way around health and social care services, and that communication from professionals isn't always clear or consistent. Many have described feeling '*pushed from pillar to post*' and that they must fight to get the information they need.

This lack of clarity leaves carers feeling frustrated and unsupported.

Transport and accessibility: We've heard how access to support is particularly challenging in rural Wales.

⁷ Unpaid Carers in Wales and Access to Financial and Statutory Support, Carers Trust Wales,

⁸ Poverty and financial hardship of unpaid carers in Wales A WPI Economics Report for Carers Wales, 2024, [Poverty and financial hardship of unpaid carers in Wales](#)

Llais response to the inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers

Transport to services is a major barrier for carers and their cared for people. Lack of public transport can prevent carers from attending appointments or accessing respite services.

Fewer local services and longer travel times also make accessing support more difficult.

Limited broadband and mobile coverage in some rural areas affects access to online resources and virtual support.

These barriers increase isolation and reduce opportunities for peer networks and community engagement.

Cultural and language barriers: Carers from ethnic minority backgrounds have told us they face additional challenges due to language and systemic discrimination.

Lack of continuity in care: Frequent changes in social workers or key workers disrupt support and planning. Carers tell us this takes its toll on them, reducing trust and increasing stress at an already difficult time.

Hospital discharge: We provided evidence to the Local Government and Housing Committee inquiry on the role of local authorities in supporting hospital discharges⁹ in March 2025.

We highlighted that unpaid carers are significantly affected by hospital discharge processes and gaps in social care provision. They often have to step in to provide care without enough notice or support. This creates stress, exhaustion, and other health impacts.

We called for stronger support for carers during discharge planning, with Regional Partnership Boards having a key role in driving improvements.

⁹ <https://www.llaiswales.org/news-and-reports/reports/llais-evidence-local-government-and-housing-committee-inquiry-role-local>

Llais response to the inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers

Together, these barriers too often leave carers feeling invisible, overstretched, and under-supported, with serious consequences for their own health and wellbeing as well as for those they care for.

Current availability of respite care across Wales, including levels of variation across regions

Limited access: Many carers tell us they have little or no access to respite, with long delays when support is available.

We know that the Short Breaks scheme¹⁰ has benefitted over 30,000 unpaid carers¹¹, giving people a break from their caring responsibilities. We have heard from carers who have said that the flexibility of the scheme has helped them to take a break when and where it suits them. It has also helped with putting them in touch with other support they need.

Yet many of the carers we have heard from tell us they have never had a break, despite desperately needing one.

When respite is available, it is sometimes unsuitable. Some carers cannot use traditional respite (e.g. residential care) and want family-inclusive or tailored alternatives that take into account their specific needs.

Carers need more flexible respite options, including short breaks and community-based support that suits both them and their cared for person.

¹⁰ [Short Breaks Scheme Carers Trust Wales](#)

¹¹ Making a Difference: The impact of the Short Breaks Scheme 2023-2025, Short Breaks Wales https://issuu.com/carerstrustwales/docs/short_breaks_scheme_-_making_a_difference

Llais response to the inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers

Affordability: Cost is a major barrier to support for many of the carers we hear from. Many carers cannot afford respite, and too many miss out on the breaks they need.

Volunteer and peer support: Carers would like to see more community-led respite schemes and peer support networks, which can provide lower-cost, flexible alternatives and reduce isolation.

Extent to which the demand for carers support services is being assessed and addressed, and current levels of unmet needs

Carer assessments

Although national policy recognises the importance of assessing and supporting carers, the reality on the ground is inconsistent.

Many carers tell us they face long waits for assessments, while others are not offered one at all.

Where assessments do happen, carers often describe them as superficial, failing to capture the realities of their role, the strain they are under, or their individual needs.

Even when assessments are completed, our complaints advocacy service has heard from carers who have received little or no follow-up in terms of respite, equipment, or financial support.

This lack of delivery undermines trust in the system and leaves many carers without meaningful help.

Inconsistent provision and limited capacity

Demand for support is not being addressed effectively in some areas of Wales. We have heard how provision varies significantly between regions, with rural areas particularly underserved. Workforce shortages

Llais response to the inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers

in social work and care services further limit capacity to assess needs and deliver support. Recognition also remains a challenge: some carers, especially parent carers and young carers, do not identify themselves as carers and therefore miss out on assessments and services altogether.

Challenges with direct payments

Direct payments are meant to give unpaid carers more choice and control over the support they receive. Many carers have told us that the system is difficult to understand and use.

Some carers aren't even aware that direct payments are an option. Others find the process confusing or overwhelming. This is often the case for carers who face language barriers or don't have easy access to digital information.

Carers who do get direct payments tell us they need more support to manage them, they worry about hiring people and following the rules.

Some have told us that the rules around how you can use direct payments can make it hard for them to use them in ways that work for them.

For direct payments to work better for carers, they need clearer information, simpler processes, ongoing support and more flexibility. Carers need to be able to use direct payments in a way that works for them and their situation.

Persistent unmet needs

The consequences are clear. Unmet need among carers is widespread and persistent.

Carers repeatedly tell us of the lack of emotional and mental health support, despite high levels of stress, isolation, and burnout.

Their experiences show access to respite is limited and inflexible, leaving many without the breaks they desperately need.

Llais response to the inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers

Financial pressures are also a serious issue, with carers often unaware of their entitlements or struggling to find their way around complicated systems.

Additional barriers for specific groups

Certain groups face even greater barriers:

Young carers: we hear how they often struggle to balance their responsibilities with education, social life, and personal development, while also experiencing poor mental health and social isolation.

Although every area of Wales has a young carer service, awareness and access is inconsistent, and tools such as the Young Carers ID Card are not yet widely used everywhere.

Carers from minority ethnic communities: face additional challenges. They are less likely to be aware of or access support services, and many feel that provision lacks cultural sensitivity, making it less welcoming or useful.

Their voices are not always represented in service design and delivery, and there is a need for stronger engagement through trusted community-led approaches.

Significant data gaps also remain, making it harder to develop effective policy responses that work for everyone.

Parent carers: Parent carers have told us that trying to get through health, education, and social care systems can be especially difficult. Many are exhausted from the constant demands of caring and feel they don't have the time, energy, or clarity to chase support or understand complex processes.

We've heard from parent carers who describe feeling overwhelmed by paperwork, confused by inconsistent advice, and frustrated by having to repeat their story to multiple professionals.

Llais response to the inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers

Some say they feel judged or dismissed when they ask for help, which adds to the emotional strain. Others have shared concerns that their child might be removed if they share that they need support with their caring responsibilities with social services.

Policy and reality gap

Taken together, these experiences highlight a clear gap between policy ambition and the reality for unpaid carers.

Assessments are too often delayed, inconsistent, or superficial; demand is not being adequately addressed; and large areas of unmet need remain, particularly around mental health, respite, and financial support.

The situation is even more acute for young carers, carers in minority ethnic communities, and those in rural Wales, who face additional barriers to recognition and access.

Role of Regional Partnership Boards in the provision of support for unpaid carers, and the effectiveness of current commissioning practices for services

Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) play a central role in shaping support for unpaid carers across Wales. They are responsible for producing Population Needs Assessments (PNAs) to identify local needs and gaps, drawing on data and lived experience.

These assessments should then inform planning and commissioning of services across regions. The next Population Needs Assessments are scheduled for completion in April 2027, making it a key opportunity to strengthen support for carers.

For service commissioning practices to be effective, they must involve the people who use those services. This will help to make sure that the service does what it's supposed to.

Llais response to the inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers

Co-production in practice

Co-production means professionals and people with lived experience working in equal partnership to design, deliver, and review services.

Although co-production is a statutory duty, how it is done by Regional Partnership Boards across Wales is inconsistent.

Carers Wales¹² found that while all 22 local authorities and several Regional Partnership Boards engage in co-production, the depth and quality of engagement vary a lot.

This reflects what we hear directly from unpaid carers.

Unpaid carers often tell us they're only asked for their views, rather than being fully involved in shaping decisions.

We'd like to see more shared decision-making around service design and development, with carers involved at an earlier stage in discussions.

This is also the case when it comes to individual care plans, which carers often tell us they feel excluded from.

Better support is needed from systems to make this happen.

Senior leadership representatives from Llais' regional teams attend Regional Partnership Board meetings to hear what actions they are taking to involve people in their work.

Opportunities to strengthen commissioning

We agree with the State of Caring Report 2024 recommendations that local authorities should work through Regional Partnership Boards to:

- Build on Population Needs Assessments at regional level.
- Map carers' needs consistently across local authority areas.

¹² Co-production with unpaid carers in Wales, Carers Wales, November 2023 [Co-pro report front](#)

Llais response to the inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers

- Use this mapping to guide budgets and ensure statutory duties under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 are met.

The strategic potential of Regional Partnership Boards to coordinate and standardise support for carers, particularly in planning and commissioning is clear.

However, realising this potential depends on making sure carers' voices are heard in decision-making and that commissioning translates into consistent, high-quality support across Wales.

Actions required to improve the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 provisions for unpaid carers (including Carers Assessments and support plans).

We have been engaging with Welsh Government around the development the next Unpaid Carers Strategy and shared what we have been hearing with them. We will continue to share what unpaid carers tell us to inform actions to improve the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 provisions.

Unpaid carers play a vital role in our communities, but many feel overlooked and unsupported. To make sure the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 works as it should for carers, we need to take clear and practical steps.

To bridge the gap between policy and practice, the following actions are needed:

1. More effective carers assessments

Llais response to the inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers

Carers need assessments that truly reflect what they're going through, not just tick-box exercises. These should happen quickly, be personalised, and lead to real support like breaks, equipment, and/or financial help.

Everyone should have fair access to assessments, no matter where they live, especially in rural areas where services can be harder to reach.

2. Give carers more financial and practical help

Caring often comes with financial strain. Carers need better financial support, including changes to Carer's Allowance and the option for paid leave.

More funding is needed for respite care and emergency grants, and the process for applying should be simpler and easier to understand.

3. Raise awareness and make support easier to access

Many carers don't know what help is available or how to get it.

We need targeted campaigns to reach carers in rural areas, those without internet access, young carers and carers from minority communities.

Frontline staff should be trained to recognise and support carers, and tools like the Young Carers ID Card should be used consistently across Wales.

4. Work together with carers to design services

Carers should be involved in shaping the services they use, not just asked for feedback.

Professionals should work in equal partnership with carers to plan and improve support.

Llais response to the inquiry into improving access to support for unpaid carers

Regional Partnership Boards have a key role to play in making this happen, and tools like the Carers Trust Wales co-production toolkit¹³ can help.

5. Understand carers' needs better

We need better data to understand what carers really need, especially young carers and those from ethnic minority backgrounds. We are aware that Carers Trust Wales are carrying out a study on the needs and experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic carers in Wales.

The next Population Needs Assessment in 2027 must reflect carers lived experiences and guide how services are planned and funded.

6. Make support consistent across Wales

Support for carers shouldn't depend on where they live.

It is important that local authorities make their performance against the 2014 Act more clearly visible and accessible to the public. We'd like to see them actively promoting and publishing comparable performance data in a clear and user-friendly way.

They should be learning from each other how best to meet their legal duties, routinely sharing what's working well.

Regional Partnership Boards should help coordinate efforts so that carers everywhere get the help they need.

September 2025

¹³ [Co-producing with unpaid carers in health settings - Carers Trust](#)