

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.](#)

UC41: Ymateb gan: Mencap Cymru | Response from: Mencap Cymru



Response to the Senedd's Health and Social Care Committee Inquiry: Improving access to support for unpaid carers: Mencap Cymru

About us

There are estimated to be around **75,000 people** with a learning disability living in Wales, with approximately **15,000 known** to social services. This includes people with a wide range of impairments, from people who have a mild or moderate learning disability, who live independently in the community with or without support, to people with profound and multiple learning disabilities who may require support 24 hours a day.

Mencap Cymru's mission is to transform society's attitudes to people with a learning disability and improve the quality of life of people with a learning disability and their families. We want to make Wales the best place to live if you have a learning disability, and everything we do is about making sure people with a learning disability are valued equally, listened to and included.

Our Response

The support given by family carers of people with a learning disability in Wales is undervalued, and more needs to be done to ensure that unpaid carers are for the important role which they play not only in the lives of their loved ones but also for the nation.

Whilst a learning disability is a lifelong condition, individuals can learn and develop new skills if they receive the right opportunities and support. People with learning disabilities are also more likely to develop long term health conditions at a far younger age.¹

Research demonstrates that people with a learning disability experience several barriers to accessing care and treatment, and are likely to need the support of either a family carer or paid carer to access the treatment they need. They may need to attend multiple appointments to achieve the same outcome, or have to attend many different appointments and meetings with healthcare professionals due to their communication and support needs and existing health inequalities.²

There are also unpaid carers in Wales who have a learning disability themselves. We believe that this inquiry should seek to include their experiences when exploring the key issues impacting unpaid carers in Wales.

Closure of Services

People with learning disabilities draw on different types of support to enable them to live rich and fulfilling lives.³ The closure of day centres and other support services are having an impact on carers,

¹ <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/leder>

² https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/Extra%20costs%20of%20learning%20disability_Final.pdf

³ <https://fraserofallander.org/publications/learning-disabilities-and-the-value-of-unpaid-care/>

significantly limiting carers' ability to access much needed respite and short breaks. In many circumstances, alternative provisions are not being offered.⁴

Mencap Cymru continue to hear examples from people whom we support about the closure of services, including day services, which are having a significant impact on their lives. Since COVID, many building-based day services have closed, and priority has been given to people with more complex needs. Whilst some have re-opened, many have done so on reduced hours and with new eligibility criteria set by local authorities which mean fewer or no hours. There is also a lack of appropriate respite services in Wales.

A reduction in service provision for people with a learning disability not only impacts the person accessing this service but also their families. Mencap Cymru's [Future of Day Services Report](#) found that 73% of respondents experienced some form of cut to day service support hours as a result of the COVID pandemic, which impacted on the well-being of both the individual and their family carer.⁵ Family members may be left with no choice but to quit their jobs, or face having to reduce the number of hours that they are able to work in a week. During the Covid pandemic, 4 in 5 (79%) family carers were forced to take on more unpaid care for their family member.⁶

Caring responsibilities limit unpaid carers' opportunity to earn income through employment, leaving them more reliant on the social security system for support, which is often insufficient.⁷

This was highlighted in an ITV Cymru Wales Sharp End report where they visited Chepstow Mencap:- <https://www.itv.com/walesprogrammes/articles/sharp-end-march-20th>

Whilst we understand that local authorities face continuing financial pressures, it is essential that they, alongside organisations providing day services, assess the impact on family carers when making changes to day service provision.

Financial Impact

Unpaid Carers are disproportionately impacted by financial hardships; approximately 26% of unpaid carers in Wales live in poverty, and around 9% in deep poverty.⁸ In addition to this, people with learning disabilities face a range of extra and unavoidable costs that are often hidden, misunderstood, or underreported when discussing policy related to Health and Social Care. These costs go beyond typical living expenses and can significantly impact the financial stability, wellbeing, and independence of individuals and families.⁹

People with a learning disability, their families and carers often have to pay more for essential disability-related specialist products, equipment, and services. For example, mobility aids, car or

⁴ <https://www.ldw.org.uk/wales-carers-alliance-sends-letter-to-welsh-government-on-the-impact-on-unpaid-carers/>

⁵ <https://wales.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-07/Future%20of%20Day%20Services%20Mencap%20Cymru.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-08/Social%20care%20survey%20%281%29.pdf>

⁷ <https://fraserofallander.org/publications/learning-disabilities-and-the-value-of-unpaid-care/>

⁸ https://www.carersuk.org/media/bvdg2fvh/poverty-and-financial-hardship-of-unpaid-carers-in-wales_web.pdf

⁹ https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/Extra%20costs%20of%20learning%20disability_Final.pdf

home adaptations, medicines, and extra therapies. There are also often extra costs of special clothing or footwear or specific dietary needs.¹⁰

People with a learning disability also typically have higher usage of essential services such as energy, and therefore disproportionately high household bills. For example, mobility and hygiene needs can require increased consumption of electricity or water for example, to run electric wheelchairs or more frequent baths and showers. Some people with a learning disability also have additional costs from health-related needs, requiring energy for medical equipment like oxygen concentrators and ventilators. Many also have important non-medical sensory needs that might involve increased use of electrical devices.¹¹

Mental Health of Family Carers

People with a learning disability have long been the subject of mental health inequalities and unpaid carers frequently report a negative impact on their mental health.¹² If family carers are in distress and left depleted this will further impact the mental health inequalities experienced by their loved ones.¹³ Families often feel unable to complain to local authorities or public bodies about the support that they receive, having a negative impact on their wellbeing. We also see families fear that they may be called a bad parent, or be blamed for failing in their role as a parent.¹⁴

We would like this inquiry to address the mental wellbeing of family carers in Wales and the support available for families in different parts of the country, however it should do so with a holistic approach, looking at the social determinants and the factors which impact on the mental wellbeing of family carers in Wales.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² <https://www.carersuk.org/press-releases/shortage-of-health-and-care-services-in-wales-damaging-unpaid-carers-health/#:~:text=For%20practical%20advice%20and%20information%20about%20caring%2C,call%20our%20helpline%20on%200808%20808%207777>.

¹³ <https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s123784/MHI%2032%20-%20Mencap%20Cymru.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://cerebra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Final-Parent-Blame-Report-20-July-21-03.pdf>