



Good practice guide

Identifying and supporting older
unpaid carers in primary care



Ariennir gan
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Introduction

Unpaid carers are worth around £10.6 billion to the Welsh economy each year and Social Care Wales estimate that carers provide 96% of care and support at home. Wales has a higher proportion of unpaid carers than England and around 55% of carers in Wales are over the age of 55.

In 2024 there were an estimated 275,000 older unpaid carers in Wales. Across England and Wales, 19% of unpaid carers aged 65 and over and 23% of those aged 75 years and older provide 50 or more hours of care each week.

Not everyone that is an unpaid carer recognises their caring status. Increasing identification is vital to giving unpaid carers the tools they need to continue their caring role. Earlier identification reduces the need for help in a crisis and so reduces pressure on health and social care services.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, defines a carer as someone who provides unpaid care to an adult or disabled child. The cared for person may be a family member or a friend, who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support. A carer could be a husband caring for his wife, a parent caring for their child who has care and support needs or a child caring for their parent.

This guide focusses on older unpaid carers and is not intended to replicate other good practice information already available. Relevant links to existing resources are included at the end of this resource.



Characteristics of older carers

An older carer can be anyone with unpaid caring responsibilities who is over 50 years old. There is no upper age limit to being an older carer and the category includes several generations - each with their own life experiences and challenges. It is important that services consider the additional barriers older carers face. The main characteristics of older carers that need consideration in how carers are identified and supported in their caring role are below.

Identification in primary care can help reach carers early so they can maintain their own health and wellbeing. Many older carers see caring as a duty, or as part of their relationship with that person and often prioritise the needs of the person they care for over their own. This can lead to emotional, mental and physical challenges. Increased exhaustion and stress can lead to difficulties in processing new information and that can affect their ability to care well, or carry on caring at all. Early identification can reduce pressures on primary care for both the cared for and the carers health needs.

In terms of their own health, older people are **more likely to be living with one or more health conditions** and are at increased likelihood of living with dementia.



Almost a third (32%) of older carers responding to Age Cymru's annual survey in 2024 said they were **living with a disability** as defined through legislation.

Research shows that unpaid caring adversely affects both physical and mental health, so it's vital that older carers have open communication routes to get the healthcare they need at times they can get to appointments.

Older people are more likely to be living with **sensory loss**.

71% of people over 70 will have some or profound levels of hearing loss and the proportion increases with age.

Older adults are disproportionately affected by **sight loss**. Around 1 in 5 people over 75 in Wales has a significant sight loss due to age related macular degeneration (AMD) and conditions like glaucoma, and untreated cataracts. This increases to almost 50% of people aged 90 and over, with increasing numbers registered as blind or partially sighted.

Older carers are more likely to be **sandwich carers**, which is caring for a partner, parent, sibling as well as providing childcare. Older couples are also more likely to be co-caring. Any carer has a right to their own life away from caring, so it's vital that they have information

and advice available on support for carers in the community that can help their wellbeing.

Older people are more likely to be **digitally excluded**, so it's important they have access to offline information and advice, and telephone contacts.

For some **LGBTQ+ older people**, former negative experiences of attempting to access health and social care at a time when their identities were poorly or little understood may mean they don't ask for help until crisis point is reached.

For some older carers, **language barriers** affect their ability to get the help they need.

Financial advice needed for older people can have additional complexities. Some benefit entitlements have age related cut off points. Pension incomes vary, so having the right advice on income maximisation is important. And with those that need paid for services via social care, it's important that older carers have access to advice, information and support on maximising their finances.

It is important to understand that each carer's position is different. The older population in Wales includes several generations with ranges of experiences of life. Expectations of what an older carer is able to provide needs to be realistic.

Carers' rights

The Charter for Unpaid Carers sets out the legal rights of unpaid carers under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014. The Act introduced new rights for unpaid carers.

These include the right to:

- Information, advice and assistance to help carers in their role and to be able to carry on doing things that matter to them.
- Keep healthy and stay free from abuse, harm or neglect
- Have access to a social life and a safe and secure home
- Have access to employment, education & training
- Be a valued part of community life
- Have positive relationships with friends and family

This guide aims to help identify older unpaid carers and to help them get the support they need earlier, to help them carry on with their caring role if that is their choice.



Good practice checklist

✓ Hold a register of all unpaid carers.

Knowing who is a carer in each health setting helps make sure they get information and advice. Knowing someone is an unpaid carer helps plan for the cared for when the carer needs medical treatment and in-patient care. The registers should be able to identify older carers that may need additional help and support.

✓ Provide information and advice that allows older carers to self-identify

Ensure information on identification, advice and support for carers is visible and accessible in GP practices. This should be inclusive of the needs of older carers and regularly updated. A link to resources is included at the end of this guide.

✓ Staff trained on identifying and communicating with older carers

Increased knowledge and awareness of the additional needs of older carers increases earlier identification of unpaid carers. Information is included at the end of this resource around common age related communication needs.

✓ An integrated approach to carers support

Older unpaid carers' needs are wide ranging. GP practices and clusters should have links with local agencies, community groups and support services that can help older carers maintain good health and wellbeing and reduce loneliness and isolation. This could be a 'Community Connector' service often provided by a local third sector partner.

✓ Dedicated carers surgeries

Many unpaid carers have additional barriers to maintaining their own health and wellbeing, for example, for those providing many hours of unpaid care, those who also work, and those who 'sandwich care.' Having a dedicated surgery time can help them plan for someone to look after the person they care for. Having a 'community connector/social prescriber' at such surgeries can be an efficient way of getting carers the wider help they need, whilst helping keep their own health.



Guides and information for unpaid carers

The Charter for Unpaid Carers shows unpaid carers their legal rights in Wales.

www.gov.wales/charter-unpaid-carers.html

A One Stop Shop Guide for Older Carers in Wales: www.agecymru.wales/siteassets/documents/carers-project/carers-guide-eng-nov-22.pdf

Information for working carers from Carers Trust: www.carersuk.org/media/ts3n2g4r/carers-wales-working-carers-guide-eng-final.pdf

Making Relationships Count: A helpful guide for families, unpaid carers and care staff supporting a person moving to live in a care home: www.agecymru.wales/our-work/carers/making-relationships-count

Carers Support

Carers Trust Wales – information on Short Breaks Scheme, Carers Support Fund and more:

<https://carers.org/around-the-uk-our-work-in-wales/our-work-in-wales>

www.shortbreakscheme.wales

Carers Wales - have a directory of local support services for carers

www.carersuk.org/wales/help-and-advice

Age Cymru local partners - have information advice and support in different parts of Wales. Further information at: www.agecymru.wales/our-work/in-your-area

Carer identification and support resources for professionals

Resources for anyone who works with unpaid carers

Carers Trust:

<https://carers.org/resources/all-resources>

<https://carers.org/resources/all-resources/135-resources-to-help-gps-identify-older-carers>

Carers Trust and Carers Trust Wales – Good practice guide on involving patients in hospital discharge

<https://carers.org/downloads/involving-unpaid-carers-in-hospital-discharge---policy-guide-for-service-planners-final-may23-eng.pdf>

Carers Trust - Identification of carers in GP practices – a good practice document: <https://carers.org/downloads/resources-pdfs/identification-of-carers-in-gp-practices/identification-of-carers-in-gp-practices-a-good-practice-document.pdf>

Dedicated support for older people

Age Connects Wales

A national network of 6 local and independent organisations who aim to provide people aged 50 and over in Wales with the assistance, support and services they need. Information on local branches is on their site.

www.ageconnectswales.org.uk/

Age Cymru

Age Cymru Advice provides confidential, impartial and expert information & advice to older people, their families, friends, carers and professionals throughout Wales. The Age Cymru Advice line also acts as a gateway to our local services.

Telephone advice service available Monday to Friday between 9am and 4pm:

Contact: 0300 3034498 or email advice@agecymru.org.uk

For those online information on a range of matters is available on the website.

Cost of living information pages:

www.agecymru.wales/information-advice/money-legal/debt-savings/help-with-the-cost-of-living

Help with benefits, managing money, avoiding scams and dealing with legal issues:

www.agecymru.wales/information-advice/money-legal

Financial advice

Citizens Advice Wales are the holder of the Single Advice Fund from Welsh Government aimed at maximising citizen's income with services across Wales www.citizensadvice.org.uk/wales/benefits/

Health related advice and support

Age Cymru – health and wellbeing information www.agecymru.wales/information-advice/health-wellbeing/

Dementia

Alzheimer's Society: www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-us/wales

A series of booklets designed to support older carers and family members of people living with dementia. These resources provide guidance on various aspects of caring, from carers assessments, and understanding your legal rights to communication strategies, prioritising your own wellbeing and respite, and choosing a care home:

<https://carers.org/policy-and-influence/wales-dementia-carers>

Sensory Loss

RNIB- creating accessible information for health and social care professionals:

www.rnib.org.uk/living-with-sight-loss/independent-living/accessible-nhs-and-social-care-information/creating-accessible-information-and-communication-resources-for-health-and-social-care/

RBID – communication tips for health and social care professionals:

<https://rnid.org.uk/information-and-support/support-for-health-and-social-care-professionals/communication-tips-for-healthcare-professionals/>

How to communicate with someone who is deaf or has hearing loss - RNID

<https://rnid.org.uk/information-and-support/how-to-communicate-with-deaf-people-hearing-loss/>

Housing

Care and repair Care & Repair Cymru is a charity helping older people in Wales to live independently by providing repairs, adaptations and home maintenance. <https://careandrepair.org.uk/our-services/>

www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/financial-support/help-with-bills-and-household-costs/housing-benefit/

Older people's housing options: www.agecymru.wales/information-advice/care/housing-options/

Housing for people with special requirements: <https://sheltercymru.org.uk/housing-advice/finding-a-place-to-live/housing-for-people-with-special-requirements/>

Transport

Community transport services can help older carers get themselves or the person they provide care for to local appointments.

<https://ctauk.org/find-ct-provider/>

Non-emergency patient transport services:

Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service (NEPTS) - Welsh Ambulance Services University NHS Trust

Alternative options if a patient is not eligible for NEPTS:

<https://ambulance.nhs.wales/services/non-emergency-patient-transport-service-nepts/alternative-transport-options/>

Wellbeing services

Community connector services across Wales can help people access community activities and support. Some are provided by Community Council Services. Search 'community connectors' in your areas.

End of life care

Marie Curie – help with end of life care at home www.mariecurie.org.uk/professionals/commissioning-our-services/wales

This project is jointly managed by Age Cymru and Carers Trust Wales and is funded by a Welsh Government Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant. The project aims to support the early identification of older carers and to help ensure that they receive timely and person centred information and advice. This includes older carers generally, as well as the carers of people living with dementia and carers of people who have moved to live in a care home.

Contact Carers Trust Wales

Carers Trust Wales
Transport House
1 Cathedral Road
Cardiff CF11 9HA

Phone: 030 0772 9702
Email: wales@carers.org
www.carers.org

Contact Age Cymru

Age Cymru
Mariners House
Trident Court
East Moors Road
Cardiff CF24 5TD

Phone: 029 2043 1555
Email: enquiries@agecymru.org.uk
www.agecymru.wales