



Headline sponsor



Building Carer Friendly Communities

Carers Week report 2026



carersweek.org

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Building Carer Friendly Communities

In 2026, Carers Week is made possible through Carers UK working together with six other major charities:

Age UK, Carers Trust, The Lewy Body Society, The ME Association, Motor Neurone Disease Association and Rethink Mental Illness.



Introduction

This year, Carers Week 2026 is focusing on the theme of Building Carer Friendly Communities – creating the places, spaces, services and groups where unpaid carers are recognised, understood and supported. Carers Week first highlighted the importance of carer friendly communities in 2015–16. Over the next two years, we are building on that legacy by sharing ideas, practical guidance and real examples from communities that have already taken steps to create positive change.

This research, released to mark Carers Week 2026, suggests that nearly half of the UK adult population – around 24.8 million people – have provided unpaid care to a family member, friend or neighbour at some point in their lives. Of those, 11.6 million people are currently providing unpaid care. This support might include collecting medication, helping someone with admin and paperwork, providing personal care like getting someone dressed, offering emotional support, or carrying out clinical tasks like giving injections and checking blood pressure.

With the UK's ageing population and people living longer with health conditions, caring will feature in even more people's lives in the future.¹ Census 2021 data in England, Wales and Northern Ireland shows that the number of hours of unpaid care provided by family and friends has increased over the past 10 years,² while in Scotland the overall number of carers has increased by 27.5%.³

11.6 million people are currently providing unpaid care



1 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2025) 400,000 more carers by 2035, says Joseph Rowntree Foundation. [400,000 more carers by 2035, says Joseph Rowntree Foundation - Understanding Society](#)

2 Office of National Statistics (2023) [Unpaid care, England and Wales: Census 2021](#); NISRA (2022) [Main statistics for Northern Ireland: Statistical Bulletin Health, disability and unpaid care](#)

3 National Records Scotland (2025) [Scotland's Census 2022: Health, disability and unpaid care](#)

Caring is estimated to contribute £184 billion to the UK economy each year – roughly comparable to NHS spending⁴ – yet carers can face immediate income loss, and long-term financial insecurity. Many also find that their health, their employment or their education is affected by caring, particularly if they do not receive sufficient support. This can have wider implications for the economy. For example, recent government analysis suggests there are productivity costs of £37 billion per year when people have to give up employment to care.⁵

Across the UK, there are many examples of carer friendly organisations and services that are supporting carers, from employers helping people to juggle work and care, to local carers' groups offering activities that improve wellbeing and bring people together. However, we know that many carers continue to feel invisible and undervalued. Much more needs to be done to ensure that all communities are carer friendly, so that carers can access support when they need it, have a choice in the amount of care they provide, and are able to focus on their own lives.

Carer friendly communities can also play a role in helping people recognise that they are caring. Many people take several years to identify as a carer, as they often think of themselves as a husband or wife, son or daughter, parent and friend. This can mean people miss out on crucial help, because they haven't considered looking into what support might be available for their caring role.⁶ Local community groups can help signpost carers to information and advice, while GP practices and pharmacies can help identify carers and ensure they get the help they need.

This research comes at a time when the UK Government is moving towards reform in several critical areas. This includes reviewing workplace rights for carers in Great Britain, reviewing pensions and the State Pension age, reviewing disability benefits in England and Wales, reviewing Universal Credit, delivering the NHS 10 Year Plan in England, and considering the findings of the Independent Commission on Adult Social Care in England led by Baroness Louise Casey. Devolved governments are also reviewing and developing strategies to improve health and social care in their respective nations, including a strategic plan for adult social care in Northern Ireland. These are all opportunities to consider the support available to carers and adapt services so that people get the support they need, when they need it.

Much more needs to be done to ensure that all communities are carer friendly, so that carers can access support when they need it, have a choice in the amount of care they provide, and are able to focus on their own lives.



⁴ Petrillo, M., Zhang, J. and Bennett, M. (2024) [Valuing carers 2021/22: the value of unpaid care in the UK](#)

⁵ Department for Work and Pensions (2025) [The cost of working age ill-health and disability that prevents work](#)

⁶ Carers UK (2022) [State of Caring 2022](#)

To ensure that communities are carer friendly, the organisations supporting Carers Week are calling on the UK Government to develop a new cross-government Action Plan for carers, spanning 2026-2028, which then acts as a stepping stone to a more ambitious and fully funded National Carers Strategy. Such an Action Plan should clearly set out the Government's current and future commitments to supporting carers, focusing on system changes which improve carers' health and wellbeing, reduce levels of poverty, better support carers to remain in or return to paid work and ensure carers are consistently identified and recognised across health, social care and wider public services. Across the UK, we are also calling for each devolved Government to do the same, and work with the UK Government on areas of reserved responsibility such as pensions, employment and relevant benefits.

This research report is published during Carers Week – an annual campaign where individuals, communities and organisations come together to raise awareness about unpaid carers and the need for greater recognition and support. Carers across the UK deserve not only recognition, but practical support that allows them and the people they care for to thrive. In 2026 we are inviting everyone to make a lasting difference by building carer friendly communities so that carers get the opportunities and help they need. More information and advice about how to build a carer friendly community is provided in our new Building Carer Friendly Communities blueprint, published alongside this report.

Together, let's build carer friendly communities – and make a real and lasting difference to the lives of carers everywhere.

Get involved at carersweek.org

“ A key way to build a carer friendly community is to ensure that local services and organisations actively recognise and support carers. This could include providing flexible options at work, easier access to healthcare appointments for the people we care for, better information about available support services, and training staff in shops, transport, and healthcare to understand the challenges carers face. Small changes like these would make it easier for carers to manage their responsibilities, maintain their health, and feel valued within the community.”

– Unpaid carer

Executive summary

Executive summary

Millions of people across the UK are providing unpaid care for an ill, older or disabled family member or friend. Unpaid carers are providing vital support to our health and social care systems, yet more needs to be done to ensure all communities value and recognise carers.

Carers Week charities commissioned Opinium to carry out polling of the general public in March 2026, including adults who are currently providing unpaid care. Polling was boosted in Northern Ireland and Wales to ensure we had sufficiently large sample sizes. This research suggests that millions of unpaid carers would benefit from more support from their communities.

The polling, of over 4,100 people aged 18 and over in the UK, found that:

Number of people caring

- **Nearly half (45%) of the UK population (aged 18 and over) has provided unpaid care at some point.** 21% of respondents are currently providing unpaid care, and 24% are not currently caring but have done so in the past.
- **Based on this polling and ONS population data,⁷ we estimate that 11.6 million people are currently providing unpaid care in the UK, and 13.2 million have previously provided care.** In total, 24.8 million people have provided unpaid care at some point in their lives – either now or in the past.

Carer friendly communities

- **A significant proportion of people feel that their communities are not carer friendly.** Nearly half (44%) of people who are currently caring said they do not feel their role as an unpaid carer is understood and valued by their community – an estimated 5 million people. 39% of former carers said they did not feel understood and valued by their community. Combined, an estimated 10 million people said they do not/did not feel valued by their community while caring.

44%

of people who are currently caring said they do not feel their role as an unpaid carer is understood and valued by their community – an estimated 5 million people



⁷ ONS (2025) Population estimates for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: mid-2024

- **Carers can often find it difficult to participate in their communities.** Nearly a quarter (23%) of current and former carers said they had been unable to take part in local groups or activities while caring – an estimated 5.7 million people. A fifth (20%) said they had been unable to maintain a healthy lifestyle – an estimated 5 million people.
- **People caring for a high number of hours per week were even less likely to feel able to participate in their community.** For example, over a third (39%) of people currently/ previously caring for 50 or more hours per week said they didn't feel able to maintain a healthy lifestyle, compared with 15% of those caring for 19 hours per week or less.
- **Some organisations and services are seen as more carer friendly than others.** Pharmacies were seen as the most carer friendly organisation/service. 67% of current and former carers who visited a pharmacy said it was carer friendly. Public transport was seen as the least carer friendly – over a fifth (21%) of current and former carers who had used public transport said it was not carer friendly.
- **Carers said that organisations are not carer friendly if they do not have a good understanding of what caring is, or they have not considered the impact of caring.** 41% of current and former carers who felt that organisations or services were not carer friendly said that this was because they do not have a good understanding of what caring is and 37% said this was because they hadn't considered what impact caring might have on them.



41%
of current and former carers who felt that organisations or services were not carer friendly said that this was because they do not have a good understanding of what caring is

The impact on carers when communities are not carer friendly

- **When communities are not carer friendly, this can have negative impacts on carers.** 36% of current and former carers who felt that organisations or services were not carer friendly said this had a negative impact on their physical or mental health, and 35% said it made it more difficult to look after the person they care for. 30% said it had had a negative financial impact.
- **Carers who felt unsupported by health and social care services were even more likely to say their mental health was impacted.** 49% of current and former carers who felt that social care services were not carer friendly said that not getting the support and recognition they need has had a negative impact on their mental and physical health. Similarly, 45% of current and former carers who said their GP was not carer friendly said that not getting the support and recognition they need had a negative impact on their health.
- **Carers' ability to work is negatively affected by employers who are not carer friendly.** 44% of current and former carers who said their employer was not carer friendly said that not getting the recognition and support they need has made it more difficult to be in paid employment.

67%
of current and former carers who visited a pharmacy said it was carer friendly



21%
of current and former carers who had used public transport said it was not carer friendly



36%
of current and former carers who felt that organisations or services were not carer friendly said this had a negative impact on their physical or mental health



The support carers would like to see

- **More carer friendly communities would help improve carers' health and wellbeing.** Over a third (34%) of current carers said that if their role as an unpaid carer was better understood, they would feel more valued, over a quarter (29%) said they would feel happier, and nearly a quarter (24%) said they would feel less stressed about caring. 19% said they would be better able to combine caring with other things, like paid employment.
- **More recognition and understanding from organisations and services is important to carers, as well as having more opportunities to meet with other carers.** When asked what one key thing could be done to build a carer friendly community, current and former carers highlighted the following areas:
 - » more recognition of carers in communities, including better understanding of the impact caring can have
 - » more opportunities to meet locally with other carers
 - » more support from the NHS, including better identification of carers, signposting to further help, more consultation with carers, and more consideration given to carers' own health
 - » more support, flexibility and understanding from employers
 - » more financial support for carers.

34%

of current carers said that if their role as an unpaid carer was better understood, they would feel more valued



Data analysis (UK)

Opinium surveyed a sample of 4101 adults aged 18 and over in the UK, including 879 current or former carers. Fieldwork was conducted in March 2026.



How many people are caring

Opinion polling results suggest that nearly half of people in the UK (45%) have provided unpaid care at some point: an estimated 24.8 million people.

- **Over a fifth (21%) of respondents said they are currently giving unpaid support to someone** – an estimated 11.6 million people.
- **Nearly a quarter (24%) said they don't currently give unpaid support to anyone but have done in the past** – an estimated 13.2 million people.
- **48% of respondents said they don't currently give unpaid support to anyone and have not done in the past.** 3% said they didn't know, and 3% did not wish to say.

The estimation of the number of people currently caring is higher than the most recent Census. Census 2021 data suggests that 5.8m people in the UK are providing unpaid care. It is important to bear in mind that the question on unpaid caring in the Census was different to the one we asked in the polling. The Census in England, Wales and Northern Ireland also took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have affected the results.

An estimated

24.8 million people

have provided unpaid care at some point



Hours of care

Over half (56%) of current carers are caring for 1-19 hours per week. 15% are caring for 20-34 hours, 7% are caring for 35-49 hours, and 14% are caring for 50 or more hours a week.

14%

of current carers are caring for 50 or more hours per week



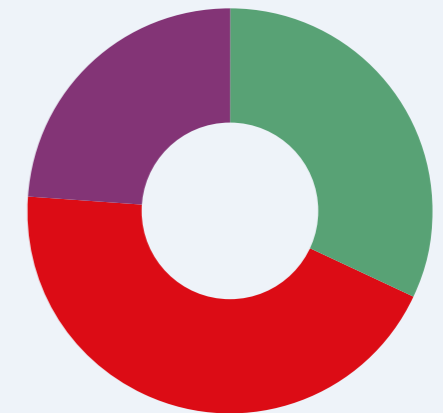
Carer friendly communities

Whether people feel their role as an unpaid carer is understood and valued

We asked current and former carers whether they felt their role as an unpaid carer is/was understood and valued by their community. 44% of people currently providing unpaid care said they do not feel their role as an unpaid carer is understood and valued by their community – an estimated 5 million people. Just over a third (32%) said they do feel valued, and a quarter (24%) were unsure.

Whether current carers feel their role as an unpaid carer is understood and valued by their community

- Yes - 32%
- No - 44%
- Not sure - 24%



Former carers also felt undervalued. 39% of former carers said they did not feel their role as an unpaid carer was understood and valued by their community – an estimated 5.2 million people. 30% said they did feel valued, and 31% were unsure.

Combined, an estimated 10 million current and former carers said they do not/did not feel valued by their community.

People providing more hours of care were less likely to feel valued. 59% of people currently or previously caring for 50 or more hours per week said their role as an unpaid carer is, or was not, understood and valued by their community, compared to 37% of people caring for 19 hours per week or less.

59%

of people currently or previously caring for 50 or more hours per week said their role as an unpaid carer is, or was not, understood and valued by their community



Whether people feel they can participate in their communities

People often find it difficult to participate in their communities when they are providing unpaid care. Nearly a quarter (23%) of current and former carers said they had been unable to take part in local groups or activities – an estimated 5.7 million people. A fifth (20%) said they had been unable to maintain a healthy lifestyle – an estimated 5 million people.

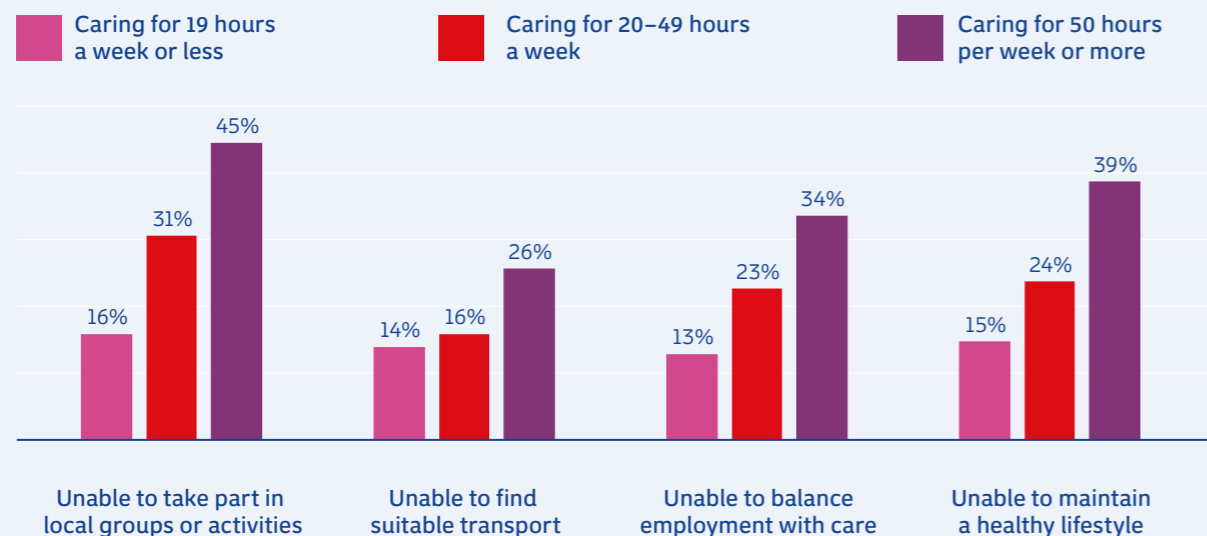
The more hours of care people provided, the less they were able to participate in their community. For example, 45% of people currently/previously caring for 50 or more hours per week said they didn't feel able to take part in local groups or activities, and 39% were unable to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

23%

of current and former carers said they had been unable to take part in local groups or activities



Proportion of current and former carers who said they were unable to do certain activities, by hours of care



Which organisations and services are carer friendly

Current and former carers were asked whether they felt different organisations/services were carer friendly. Pharmacies were considered the most carer friendly. Our previous Carers Week research on carer friendly communities also found this. Although the previous research used a different methodology,⁸ it is clear that carers value pharmacies and find them helpful.

This time, we found that a higher proportion of carers felt that hospitals are carer friendly. 61% of current and former carers who had visited a hospital said it was carer friendly.

Most carer friendly organisations and services

Rank	Organisation or service	%
#1	Pharmacy	67%
#2	Hospital	61%
#3	GP	60%
#4	Community spaces (eg library, leisure centre, place of worship, park)	56%
#5	Local shops and businesses	51%
#6	Social care and support services	50%
#7	Workplace	47%
#8	School	47%
#9	University or college	44%
#10	Public transport	41%
#11	Services (eg financial services, banking, insurance, utilities)	40%

Pharmacy

67%



Hospital

61%



GP

60%

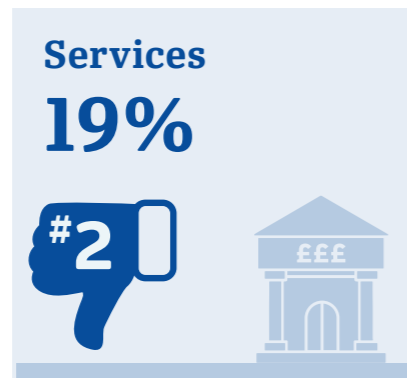
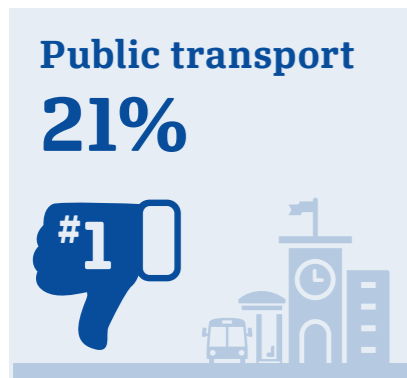


⁸ Previous research on Building Carer Friendly Communities was based on a survey of Carers UK members, rather than polling of the general public.

Public transport was considered the least carer friendly organisation/service. 21% of current and former carers who had used public transport said it was not carer friendly.

Least carer friendly organisations and services (the proportion of carers who said organisations were unfriendly)

Rank	Organisation or service	%
#1	Public transport	21%
#2	Services (eg financial services, banking, insurance, utilities)	19%
#3	Workplace	18%
#4	Social care and support services	17%
#5	School	16%
#6	University or college	14%
#7	GP	14%
#8	Hospital	13%
#9	Community spaces (eg library, leisure centre, place of worship, park)	11%
#10	Local shops and businesses	11%
#11	Pharmacy	9%



Good practice examples

Across the UK, there are many examples of organisations and services that are supporting carers. Some of these are highlighted below, and further examples can be found in our new Building Carer Friendly Communities blueprint.



Business and services

Specsavers has created a **Carers Hub** as a central source of information and advice for people supporting their family members or friends. Working with a range of organisations, it has published a series of videos covering everything from how to get a good night's sleep to managing your finances.

Specsavers' home visits service provides comprehensive NHS-funded eye tests in the comfort of your home, for people who are unable to get to a store unaccompanied. Additionally, Specsavers now offers free home hearing services in select locations in the UK. One unpaid carer described the support they received during a Specsavers home visit:

“ Specsavers at home were excellent – their guy was able to read my husband air writing the letters on the chart so able to gauge his level of vision. It was amazing to watch & I was v grateful of his understanding of my husband’s lack of speech.”

To find out more or check eligibility visit www.specsavers.co.uk/home-visits/eligibility or call 0800 089 0144.



Good
practice



Employer

As an employer, TSB are committed to supporting employees who have caring responsibilities. They are an active member of Employers for Carers, and a Carer Confident Ambassador. In June 2020, TSB introduced a Carer's Policy, giving employees with caring responsibilities access to up to 70 hours of paid Carer's Leave (pro rata) on a rolling 12 month basis, and a Carer's Passport – so carers need only tell their manager once throughout their TSB career about their situation.

Carers at TSB describe the policy as a '4th emergency service', which allows them the flexibility they need to support short or longer-term caring needs. A TSB colleague added:

“ Having the passport in place meant I could easily share my caring responsibilities with my team, and TSB's Carer's Leave policy has enabled me to work flexibly when I need to be at the hospital. It also means I can continue working, which provides a sense of normality.”



Good
practice



Health

Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (LPFT) provides mental health and learning disabilities services. The Trust recognises the vital role that carers play.

Previously the Trust ran a Carers Education session every fortnight to help carers develop knowledge and skills in their caring roles, and these will soon be relaunched as Carers Workshops. The Trust are also thinking about the different pathways that carers experience and are revising care plans so there is just one universal document. Carers have fed into this process and provided feedback to ensure that the care plans are carer friendly. The care plans will help people to identify as carers and to give their views on what care is needed. Carers have also been involved in safety planning and have been part of discussions with clinicians on how to manage crisis and emergency situations.

In 2020, the LPFT created a Carers Council to ensure that carers' voices are considered. The Chief Executive attends the monthly Carers Council meeting, along with the Director of Nursing. Carers on the Council have helped deliver training sessions for staff and enhance and develop services and information. For example, carers co-produced an About My Relative document which carers now use to provide detailed information about the person they care for and the support they need. Although this document is hugely valued by carers, it isn't being used as much as it could be, and the Council will be considering whether any changes can be made to make it more useful for carers and professionals. Carers also co-produced the Carer Policy, and have shared their views on how best to communicate with carers, so that carers do not feel overwhelmed and are not asked for too much information. There are plans in place to refresh membership of the Council so that it is more representative of local communities. The group will move to face-to-face meetings in the future, so that more carers are able to participate.



Good practice



Local community

SENDS 4 Dad is a community group in Northamptonshire offering activities and sessions for men caring for a child with a disability or special educational need. Created 11 years ago, membership has grown since the COVID-19 pandemic. The group was founded by Paul Meadows, a carer who went through a period of mental ill-health after his son was diagnosed with autism, ADHD and Dyspraxia, and he found that there wasn't much recognition or support for male carers. SENDS 4 Dad is an opportunity for dads to help each other through the challenges of caring.

There is a social group for male carers at a local pub, Happy Hub sessions at the Frank Bruno Foundation with opportunities to exercise and socialise, a breakfast social at a café that supports people with autism into employment, wellbeing activities for parents, family sessions at an activity centre with a sensory garden, activities for dads such as archery and pistol shooting, a drop-in session attended by local services, and a Brew-tiful Bromance group. This year there is a new dad and child youth club, and SENDS 4 DAD are also a community partner for Everyone Active, which offers monthly swimming sessions. Some of the fathers help run the groups, and one has started his own daytime drop-in session for parents not in employment. A local youth club association is also supporting the dads to devise and run their own sessions.

Paul has found it helpful not to label the groups as 'support groups' as sometimes this can be a barrier if people don't want to admit they are struggling, or don't realise that they need more support. Offering social activities creates a more informal environment. The groups help to reduce isolation: some of the men who attend are single parents, some have experienced mental health issues, and several feel excluded from conversations with support services who sometimes assume the mother is the main carer. Paul feels that fathers are more likely to talk openly about challenges in groups attended by other men. SENDS 4 DADS has been a lifeline for those who have felt suicidal.



Good practice



Education

The London School of Economics (LSE) supports students who have caring responsibilities to realise their full potential. It offers a contextual admissions process for undergraduates, where admissions selectors consider an applicant's personal and educational circumstances, as well as achievement and potential. Carers can also complete an Extenuating Circumstances form if they have experienced significant educational disadvantage. At postgraduate level, carers are encouraged to include information about their circumstances on their application, as assessors take a holistic view.

For students who are struggling financially, support includes an Undergraduate Bursary Scheme, an Accommodation Bursary, Discretionary Bursaries, In-Course financial support, and Travel Fund. There is also mental health support, including a Disability and Wellbeing service, Mental Health advisers, and Counselling Service.

Additionally, students can use the accommodation booking form to identify as a carer and request any accommodation requirements. Students caring for children also have the option of Family Accommodation provided through the University of London.

Academic support is provided by departmental academic mentors, programmes managers and Student Services staff. Through these sources of support, the School endeavours to meet students' individual needs. Where an emergency arises, there are robust policies to support students with assessments and impacted teaching.

LSE has a collaborative relationship with Carers UK whose staff regularly attend student volunteering fairs, to raise awareness about caring and provide advice.



Why carers feel communities are not carer friendly

Current and former carers who said that organisations/services were not carer friendly were asked why they felt this way. The main reason was organisations/services not having a good understanding of what caring is (41%), followed by organisations/services not considering the impact of caring (37%).

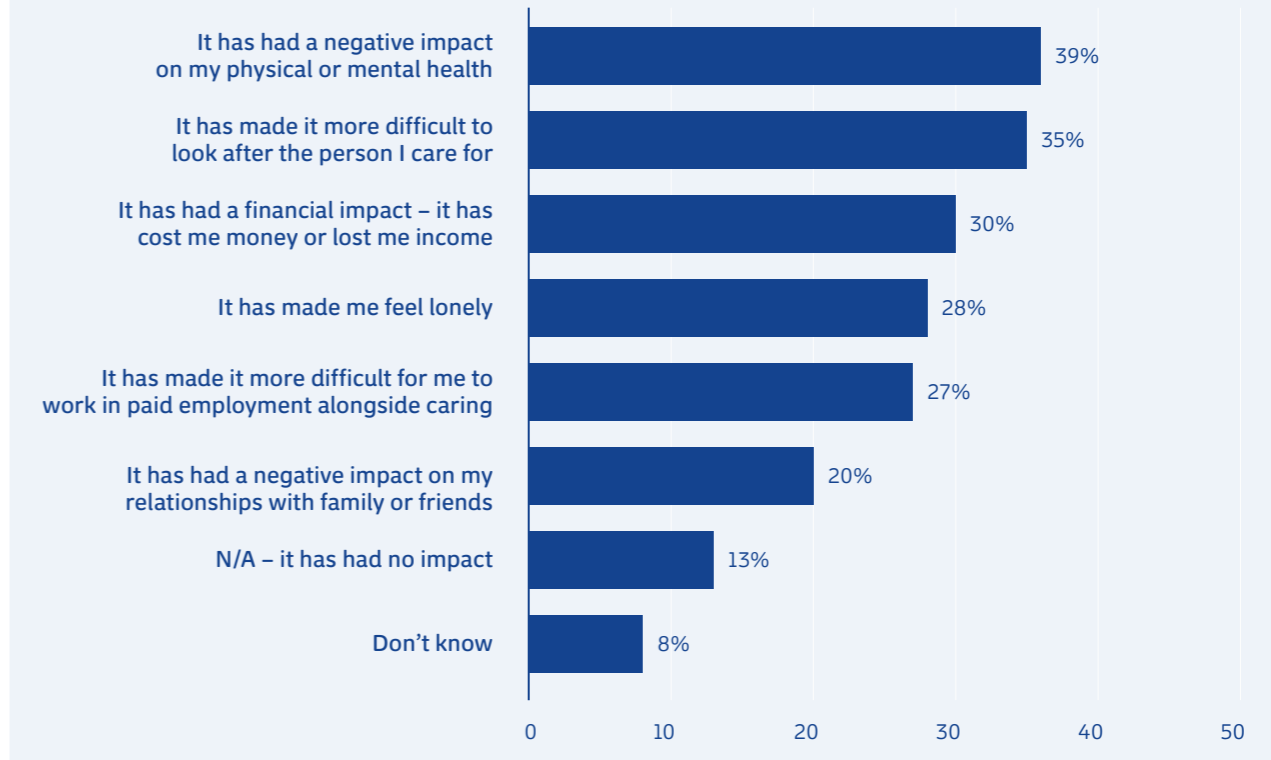


People currently providing care were more likely than former carers to feel that organisations/services were not carer friendly because they hadn't considered the impact of caring (40% compared to 35%), and because they weren't accessible for the person cared for (32% compared to 27%).

The impact of communities not being carer friendly

Current and former carers who felt that organisations or services were not carer friendly were asked what, if any, impact this had had on them. The most commonly reported impact was in relation to health: 36% said it had a negative impact on their physical or mental health. 35% said it made it more difficult to look after the person they care for, and 30% said it had had a negative financial impact.

The impact on current and former carers of organisations not being carer friendly



People currently caring were more likely than former carers to say that organisations/services not being carer friendly had a negative impact on them, across all areas. For example, 33% of current carers said it had made them feel lonely, compared to 23% former carers.

Carers who felt unsupported by health and social care services were more likely to say their mental health has been impacted. 49% of current and former carers who felt that social care services were not carer friendly said that not getting the support and recognition they need has had a negative impact on their mental and physical health. Similarly, 45% of current and former carers who said their GP was not carer friendly said that not getting the support and recognition they need had a negative impact on their mental and physical health.

49%

of current and former carers who felt that social care services were not carer friendly said that not getting the support and recognition they need has had a negative impact on their mental and physical health



When employers are not carer friendly, this can make it more difficult for people to juggle work and care. 44% of current and former carers who said their employer was not carer friendly said that not getting the recognition and support they need has made it more difficult to juggle work and care.

Carers who felt shops are not carer friendly were more likely to say that their finances had been impacted. 39% of current and former carers who said that local shops and businesses were not carer friendly said that not getting the recognition and support they need has cost them money or lost them income.

44%

of current and former carers who said their employer was not carer friendly said that not getting the recognition and support they need has made it more difficult to juggle work and care



The support people would like to see in their communities

The benefits of carer friendly communities

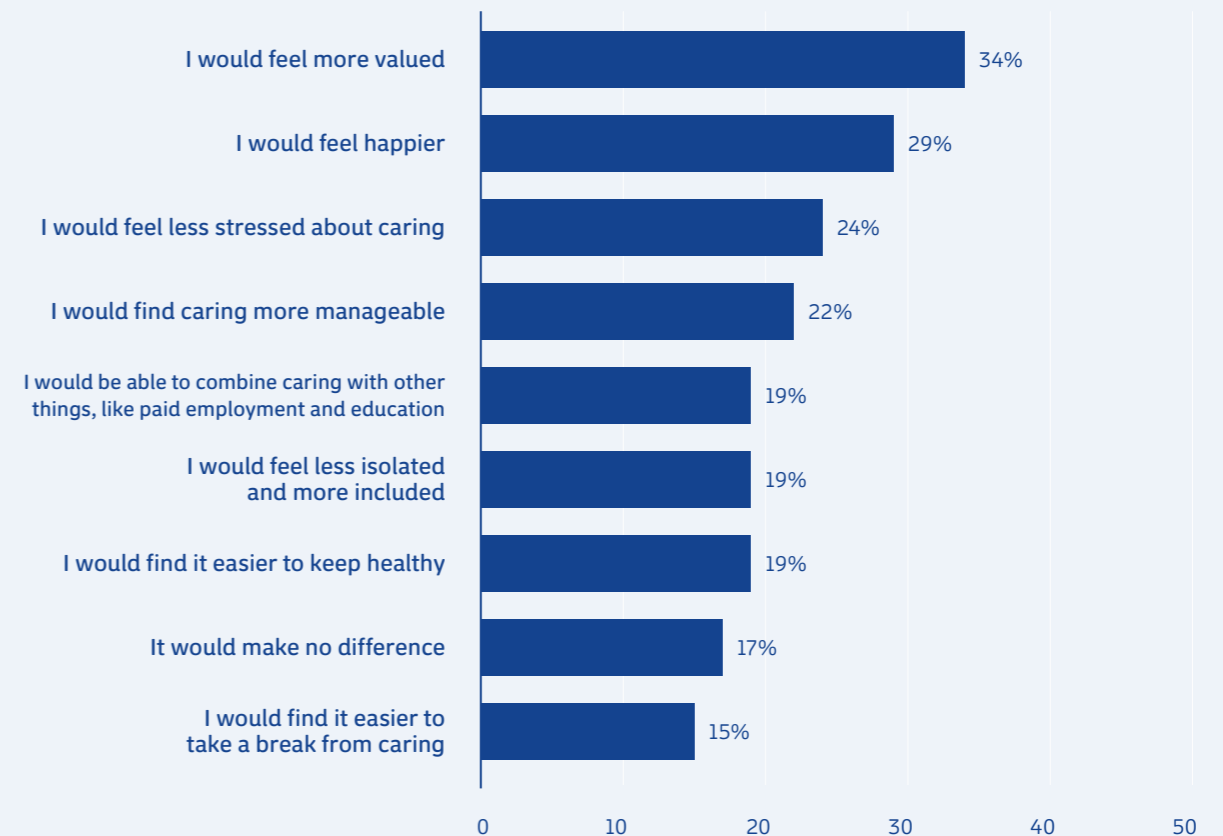
Carers were asked what difference it would make if their role as an unpaid carer was better understood within their community, and reported a range of benefits. 34% of current carers said they would feel more valued, 29% said they would feel happier, and 24% said they would feel less stressed about caring.

24%

of current carers said they would feel less stressed about caring if they were better understood and valued within their community



The benefits of carer friendly communities for current carers



People currently caring were more likely than former carers to say that organisations/services not being carer friendly had a negative impact on them, across all areas. For example, 33% of current carers said it had made them feel lonely, compared to 23% former carers.

How can we make communities carer friendly

We asked current and former carers what one key thing could be done to make communities carer friendly. The most common response was more recognition of carers within communities, including more empathy and understanding about the impact caring can have. Other common suggestions included more support from the NHS, more flexibility from employers, and more opportunities to meet other carers.

“ By making carers visible and providing practical, flexible assistance at the local level, a community can significantly reduce the isolation, burnout, and financial strain that unpaid carers often face.”

– Unpaid carer

We also asked people with no experience of caring to suggest one key thing that might help make communities more carer friendly. The responses suggest that people who have not provided unpaid care do not always understand what it involves. For example, even though a summary of unpaid care was provided in the survey, some respondents thought the question referred to paid care workers, while others thought we were asking about how people might be able to support older neighbours through volunteering programmes. This means that campaigns like Carers Week are necessary in helping to raise awareness of unpaid carers.

Key things that would make a difference for current and former carers

Opportunities to meet other carers:

“ A carers corner in a high street or coffee bar where you could meet people in the same situation. ”

“ Local communities could set up more social hubs or support groups where carers can meet up, take a break, and realize they are not doing this all alone. ”

“ Libraries to offer meeting space for carers to join up with others. ”

Better recognition and understanding

“ Educate people so that they can better understand the role of a carer and the challenges it poses. ”

“ Help people understand how difficult it is to be an unpaid carer and the amount of time the role requires. ”

“ Increase public awareness of how important and common caring is in the community and the range of things which may go unnoticed. ”

Better support from the NHS

“ GP practices and hospitals can proactively identify unpaid carers and record this on their medical files to ensure they are recognised in every interaction. ”

“ It would really help if the various groups (NHS, Social Services, GPs, etc, etc) were better joined up and could work together seamlessly. ”

“ NHS should listen to carers, and not ignore or dismiss what they say. ”

More financial support

“ Businesses could be more inclusive offering discounts for recognised carers. ”

“ Provide more financial support to people like me who are struggling on their own. ”

Accessible services

“ Easier access to shops with a wheelchair. ”

“ Greater availability of truly accessible transport. ”

More support from employers

“ Employers should offer paid Carer’s Leave or flexible working hours so carers don’t have to choose between their job and their caring responsibilities. ”

“ Employers offering genuinely flexible working as standard for anyone with caring responsibilities without making them feel like they are asking for special treatment would make a huge difference... ”

“ Employers to have a written carers policy regarding leave and support. ”

Easier access to advice and information

“ Better access to information. It feels like it can be a struggle to get all the information I need. ”

“ More information could be provided, eg how to look after someone with dementia. As it was, we had to figure it out ourselves. ”

“ Provide clear advice on all the help that is available so that carers are not passed from pillar to post and going round in circles to find out who can help them. ”

Angela's story

Angela cared for her father who had dementia and cancer, and her mother who had cancer. Both parents received care in hospital, and Angela said she would have found it beneficial if *“each department had access to my relative's medical history, so I don't have to explain each time.”*

When her mother was moved to a different ward, Angela had to explain everything again from the beginning, including having to inform the new ward about her mother's forthcoming scan. She also found that her father's hospital did not provide her with updates on his condition when asked, and did not share information with the GP practice, and the care home.

Angela also said that more tailored support would have been helpful: *“It seems support is one size fits all and if your relative doesn't meet all criteria then there is no support available.”*

Angela's father had some behavioural issues where he could become aggressive, so he needed additional support in the care home, but didn't meet the criteria for NHS Continuing Healthcare, and was awarded nursing care instead. However, Angela didn't think he needed nursing care, and the social services team said

they would struggle to find a nursing home that would accept him, as they also felt it wasn't the right form of care.

Angela said that more joined-up working between health and social care services would have been beneficial and would have helped prevent her from feeling stressed. She also said she was often having to deal with multiple different people within the social services team, and had to keep repeating things: sometimes she felt the staff were forgetting things or not reading the files.

At the time, Angela was combining caring with full-time employment. Having to explain her parents' medical history multiple times, continually asking for updates and information, and having to act as a liaison between the different services created additional admin. If she had had more support, she would not have felt so exhausted and burnt out.

Liz's story

Liz cared for her husband, who had COPD, heart disease and dementia, as well as other conditions, for around 50 years, until he passed away in 2025. She also supports her adult son and daughter who use wheelchairs. Liz has benefited from support from her local church community: *“they helped me to feel part of the community and cared deeply in prayers for myself and my family when my husband passed away January 2025.”*

Liz described how a member of the church drove over 70 miles to the hospital at night, to bring her husband's sleep apnea machine as the hospital did not have a spare. Liz also said the *“ministry team were so supportive again when my granddaughter suffered a traumatic accident.”*

Liz thinks that church communities can play an *“essential part in supporting carers”*, by taking the time to speak to carers, *“understanding the time and energy the carer spends caring,”* and recognising that people with caring responsibilities may not always be able to

participate in church life, due to caring, but still want to remain part of the community. She would like to see support for carers from all churches, with more people *“looking beyond their own circumstances and experiences”* and accepting differences, rather than judging others.

Liz described a situation where her son and daughter were unable to use ordinary cutlery and she was asked whether she was embarrassed by this. She said that *“something so simple like accepting that difference”* would be really helpful.



Alex's story

Alex cares for her husband who has Complex PTSD. When her husband was admitted to hospital for an unrelated physical health issue, Alex wanted his mental health condition to be taken into account during his treatment: *"[I wanted] to be listened to and believed when I tell NHS staff about my husband's illness and the support he needs".*

She had explained to healthcare professionals that her husband's management of his mental health condition reduces when he is physically unwell and/or under emotional stress. However, rather than making any adjustments and treating her husband with empathy, Alex said the staff did not take her concerns on board. This caused a huge amount of unnecessary distress which could have been avoided if staff had listened to her. Alex feels that healthcare staff should recognise carers as the helpful resource that they are.

Alex said she would also find it helpful to have more support from the NHS with her own health and wellbeing: *"[I would like] to have my own health proactively monitored, especially as I get older, so I can continue to support my husband."*

"To have my caring role acknowledged and fast track access to services such as Healthy Minds for ongoing counselling would make a huge difference."

Alex said that the demands of caring have impacted on her health and is very conscious of the need to keep well so that she can continue to support her husband. Alex feels that proactive monitoring of her health should be available. She has not had a conversation with her GP about caring, despite going to the GP with a stress related condition and saying that she was a carer.

Alex would like to see better identification of carers in the NHS, with this information immediately available to NHS staff so that carers are flagged on the first screen of their health records.

Alice's story

Alice cares for her husband who has had epilepsy for many years, and experiences seizures. A few years ago her husband's health significantly deteriorated, and Alice felt *"under huge pressure."* She also has two children with additional needs and felt she was *"spinning all the plates on my own."*

Alice's employer – a small charity – supported her to take a sabbatical, and then helped her to return to work in a different role that was less pressured, with reduced hours. Alice thinks her employer has been *"brilliant"* and treated her *"so fairly and so flexibly and so kindly."* She described her line manager as *"so compassionate."*

Alice is able to work from home and has a flexible start time which she has found helpful, as her husband's seizures often occur on waking. Alice has also found unpaid carer's leave beneficial in enabling her to visit her husband in hospital. She said the support she currently receives from her employer is fundamental in enabling her to remain in employment, and that her situation would be *"very very different"* without this support.



Disparities between carers

Differences by gender, age, socio-economic status, ethnicity and sexual orientation

Disparities between carers: differences by gender, age, socio-economic status, ethnicity and sexual orientation

Gender

Female current/former carers were more likely than males to feel their role as an unpaid carer was not valued and understood by their community (44% compared with 38%). They were also more likely to say that when organisations or services are not carer friendly, this has had a negative impact on their health, made them feel lonely, and made it harder to look after the person they care for.

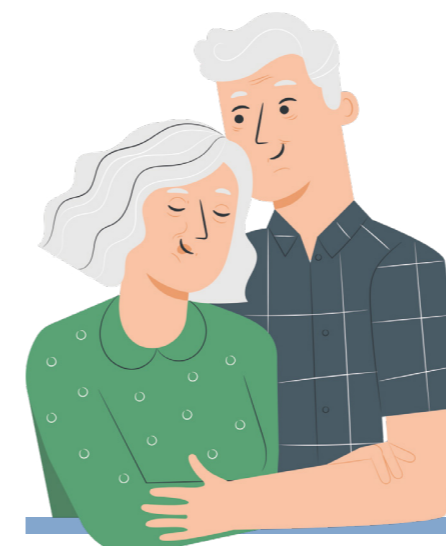
The benefits of carer friendly communities varied by gender. Male current/former carers were more likely to say that being better understood would help them stay healthier and feel happier, while female current/former carers were more likely to say they would feel less stressed and less isolated.



Age

Carers in the 55-64 age group were most likely to feel their role as an unpaid carer is/was not understood by their community (50%), compared with all other age groups. They were also most likely to say that when organisations or services are not carer friendly, this has made it more difficult to look after the person they care for.

The benefits of carer friendly communities varied by age. Those from the 25-34 age group were most likely to say that carer friendly communities would make them feel more valued and happier, and better able to manage their caring role and combine work and care. Those from the 55-64 age group were most likely to say they would feel less stressed.



Socio-economic status¹

Current and former carers from the lower socio-economic groups (C2DE) were slightly more likely than those from the higher socio-economic groups (ABC1) to feel their role as an unpaid carer is/was not understood by their community (43% compared with 40%). They were also more likely to say that when organisations or services are not carer friendly, this has had a negative financial impact, made them feel lonely, and had a negative impact on their health.

However, those from the ABC1 groups were more likely to feel that carer friendly communities would be beneficial. For example, 34% of current/former carers from the ABC1 group said that they would feel more valued, compared to 27% from the C2DE groups.



Ethnicity

White current and former carers were more likely than ethnic minority carers to feel their role as an unpaid carer is/was not understood by their community (43% compared with 32%). White carers were also more likely to say that when organisations or services are not carer friendly, this has had a negative impact on their health, has made their caring role more difficult, and has made them feel lonely. In contrast, ethnic minority carers were more likely to say that when organisations or services are not carer friendly, this has had a financial impact.

Carers from ethnic minorities were more likely to feel that carer friendly communities would be beneficial in making them feel more valued and happier, and making it easier to juggle work and care, while White carers said they would feel less stressed.

Disability

Current and former carers who are disabled were more likely than those who were not disabled to feel their role as an unpaid carer is/was not understood by their community (46% compared with 39%). They were also more likely to say that when organisations and services have not been carer friendly this has had a negative impact across all areas, including health, employment, and finances.

Current and former carers who are disabled were more likely to say that carer friendly communities would make their caring role feel more manageable and that they would feel less isolated and less stressed.



Sexual orientation

There was little difference by sexual orientation in whether people felt their role as an unpaid carer is/was understood by their community. LGBTQ+ current/former carers were more likely to say that when organisations and services have not been carer friendly this has had a negative impact on their relationships with family and friends (30% compared with 19%). Heterosexual carers were more likely to say there had been a negative financial impact.

LGBTQ+ current and former carers were more likely than heterosexual carers to say that carer friendly communities would help them feel valued, feel less stressed about caring, and that they would find their caring role more manageable.

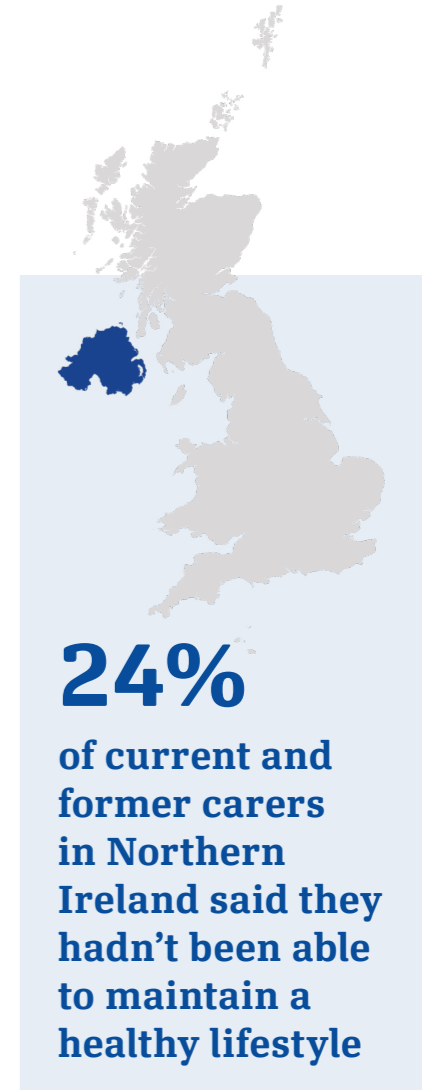
¹ ABC1 and C2DE are socio-economic classifications. ABC1 includes people working in higher and intermediate managerial, administrative and professional occupations, and supervisory, clerical, and junior managerial, administrative and professional occupations. CD2E includes people working in skilled manual occupations, semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, unemployed and lowest grade occupations.

Results in the Nations

Northern Ireland

Carer friendly communities

- **A significant proportion of people feel that their communities are not carer friendly.** Over a third (31%) of people currently caring do not feel their role as an unpaid carer is understood and valued by their community. 44% do feel understood and valued, and 25% were unsure.
- **Carers can often find it difficult to participate in their communities.** Nearly a quarter (24%) of current and former carers said they hadn't been able to maintain a healthy lifestyle, and 23% said they hadn't been able to get the support they need from essential high street shops or services. Over a fifth (22%) of current and former carers said they had been unable to take part in local groups or activities.
- **Some organisations and services are seen as more carer friendly than others.** Pharmacies were seen as the most carer friendly organisation/service. 66% of current and former carers who visited a pharmacy said it was carer friendly. Public transport was seen as the most unfriendly – 20% of current and former carers who had used public transport said it was unfriendly.



Northern Ireland results: Most carer friendly organisations and services

Rank	Organisation or service	%
#1	Pharmacy	66%
#2	Hospital	60%
#3	Local shops and businesses	60%
#4	Community spaces (eg library, leisure centre, place of worship, park)	58%
#5	GP	55%
#6	Social care	47%
#7	School	43%
#8	Services (eg financial services, banking, insurance, utilities)	42%
#9	Workplace	41%
#10	University or college	41%
#11	Public transport	36%

Northern Ireland results: Least carer friendly organisations and services
(the proportion of carers who said organisations were unfriendly)

Rank	Organisation or service	%
#1	Public transport	20%
#2	Services (eg financial services, banking, insurance, utilities)	19%
#3	Workplace	18%
#4	Social care	18%
#5	University or college	16%
#6	GP	12%
#7	Hospital	11%
#8	Community spaces (eg library, leisure centre, place of worship, park)	11%
#9	Pharmacy	10%
#10	School	10%
#11	Local shops and businesses	10%

What support people would like to see in their communities

- **More carer friendly communities would help improve carers' health and wellbeing.** 37% of current carers said that if their role as an unpaid carer was better understood, they would feel more valued, 30% said they would feel happier, and nearly a quarter (24%) said they would feel less stressed about caring.

We asked current and former carers to suggest one key thing that could help make communities carer friendly. Suggestions included more recognition for carers within communities, more support from the NHS, more flexibility from employers, and more accessible services.

- “ Employers could be more empathetic and caring towards a member of staff that is doing a juggling act of working full time and then going home to work unpaid caring for someone they care about.”
- “ More education and awareness around carers and their role.”
- “ Ditch the 8am scramble at GPs.”
- “ Easy access to public transport for disabled people.”

Scotland

Number of people caring

- **38% of respondents in Scotland have provided unpaid care at some point.** 17% of respondents are currently providing unpaid care, and 20% are not currently caring but have done so in the past.
- Based on this polling and ONS population data, we estimate that over 760,000 people are currently providing unpaid care in Scotland, and over 900,000 have previously provided care.
- In total, in Scotland, 1.7 million people have provided unpaid care at some point – either now or in the past.

Carer friendly communities

- **A significant proportion of people feel that their communities are not carer friendly.** 45% of people currently caring do not feel their role as an unpaid carer is understood and valued by their community. 34% do feel valued, and 21% are unsure.
- **Carers can often find it difficult to participate in their communities.** Over a quarter (28%) of current and former carers said they had been unable to take part in local groups or activities, and over a fifth (20%) said they hadn't been able to maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- **Some organisations and services are seen as more carer friendly than others.** Health services were viewed most positively, with pharmacies seen as the most carer friendly organisation/service. 68% of current and former carers who visited a pharmacy said it was carer friendly. This was closely followed by GPs (64%) and hospitals (63%). Schools were seen as the least carer friendly. 19% of current and former carers who had attended school whilst caring, or dealt with a school as a parent carer, had found it unfriendly.

45%

of people currently caring in Scotland do not feel their role as an unpaid carer is understood and valued by their community



Scotland results: Most carer friendly organisations and services

Rank	Organisation or service	%
#1	Pharmacy	68%
#2	GP	64%
#3	Hospital	63%
#4	Social care	52%
#5	Community spaces (eg library, leisure centre, place of worship, park)	53%
#6	Workplace	51%
#7	Local shops and businesses	51%
#8	School	39%
#9	Services (eg financial services, banking, insurance, utilities)	38%
#10	Public transport	36%
#11	University or college	30%

Scotland results: Least carer friendly organisations/services (the proportion of carers who said organisations were unfriendly)

Rank	Organisation or service	%
#1	School	19%
#2	Workplace	17%
#3	Services (eg financial services, banking, insurance, utilities)	17%
#4	Public transport	15%
#5	Hospital	13%
#6	Local shops and businesses	12%
#7	Social care	11%
#8	University or college	10%
#9	Community spaces (eg library, leisure centre, place of worship, park)	10%
#10	GP	9%
#11	Pharmacy	5%

- **Carers feel that organisations are not carer friendly if they do not have a good understanding of what caring is, or have not considered the impact of caring.** 35% of current and former carers who felt that organisations or services were not carer friendly said that this was because they do not have a good understanding of what caring is and what it involves, and 35% said this was because they hadn't considered what impact caring might have on them.

The impact on carers when communities are not carer friendly

- **When communities are not carer friendly, this can have a negative impact on carers.** 38% of current and former carers who felt that organisations or services were not carer friendly said it made it more difficult to look after the person they care for, and 32% said it had a negative impact on their physical or mental health. 25% said it had made them feel lonely.

What support people would like to see in their communities

- **More carer friendly communities would help improve carers' health and wellbeing.** 22% of current carers said that if their role as an unpaid carer was better understood they would feel more valued, and 22% would find their caring role more manageable.

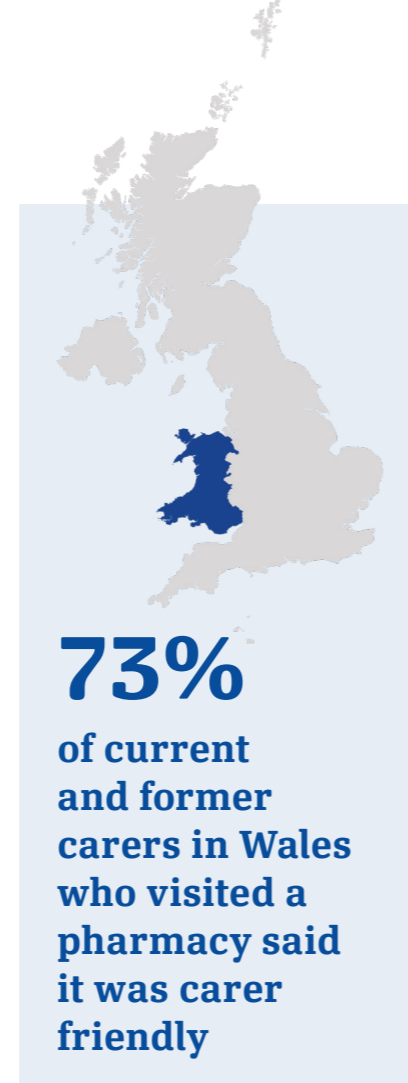
We asked current and former carers to suggest one key thing that could help make communities carer friendly. Suggestions included more recognition for carers within communities, more support from the NHS, more flexibility from employers, more opportunities for carers to meet locally, and more accessible services.

- “A lot of administration could be reduced from the carer if the NHS worked together ie GP surgery, pharmacy outpatient at the hospital. This would allow the carer to focus on caring and ensuring their own health to keep caring rather than taking to war with everyday easily solvable problem.”
- “Arrange get together for carers and their families in their local areas.”
- “Carers are key workers recognised under the Covid Act but it is not a status acknowledged by the wider community – if we were recognised as key workers then support would be easier to find/receive.”
- “Easy access – no cars parked on pavements, pavements and roads in better condition for wheelchair users, better access into shops etc.”
- “Employers should be as understanding as possible in allowing flexible working arrangements for people to manage their caring responsibilities.”

Wales

Carer friendly communities

- **A significant proportion of people feel that their communities are not carer friendly.** 45% of people currently caring do not feel their role as an unpaid carer is understood and valued by their community. 33% do feel valued, and 22% were unsure.
- **Carers can often find it difficult to participate in their communities.** Over a fifth (22%) of current and former carers said they had been unable to take part in local groups or activities, and 19% said they hadn't been able to get the support they need from essential shops or services.
- **Some organisations and services are seen as more carer friendly than others.** Pharmacies were seen as the most carer friendly organisation/service. 73% of current and former carers who visited a pharmacy said it was carer friendly. Public transport was seen as the most unfriendly – nearly a quarter (24%) of current and former carers who had used public transport said it was unfriendly.



Wales results: Most carer friendly organisations and services

Rank	Organisation or service	%
#1	Pharmacy	73%
#2	GP	72%
#3	Hospital	69%
#4	Community spaces (eg library, leisure centre, place of worship, park)	67%
#5	Workplace	56%
#6	Social care and support services	55%
#7	Local shops and businesses	55%
#8	Public transport	50%
#9	Services (eg financial services, banking, insurance, utilities)	49%

Wales results: Least carer friendly organisations and services (the proportion of carers who said organisations were unfriendly)

Rank	Organisation or service	%
#1	Public transport	24%
#2	Workplace	19%
#3	Services (eg financial services, banking, insurance, utilities)	16%
#4	GP	11%
#5	Social care	9%
#6	Hospital	8%
#7	Local shops and businesses	8%
#8	Pharmacy	7%
#9	Community spaces (eg library, leisure centre, place of worship, park)	4%

What support people would like to see in their communities

- **More carer friendly communities would help improve carers' health and wellbeing.** 37% of current carers said that if their role as an unpaid carer was better understood they would feel happier, 23% said they would feel more valued and nearly a quarter (24%) said they would feel less stressed.

We asked current and former carers to suggest one key thing that could help make communities carer friendly. Suggestions included more recognition for carers within communities, more opportunities to meet other carers, and easier access to advice and information.

“A support network for people who are in caring roles.”

“Listen, that's all that's required as we feel very alone, totally stressed out and at breaking point. If someone listens to us that's half the problem solved. Listen and assist where you can.”

“More information could be provided, eg how to look after someone with dementia. As it was, we had to figure it out ourselves.”

“Openly communicate what help is available, rather than us all having to hunt help out and apply/fight for it.”

Recommendations

Recommendations

Government:

- The UK Government should use cross-government working to create a new Government Action plan to support unpaid carers. This Action Plan should act as a stepping stone to a more ambitious and fully funded Carers Strategy. This strategy should recognise the role and responsibilities of the devolved nation governments, their own carers strategies and the need to work together on areas where UK Government has reserved responsibility, such as employment. We are also calling on nation governments to develop their own carers strategies where these do not currently exist.
- The UK Government should ensure that any recommendations relating to unpaid carers that are put forward by Baroness Casey during her ongoing Commission into adult social care reform in England are implemented swiftly and in full. Nation governments should consider the recommendations and lessons that can be adopted from the Casey Commission to support improvements for carers across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- The UK Government should deliver a fresh approach to supporting unpaid carers through the delivery of the NHS 10 Year Plan in England, transforming the way the NHS interacts with unpaid carers to make it the most carer friendly health service in the world by the end of the next decade. Each of the governments across the UK should use every lever at their disposal – including legislation where necessary – to ensure the NHS recognises and supports carers better.
- The UK Government should review the current support provided to unpaid carers through the social security system, including setting objectives for carers' social security benefits as well as timescales and options for change, to prevent carers from falling into poverty. This includes working with the nation governments on devolved benefits to reduce barriers for carers of claiming social security support.
- The UK Government should use the opportunity presented by the consultation on employment rights for carers to legislate to introduce a new statutory right to five days of paid Carer's Leave per year by the end of this Parliament, to support more people to balance employment and unpaid care and remain in work.



CARER FRIENDLY WORKPLACE

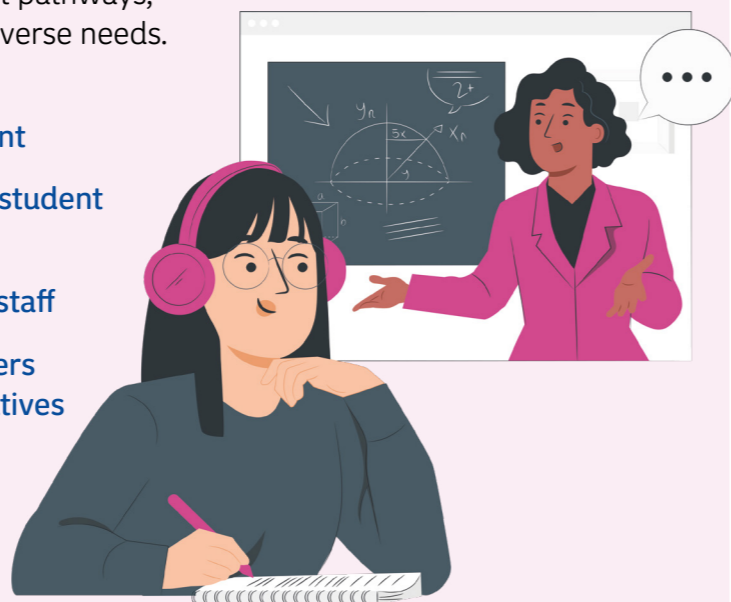


Employers should:

- Support carers to achieve their potential at work, recognise the value of employees with caring responsibilities, and create workplaces that enable and empower unpaid carers to thrive. This might include:
 - » introducing at least five days of paid Carer's Leave
 - » raising awareness of awareness of employees' rights under the Carer's Leave Act,
 - » joining Employers for Carers, or Employers for Carers Wales.
 - » providing training to line managers to ensure they understand and support those managing paid work alongside providing unpaid care

Schools, universities and colleges should:

- Offer flexible learning options, clear support pathways, and trained staff who understand carers' diverse needs. This might include:
 - » Signing up to the Young Carers Covenant
 - » Appointing a dedicated young carer or student carer lead
 - » Providing carer awareness training for staff
 - » Making carers a priority group for careers advice and widening participation initiatives
 - » Creating a supportive learning environment that recognises the realities of caring



Businesses and services should:

- Make everyday places more understanding, flexible, and accessible for people with caring responsibilities. Further recommendations can be found in our Building Carer Friendly Communities blueprint.

Friends, family members and neighbours can:

- Help carers feel recognised and valued by listening, being empathetic, and taking time to consider the impact that caring can have.
- Help ensure people get the support they need by signposting carers to support and advice.



More information

More information and advice about how to build a carer friendly community is provided in our new Building Carer Friendly Communities blueprint, published alongside this report.





Headline sponsor



Carers Week is an annual awareness campaign to recognise the vital contribution made by unpaid carers across the UK.

In 2026, Carers Week is made possible through Carers UK working together with six other major charities: Age UK, Carers Trust, The Lewy Body Society, The ME Association, Motor Neurone Disease Association, and Rethink Mental Illness.

TSB is the headline sponsor for Carers Week 2026, and we are grateful for their support.



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