

[Home](#) [Health and social care](#) [Disabled people](#) [Carers](#)
[Unpaid carers action plan: recognise, refer, reach](#)



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Policy paper

Unpaid carers action plan: recognise, refer, reach

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[Contents](#)

[Ministerial foreword](#)

[Introduction](#)

[1. Recognise](#)

[2. Refer](#)

[3. Reach](#)

[Governance and oversight](#)

[Annex A: actions to recognise unpaid carers](#)

Ministerial foreword

Unpaid carers form a core part of our communities. They provide vital support to family, friends and neighbours. This can be both rewarding and challenging. We must do more to recognise this contribution and ensure unpaid carers receive the right support at the right time. This is why the government is acting now, and this plan sets out how.

Nearly one in 10 of us is an unpaid carer, and that contribution underpins the health and care system, the strength of our neighbourhoods, the welfare of our society and the resilience of our economy.

The demands of caring can affect a person's:

- physical and mental health
- financial stability
- opportunities for education and work
- ability to lead a fulfilling life in retirement

This is because, all too often, unpaid carers face fragmented services, barriers to support and a lack of recognition for their essential role. This is not good enough, and we are determined to change it.

Since coming into government, we have already made changes in the support available for unpaid carers, including:

- significant reforms to Carer's Allowance
- new commitments as part of the 10 Year Health Plan for England
- a review of carer's leave
- resetting children's social care to better support young carers and their families

This plan builds on the foundation of the following changes that we've already made.

Publishing the 10 Year Health Plan

Through measures in the 10 Year Health Plan for England, we are making unpaid carers more visible in the NHS and joining up services through the introduction of a new 'MyCarer' section within the NHS App. As part of the move towards neighbourhood health, unpaid carers will be actively involved in care planning. We will promote the inclusive practices of family group conferencing, a collaborative process that brings together individuals, their families, unpaid carers and professionals to develop shared plans that support wellbeing and address concerns.

Reviewing carer's leave

On 19 November 2025, the government published the terms of reference for the review of employment rights for unpaid carers. In June 2026, we launched a public consultation on employment rights for unpaid carers and parents of seriously ill children. While this action plan applies to England only, the employment rights mentioned in this plan are applicable to carers in Scotland and Wales too.

Increasing the Carer's Allowance weekly earnings limit

We increased the Carer's Allowance weekly earnings limit from £151 to £204. This amounts to the equivalent of 16 hours per week at the National Living Wage. The increase in April 2025 represented the largest cash increase to the earnings limit since its introduction in 1976. As a result of this, over 60,000 more people will be able to receive Carer's Allowance between April 2025 and March 2030.

Introducing the Employment Rights Act

The Employment Rights Act 2025 includes provisions which will support all employees to achieve a better work-life balance. This includes changes that will make it more likely that flexible working requests are accepted. It also encourages employers to take steps to support employees to better balance work and care as part of an action plan, which all employers in Great Britain with 250 or more employees will be required to produce, subject to legislation, from spring 2027. This stands to make a particular difference to people combining work with unpaid care.

Publishing data on the impact of caring on the education of young carers

This schools data, published annually, includes the number of young carers identified by schools, their attendance, suspensions and exclusions and, for the first time last autumn, their attainment at key stage 2 and key stage 4. It is helping to implement change as we reform education and undertake a complete reset of children's social care - including through the provisions of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 and the education inspection regime.

This action plan brings together the work of the government across health, social care, education, social security and employment with an aim to improve how unpaid carers are recognised by those around them, how support is offered and how they can be helped to reach their own personal potential and live fulfilling lives.

The government cannot achieve this on its own. Success depends on working together across government and beyond, with local authorities, employers, schools, health and care services, communities and businesses, to ensure that unpaid carers receive the recognition and support they deserve. Collaboration will be the guiding principle for how the government achieves the outcomes in this action plan.

Stephen Kinnock MP, Minister of State for Care, Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)

Kate Dearden MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Employment Rights and Consumer Protection), Department for Business and Trade (DBT)

Olivia Bailey MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Early Education) and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Equalities), Department for Education (DfE)

Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP, Minister of State (Minister for Social Security and Disability), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Introduction

While caring can be deeply rewarding, it can also be physically and emotionally

demanding. These pressures can affect a person's physical and mental health and financial stability, as well as their ability to study, work or enjoy a fulfilling retirement. The government is committed to ensuring unpaid carers receive the support they need through, for example:

- the NHS
- the benefits system
- schools
- adult social care services
- employment rights

This is in addition to organisations which provide support to unpaid carers and their families, including:

- carer-focused and health condition-related charities
- employers
- employment services
- community organisations

Unpaid carers are a diverse group with a wide range of experiences. They include children, working age adults and older people who may have their own health and care needs. According to the [2021 Census](#), 30% of unpaid carers in England (1.4 million people) are providing high intensity care of 50 hours or more a week. Many unpaid carers will be trying to balance care with other responsibilities. We recognise in this plan that carers' needs vary by age, circumstances and by the intensity of their caring responsibilities, and that support must be flexible and proportionate to reflect this and meet their needs.

The experience of navigating the system of support for carers can be confusing and overwhelming, adding further pressure for people who are already managing significant responsibilities. To make meaningful change and improve access to services and support, it will be vital to have departments across government work together and adopt a systemic approach that places the needs of unpaid carers at its centre.

To make this change, the government has developed this action plan to improve the lives of unpaid carers in England, and concentrated on 3 central themes - recognise, refer and reach.

Recognise

Whether in the workplace or a health or education setting, people providing care are often not recognised as unpaid carers, either by themselves or by the systems around them. Improving recognition will help ensure unpaid carers understand the effect caring can have both on their own lives and on the lives of others. It will also make them aware of the support available to them. We have a specific responsibility to help improve the identification of young carers.

Refer

Alongside improving recognition of the role unpaid carers play in our families and communities, we must ensure they are clear about the support and services available to make caring more manageable. We can improve outcomes for both unpaid carers and those they support by ensuring unpaid carers:

- can access financial support and benefits
- receive clear and accessible information
- are fully involved in the important processes for the people they care for

Reach

We want unpaid carers to be able to reach their full potential, whether that is in their education, work or in retirement. We want to support carers with their health and wellbeing, while helping them learn, work and lead fulfilling lives. We can help unpaid carers pursue their aspirations and access opportunities by:

- addressing educational and social challenges for young carers
- removing barriers to opportunity
- improving workplace support
- ensuring access to timely health and care services for all carers, including older carers

1. Recognise

Unpaid carers play a vital role in our neighbourhoods and communities, yet too often their contributions go unseen. Across education, workplaces and health and social care settings, many people providing care are not recognised as unpaid carers - and many do not see themselves as such. As a result, carers are not always well understood. They may miss out on information that could make their lives easier, including support for their physical and mental wellbeing. Young carers are those least likely to be identified as unpaid carers and are at particular risk of missing out on vital support.

We are taking practical steps to make unpaid carers more visible within the health and social care system through measures set out in the [10 Year Health Plan](#). These include the introduction of a new MyCarer section within the NHS App, so people can easily indicate that they look after someone and manage important aspects of that person's care on their behalf, such as appointments and prescriptions. This helps the NHS recognise unpaid carers' role and point them towards the right support. This sits alongside wider efforts to ensure identification of unpaid carers becomes a routine part of personalised care and support planning for people with complex needs.

Recognising the particular challenges young carers face, NHS England and DfE are working together to see what can be done to identify them at an early stage. The Chief Public Health Nurse is working with school nursing organisations to highlight best practice on identifying young carers in school and providing them with high quality support. The government's reset of children's social care, following the [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026](#), will also base reform around better support for families with an absolute focus on the promotion of enduring relationships.

Effective information sharing is an essential component of DfE's work to support children, including young carers. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 introduces an information sharing duty, which enables local partners to share information for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. We are piloting the introduction of a single unique identifier for every child. This will be based on common data standards, so that information can follow children across services in a safe and consistent way.

A Carer Passport is a record that can identify an unpaid carer in some way and lead to provision of support, services or other benefits in response. DHSC is funding a

refresh of the [Carer Passport website](#) to reflect best practice and encourage its use across workplaces and health and educational settings. We expect this will help unpaid carers in a range of settings to communicate their caring responsibilities and the effect these have on their daily lives, making it easier for organisations to offer the right support. We will also encourage implementation of the Carer Passport scheme across NHS trusts, as well as encouraging and facilitating NHS bodies to become [Carer Confident employers](#). As the country's largest employer, we want the NHS to lead by example in recognising, supporting and retaining unpaid carers in its workforce.

To understand the challenges the social care system experiences in identifying unpaid carers and why these persist, DHSC has launched a project through the [Partners in Care and Health programme](#). This project will increase our understanding of:

- why people may not themselves recognise their caring responsibilities
- what stops care organisations from identifying them.

The Partners in Care and Health programme will also seek to improve the quality of local authority data on unpaid carers and address barriers to data sharing between local systems. It will uncover what effective practice looks like in improving data quality and sharing, with a view to promoting these approaches to the rest of the system. Alongside this, DBT has set up a lived experience group and commissioned external research to better understand the needs and experiences of carers in employment and how employers can improve the support they provide. The first [qualitative research with unpaid carers report](#), which explored the early impacts of the Carer's Leave Act 2023, was published in June 2026.

To further improve the data collected about unpaid carers in England, DHSC has commissioned, through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), the [Centre for Care](#) to run an independent pilot study. The pilot aims to develop and test methodologies to collect detailed information about unpaid carers, including carers not already known to their local authority or GP. The findings from the pilot, expected by mid 2027, will be used to inform the development of a more comprehensive new survey for unpaid carers. This in turn will help fill important evidence gaps surrounding the circumstances, experiences and needs of all unpaid carers in England.

Alongside this, DHSC continues to invest into research on health and social care, including unpaid care, through NIHR. The ongoing and independent [Combinations of Support for Adult Carers \(CoSAC\) study](#), funded by NIHR, will explore the use and effect of different local packages of support for unpaid carers, helping to inform

local commissioning decisions and service design.

Caring can have a significant impact on people's physical and mental health and wellbeing, and life opportunities. We recognise caring as an important social determinant of health, first identified by Public Health England in the 2021 report [Caring as a social determinant of health: review of evidence](#). We will continue to promote approaches that identify and address the inequalities experienced by carers.

We are spending record amounts in supporting unpaid carers through the [Carer's Allowance](#), with 2025 to 2026 forecast real expenditure of £4.6 billion supporting 1 million people. By March 2030, the government is forecast to spend £5.5 billion a year on Carer's Allowance in England and Wales, a real terms increase of 20%. DWP also provides support to unpaid carers through income-related benefits, which can be paid to carers at a higher rate than those without caring responsibilities. If eligible, Universal Credit (through the carer's element) and Pension Credit pay an extra £2,500 a year to 1.1 million unpaid carers. We will continue to work with Carers UK and others to raise awareness of the additional support that income-related benefits can provide.

We will improve and modernise the way Carer's Allowance operates, making it easier for unpaid carers to combine their caring responsibilities with paid work where they can, and rewarding them more for doing so. We will also ensure that those receiving Carer's Allowance and Universal Credit receive a more joined-up service.

DWP launched a [call for evidence on the modernisation and reform of Carer's Allowance](#) on 7 July 2026. The call for evidence, which closes on 18 August 2026, will help build DWP's evidence base as the department considers ways of modernising support for carers through the benefit system, and in particular through Carer's Allowance. DWP is seeking input from carers, people with care needs, carers' organisations and others with experience to share. Accessible format versions will be available on request.

This reflects the government's commitment, given in its [response to the independent review of Carer's Allowance overpayments](#), to implement the accepted recommendations. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the introduction of Carer's Allowance, the next few years will see some of the most significant reforms since it was introduced in 1976, reflecting the importance we attach to supporting unpaid carers.

In November 2025, the government commissioned the Right Honourable Alan Milburn to author a 'young people and work' report to understand the drivers of the

increase in the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The final report is intended to take a holistic view of the welfare, health, skills and employment systems and identify areas for reform. This will be published in the autumn and will be expected to introduce changes that help young people who are unpaid carers. The [Young people and work: interim report](#) was published in May 2026.

2. Refer

It is vital that those with caring responsibilities can get help and support that is right for them. However, according to DWP's [Carers' Employment Digital Discovery and Care Choices reports](#), too often carers find themselves facing complicated systems or being provided with unclear information at exactly the moment they most need support.

This section sets out how we will ensure unpaid carers are directed to the right support and services at an earlier stage. This includes:

- helping unpaid carers access support for their own lives
- ensuring that they are aware of, and involved in, services and decisions relating to the person they care for

This could include financial, employment and health and wellbeing support, all underpinned by clear, accessible information. This will help both unpaid carers and those they support experience better, more joined up services and improved outcomes.

Local carers organisations play a vital role in providing advice, information and practical support to carers in communities. As we improve how carers are identified and directed to support, we will continue to work in partnership with these organisations to help ensure carers can access the right help at the right time.

Adult social care is part of our vision for a neighbourhood health service that shifts care from hospitals to communities. The shift will offer more personalised, proactive and joined-up health and care services that help people stay independent for as long as possible. As integrated care boards (ICBs) and local authorities plan for and implement the shift to neighbourhood health, they are encouraged to consider how to make arrangements to meaningfully involve people using those services, as well as their unpaid carers.

We are developing a new cross-government information page, based on this existing [Caring for someone resource](#). This new information page will bring together clear, up-to-date guidance from different departments in one accessible place. This information will support carers at different stages of life, including young carers and older carers, who may be balancing caring responsibilities with changes to their own health or finances.

We are exploring broadening the use of government systems such as [Diagnosis Connect](#) or the [NHS Notify](#) system to push this information and other links to unpaid carers, so that they have easy access to services that are most relevant to them. We are also developing a 'carers' charter' for England. The aim of the charter is to help carers identify themselves and to refer them to all the rights that are available to unpaid carers across healthcare, employment, education and social security.

Alongside improving how carers find and access support, we are also taking forward a broader programme of work across health, care and wider services to strengthen how support is provided in practice and ensure carers are better recognised and supported across the system.

The development of shared care records and the single patient record will positively change the way that carers experience care. It will reduce the number of times that carers have to repeat information and tell the story of the person they care for. Access to the single patient record, where they have permission to do so, will also help carers to have the knowledge and information to help them plan and provide care. We will work to ensure that carers' needs and perspectives are considered in the design and implementation of digital health records, enabling better communication, improved care co-ordination and more joined-up support, while respecting privacy, consent and individual choice.

Through the development of an adult social care pandemic action plan for England, DHSC will consider lessons identified from the COVID-19 pandemic - and other events such as the 2024 mpox clade IIb outbreak and Exercise Pegasus^{[\[footnote 1\]](#)} - to enhance support for unpaid carers during future health emergencies. This will include consideration of access to:

- information
- contingency planning
- replacement care arrangements
- the recognition of unpaid carers within emergency response planning

The forthcoming cross-government mental health strategy for England, expected to

be published later in 2026, will set the strategic direction for a more preventative, joined-up approach to mental health. The strategy aims to improve access to support and to help people to stay well and participate in education, work and community life. For unpaid carers, this should mean:

- clearer pathways to help
- earlier access to mental health support where needed
- improved co-ordination across services

The strategy will also recognise the role of support beyond the NHS, including community organisations and, where relevant, employment support in improving outcomes for carers and those they support.

As the government develops its modern service frameworks (MSFs), we are considering the needs of unpaid carers. These considerations include:

- enhancing engagement with unpaid carers
- improving the support available to unpaid carers
- recognising unpaid carers as important partners in care planning and provision
- supporting better access for unpaid carers to relevant information, services and support for themselves and the people they care for

For instance, the MSF for frailty and dementia will implement rapid and significant improvements in quality of care and productivity in adult social care. This MSF will be informed by phase one of Baroness Casey's [independent commission on adult social care](#).

The [Health and Care Act 2022](#) introduced a statutory duty on NHS trusts to involve unpaid carers in discharge planning. Carers UK's [State of Caring 2025 survey](#) found that only 14% of respondents were asked about their ability and willingness to provide care after hospital discharge. This is why we have commissioned the Local Government Association's [Better Care Fund support programme](#) this year to help local health and social care systems adopt best practices. Families and friends often know the person they care for best. Bringing them into the conversation from the start helps ensure safer, more co-ordinated and more compassionate care following discharge from hospital.

Local authorities have a duty to provide support to unpaid carers under the [Care Act 2014](#) and the [Children and Families Act 2014](#). However, we know that the help available to unpaid carers can differ greatly from one area to another, and too many

unpaid carers face unnecessary barriers simply because of where they live. To improve consistency of support across the country, we will continue to work with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to promote a consistent understanding of what good practice looks like for unpaid carers across all 4 provider assessment frameworks:

- adult social care
- mental health care
- primary care (GPs and community pharmacies, for example)
- hospitals

The work to improve geographical consistency includes highlighting best practice examples emerging from CQC's first round of local authority inspections.

In the policy paper [Adult social care priorities for local authorities: 2026 to 2027](#), we stated that more support for unpaid carers to help them maintain their own wellbeing is part of our priority outcomes for local authorities in delivering adult social care. Respite care can form a critical part of this, as it can help improve the lives of carers by enabling them to continue to have a life of their own alongside caring.

Through the Better Care Fund (BCF), ICBs and local authorities are encouraged to work together to identify and support unpaid carers. This support can include the provision of respite and short-break services where appropriate. The [BCF framework 2026 to 2027](#) stated that when local authorities and ICBs develop their BCF plans, they should consider how pooled funding can help the NHS and local authorities meet their duties in relation to unpaid carers and help ensure that partners work together to:

- systematically identify unpaid carers and their responsibilities
- provide carer's assessments as required and support unpaid carers

Through the review of employment rights for unpaid carers and the implementation of the [Employment Rights Act 2025](#), DBT will look to increase awareness of the existing employment support unpaid carers can access in the workplace. This includes ensuring that relevant information is accessible on the cross-government information page for unpaid carers.

Too often, young carers miss out on the support available to them and often describe the transition from children to adult services as a 'cliff edge'. We know this is not good enough. That is why DHSC is working with DfE to improve the quality and consistency of transitions from children's services into adult social care, including

through developing specialist best practice materials for local authorities. DHSC and DfE are also supporting the [no wrong doors for young carers memorandum of understanding](#). We will work with local government to encourage national take-up.

Case study: from neighbour to carer

Building a shared support network through a family group conference - Camden

Camden Council is using family group conference (FGC) to improve the support available to unpaid carers. An FGC brings together family members, friends and support networks to develop a plan that helps meet the needs of the unpaid carer and the person they support. This case study demonstrates how local areas can adapt existing approaches to better support unpaid carers.

Annabel and Beryl became friends 20 years ago when Annabel moved into a nearby flat and joined the Residents Association. Their friendship grew through a shared love of music, with Annabel encouraging Beryl to perform publicly for the first time at the age of 80. Beryl later recorded a CD, marking a proud achievement in her life.

Over time, Annabel became increasingly concerned about Beryl's ability to manage independently. With no close family nearby, Annabel gradually took on more responsibilities, supporting Beryl with daily tasks, attending appointments, managing finances and liaising with professionals. Eventually, she also became Beryl's power of attorney. The small tasks began mounting up on Annabel, leading her to feel overwhelmed as their friendship, built on shared interests and mutual support, had gradually evolved into a significant caring role.

An FGC was then suggested by the local authority. Initially, both women saw it as an informal meeting over lunch, but with support from independent co-ordinator Azara, the process developed into a structured opportunity to strengthen Beryl's support network. Neighbours, friends and extended family joined in person and by phone.

The FGC proved transformative. It created dedicated time for open discussion and practical problem-solving around Beryl's future care. During private family time, the group developed a shared plan for ongoing support.

For Annabel, the process was particularly significant, as she recognised for

the first time that she was a carer - something she described as a “great relief”. The conference reduced isolation for both women, eased pressure on Annabel and created a sustainable network of shared responsibility, allowing her to continue supporting Beryl as both a friend and an advocate.

With thanks to Camden Council for contributing this case study.

[Learn more about adult FGC and its impact on unpaid carers in Camden](#)

3. Reach

We want all unpaid carers, no matter their age or circumstances, to realise their full potential and reach the goals that they set themselves, without fear that the compromises they make as a carer will hold them back in the future. We know that caring can affect even the youngest children with evidence of children falling behind their peers by the end of primary school - an impact that can last a lifetime.

Crucially, there are roles for others to play at this point - as employers, friends and colleagues of unpaid carers. Schools, employers, friends and colleagues should accommodate for people who are unpaid carers as a matter of routine. Collectively, we need to do what we can to help unpaid carers maintain a clearer focus on their own aspirations and goals, alongside their caring role.

The government launched the independent [Pensions Commission](#) in July 2025 and, as part of the terms of reference, highlighted that carers are at greater risk of low living standards in retirement. We welcome the [commission's interim report](#), published on 19 May 2026, which highlighted that unpaid carers face:

- heightened risks of undersaving for retirement
- reduced or interrupted paid employment
- limited opportunities for progression
- restricted access to workplace pensions

The Pensions Commission final report, due in early 2027, will include its recommendations to government and, as per the terms of reference for the commission, we anticipate this will include measures to improve pension adequacy for those most at risk of undersaving.

An important element of our plans to modernise the world of work is to support unpaid carers who want to work while managing their caring responsibilities. This helps provide good jobs for carers and a skilled workforce for employers. The labour market cannot afford to lose the skills and talents of working unpaid carers. We are exploring an option to commission [Employers for Carers](#) to develop a scheme specifically aimed at supporting small and medium sized enterprises to employ unpaid carers.

We are also reviewing the implementation of the [Carer's Leave Act 2023](#) and looking at where any improvements may be needed. This includes, but is not limited to, examining the benefits of paid leave, while being mindful of the impacts this might have on businesses. [Employment rights for unpaid carers review: terms of reference](#), published in November 2025, outlines further detail about the review, including a timeline. A public consultation, [Make work pay: employment rights for unpaid carers and parents of seriously ill children](#), was launched in June 2026 and closes on 1 September 2026.

Employers who understand what makes a healthy and inclusive workplace are better placed to support staff to stay well and thrive at work - including those employees who are balancing paid work and caring responsibilities. The government's [Keep Britain Working](#) approach, led by Sir Charlie Mayfield, is helping build a labour market fit for the future. This includes supporting unpaid carers to:

- manage their own health needs at work
- stay in good work wherever possible
- help those who are currently excluded from the labour market to re-enter work safely and sustainably

The Carer Passport scheme is enabling more workplaces, schools and health settings to offer tailored and equitable support to carers, and to provide adjustments where they are needed. As set out earlier in this action plan, DHSC is funding the refresh to the website to increase awareness of this support and to ensure unpaid carers are not only recognised but also better supported to reach their personal goals.

NHS England will work in partnership with local carers organisations, in line with the [Civil Society Covenant](#), to listen to carers' experiences, recognise the vital role that carers play, and co-ordinate and, where appropriate, co-locate carers' support alongside NHS services to make it easier for carers and those they care for to get timely help.

The increases to the Carer's Allowance earnings limit will further allow unpaid carers greater flexibility at work. Under the current system, once an employee earns £204 per week net, they lose all their £86.45 per week Carer's Allowance (2026 to 2027 rates). Consequently, the government is also considering replacing the current cliff-edge earnings rule with a taper.

As part of the government's plans to [Get Britain Working](#), DWP is creating a new jobs and careers service with an enhanced focus on skills and careers. Employment support will be more inclusive and better tailored to individual circumstances. This includes ensuring the future jobs and careers service is designed and tested to meet the needs of unpaid carers. The service aims to support those who want help to move into good, meaningful work and to progress in work in ways that reflect their caring responsibilities.

Unpaid carers can find themselves at risk of harm or abuse. Carers and the people they care for should never find themselves subject to abuse or harm and carers at risk of suicide should be identified and properly supported. We strongly welcomed Baroness Casey's focus on the need to protect vulnerable adults and ensure services are safe, effective and high quality. That is why, as recommended by Baroness Casey, we have set up a new [National Adult Safeguarding Board](#) and we are developing plans for an urgent review of adult safeguarding statutory duties and powers. Alongside this, we will also look at how data can be used to inform action at local and national level. The board is chaired by the Chief Social Worker for Adults and will report directly into the Minister of State for Care (DHSC). It will work to improve accountability and assurance of adult safeguarding across the system at a national level.

Our work supports the intended outcomes of the Carers Trust's [Young Carers Covenant](#), helping to ensure that young carers are recognised, supported and able to thrive across all areas of their lives. Our schools policy paper, [Every child achieving and thriving](#), will ensure all children, including young carers, get the right support in early years, school and college. This includes investment in staff training, better buildings and equipment, and access to expert professional support when needed. To support this, we will continue to publish annual data on the identification, attendance, exclusions and suspensions, and attainment of young carers. We are also exploring the inclusion of young carers in the daily attendance data collected by DfE.

This [schools data](#) is already driving change. Ofsted's updated [education inspection framework](#) places a renewed emphasis on inclusion in schools. Supporting toolkits are absolutely clear that inspection judgements will take into consideration how the needs of young carers are being met. Further, we have included provisions in the

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 to allow us to introduce Children Not In School registers and, as part of this, to require local authorities to record whether children on these registers are young carers. This will help ensure local authorities are aware of children in their area who are young carers and that they are receiving the right support.

Young carers will also stand to benefit from wider changes as we remove barriers to opportunity in education. This includes, for example, the national roll out of free breakfast clubs in every state funded school with primary age children. This change has the potential to be of huge benefit to those young carers who often sacrifice their own punctuality or attendance when getting younger siblings ready for and to school.

We will also ensure our reset of children's social care works for families where children may have caring responsibilities. In November 2025 we announced that we will provide £2.4 billion over the next 3 years for preventative services to be delivered through the [Families First Partnership programme](#). This funding will ensure every local authority establishes a single offer of Family Help for children and families so that support is available when it is needed. This is of crucial importance to young carers - given the strong links between the reasons for children's social care intervention and families and children undertaking caring at home. Parental mental health concerns are, for example, now the most prevalent factor recorded by social workers at the end of initial children's social care assessments.

The forthcoming cross-government mental health strategy for England will put a greater emphasis on supporting everyone to participate in education, employment and community life. This approach is expected to benefit unpaid carers by helping create a more inclusive and supportive system, enabling them to maintain both their physical and mental wellbeing while pursuing their goals.

Case study: supporting hidden young carers

Promoting wellbeing and academic achievement through early intervention - Marches Academy

Jordan cares for his father, a single parent experiencing mental health difficulties and alcohol misuse. On his own, Jordan had been providing emotional support for his father while managing household chores. Both were significant responsibilities but were normalised as no wider family support was available.

Jordan remained positive and resilient, with strong engagement in school. He

had yet to recognise himself as a carer, while his caring role put his academic progress at risk due to fatigue, emotional strain and stress at home.

Jordan eventually received a structured support plan, which included pastoral support and referral to young carers services. As a result, Jordan has connected with peers who share similar experiences, reducing isolation and improving emotional wellbeing. Jordan also now has a young carer passport, a critical intervention that enables staff to understand and respond consistently to his needs without repeated explanations. It also provides Jordan with classroom support and the flexibility needed to balance his studies and caring role.

Jordan's case highlights the importance of early identification, safeguarding and targeted intervention for young carers, particularly those supporting parents with mental health or substance misuse needs, whose experiences often remain hidden.

With thanks to [Marches Academy Trust](#) for contributing this case study.

Governance and oversight

Overall accountability for implementing this action plan will sit with the cross-government small ministerial group (SMG). The SMG is chaired by the Minister of State for Care (DHSC) and attended by the:

- Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Employment Rights and Consumer Protection) (DBT)
- Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Early Education) and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Equalities) (DfE)
- Minister of State (Minister for Social Security and Disability) (DWP)

The SMG will continue to meet quarterly to provide strategic oversight, agree priorities and implement the action plan across government. Officials from DHSC, DBT, DfE and DWP will continue to support the SMG through regular meetings. These forums will co-ordinate implementation, manage risks and ensure actions remain aligned with wider priorities. For transparency and accountability, the government intends to provide annual public updates on progress against this action

plan, including through a written ministerial statement. Ministers will also meet annually with unpaid carers to hear directly how the action plan is making a difference in practice and to ensure that lived experience continues to inform implementation.

This action plan is intended to be an iterative document. We expect to refresh the plan at the main implementation points, including following the conclusion of the employment rights review and the achievement of early implementation milestones under the 10 Year Health Plan.

Annex A: actions to recognise unpaid carers

This table sets out the actions the government will take to recognise unpaid carers.

Action	Lead	Date
1. Lead the development of the MyCarer component of the NHS App which will help identify unpaid carers.	NHS England	NHS App transformation by 2028 (proxy access by 2027)
2. Integrate carer identification into personalised care and support planning for those with complex needs.	NHS England	2027
3. Publish updated healthy child programme guidance , which focuses on improving identification and support for young carers.	DHSC and NHS England	Completed
4. Oversee the implementation of an independent pilot study to develop and test methodologies to collect detailed information about unpaid carers known to their local authority, and those who are not. The findings from the pilot will be used to inform the development of a more comprehensive new survey for unpaid carers.	DHSC commissioned the Centre for Care through NIHR	By mid 2027

5. Improve - through the Partners in Care and Health programme - the quality of local authority data on unpaid carers, address barriers to data sharing between local health and social care functions, and improve local authorities' identification, assessment and support to unpaid carers.	DHSC	March 2027
6. Fund a refresh of the Carer Passport website to encourage passport use across workplaces, health and educational settings. This ensures unpaid carers are able to identify themselves and communicate their needs and circumstances. It may encourage reasonable adjustments to be put in place, in schools as well as workplaces, enabling the individual to remain in school and in work with the right support.	DHSC with DBT input	March 2027
7. Publish annual data on the identification, attendance, suspension and exclusions, and key stage 2 and key stage 4 attainment of young carers.	DfE	Annually
8. Commission external research to better understand the needs and experience of carers in employment and their employers. The first qualitative report has been published.	DBT	Completed
9. Begin Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 multi-agency information sharing duty for child protection and welfare.	DfE	Autumn 2026
10. Introduce the single unique identifier for children.	DfE	Autumn 2028

Annex B: actions to refer unpaid carers

This table sets out the actions the government will take to refer unpaid carers to relevant support.

Action	Lead	Date
11. Test proxy access through the NHS App at selected sites with a view to a full rollout by 2027. This will in turn support the transformed NHS App (including the MyCarer section) by 2028. [footnote 2]	NHS England	NHS App transformation by 2028 (proxy access by 2027)
12. Increase unpaid carers' involvement in care planning by exploring best practice with carers and charities. NHS England is exploring how to share best practice including through family group conferencing and test-and-learn toolkits in local authorities.	NHS England and DHSC	Spring 2027
13. Develop a cross-government information page for unpaid carers on GOV.UK.	DHSC	Summer 2026
14. Work with strategic partners to ensure both local health and social care systems' involvement of unpaid carers in hospital discharge can be increased, particularly through the support under the Better Care Fund programme.	DHSC	March 2027
15. Explore broadening the use of the NHS Notify system to push information and links to unpaid carers about the support available from other public sector agencies (for example, DWP on benefits).	NHS England	Spring 2027
16. Explore how carers can be better signposted to support services, including through Diagnosis Connect.	NHS England	Spring 2027

17. Publish the cross-government Carers' Employment Digital Discovery and Care Choices reports to make the insights and prototypes available to external stakeholders.	DWP	Completed
18. Improve and update DWP information on working and providing unpaid care (Jobhelp pages).	DWP	Completed
19. Increase the weekly Carer's Allowance earnings limit to £204 from April 2025, pegged to 16 hours' work at the National Living Wage.	DWP	Completed
20. Modernise the treatment of earnings in Carer's Allowance. This includes the possibility of automating the calculation of earnings and replacing the current cliff-edge earnings rule with a taper, where scoping work has already started.	DWP	Ongoing
21. Following the government response to the independent review of Carer's Allowance overpayments, work to implement the accepted recommendations. [footnote 3]	DWP	Ongoing
22. National rollout of Families First Partnership programme so there is a single offer of Family Help for children and families in every local area.	DfE	Ongoing
23. Refresh GOV.UK pages to increase awareness of the existing employment support unpaid carers can access in the workplace.	DBT	Ongoing
24. Publish a carers' charter to gather the rights available to carers across the system and help carers to understand what support is available.	All	Ongoing
25. Through the adult social care pandemic action plan, agree a series of actions to improve support for unpaid carers and young carers during future health emergencies, including better access to information, contingency planning, replacement care and formal recognition in emergency	DHSC	Ongoing

response planning.

26. Publish the cross-government mental health strategy for England, which will provide clearer pathways and earlier access to mental health support, and recognise the role of community support in improving outcomes for unpaid carers and the person they care for.	DHSC	2026
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Annex C: actions to ensure unpaid carers reach their full potential

This table sets out the actions the government will take to ensure unpaid carers can reach their full potential.

Action	Lead	Date
27. Following the publication of each phase of Baroness Casey’s independent commission on adult social care, government departments will work together to respond to and implement the commission’s recommendations. This will include any specific recommendations on unpaid carers.	DHSC	In 2026 (phase 1) and by 2028 (phase 2)
28. Review the effectiveness and take up of the Carer’s Leave Act 2023. The review’s terms of reference was published in November 2025 and the public consultation launched in June 2026. Once the review is finished, a final summary report will be published.	DBT	The final phase of the review will conclude in the winter of 2026 to 2027.
29. Implement the Employments Rights Act 2025, including changes to flexible working, the introduction of action plans and other measures to help support work-life balance.	DBT and Cabinet Office	2027 ^{[footnote 4]}

30. Establish a lived experience group of unpaid carers to test policy thinking and research findings on employment rights for unpaid carers.	DBT	Ongoing
31. Support a system-wide and employer-led shift in workplace health and inclusion by a series of measures following publication of the Keep Britain Working independent report in November 2025.	DBT and DWP	Ongoing
32. Look at how we can best identify and support young carers to combine study with their caring responsibilities where they can, including taking account of changes in the education system and entitlement to carers benefit.	DWP and DfE	Ongoing
33. Launch the revised Ofsted education inspection framework with a renewed focus on inclusion in schools. Inspection toolkits are clear that inspectors should consider how schools meet the needs of young carers.	Ofsted	Completed
34. Develop mental health and parental support initiatives by tackling parental substance misuse. Further details will be developed, including the role of the Families First Partnership programme.	DfE and DHSC	To be confirmed
35. Review the young carers content in the Working together to safeguard children statutory guidance.	DfE	March 2027
36. Review the young carer's content in the Keeping children safe in education statutory guidance.	DfE	Completed
37. Introduction of Children Not In School registers.	DfE	To be confirmed - DfE will consult on statutory guidance and policy content for regulations

38. Improve the quality and consistency of transitions from children's services into adult social care, including carers who are transitioning. Develop, through a project with DfE, national best practice guidance and training to ensure staff have the knowledge and tools to provide high-quality support to young people as they transition into adulthood.	DfE and DHSC	Ongoing
39. Organise the annual Commitment to Unpaid Carers Conference - the 2026 conference will focus on and showcase national policy direction for unpaid carers, including case studies.	NHS England and DHSC	By December 2026
40. Work in partnership with local carers organisations, in line with the Civil Society Covenant, to listen to carers' experiences, recognise the vital role that carers play, and co-ordinate and, where appropriate, co-locate carers' support alongside NHS services to make it easier for carers and those they care for to get timely help.	NHS England	Ongoing
41. Ensure that the future jobs and careers service is designed and tested to meet the needs of unpaid carers, with employment support tailored to reflect caring responsibilities.	DWP	Ongoing
42. Develop and test different implementation approaches for the jobs and careers service to improve access to employment support for people who are economically inactive, including unpaid carers.	DWP	Ongoing

1. Exercise Pegasus was the UK's 2025 national simulation of how authorities would respond to another pandemic. [↩](#)
2. Proxy access will facilitate the involvement of unpaid carers in the diagnosis and treatment of the person they care for through enabling carers' access to the health information of their cared-for person. [↩](#)
3. This includes better use of data, improved guidance and communications, modernisation of earnings rules, reassessing and refunding incorrect

overpayments, and ensuring that Carer's Allowance and Universal Credit work more effectively together. [↩](#)

4. Action plans for large employers have been voluntary from spring 2026 and will be mandatory from spring 2027 (subject to secondary legislation). Changes to flexible working will take effect in 2027. [↩](#)

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