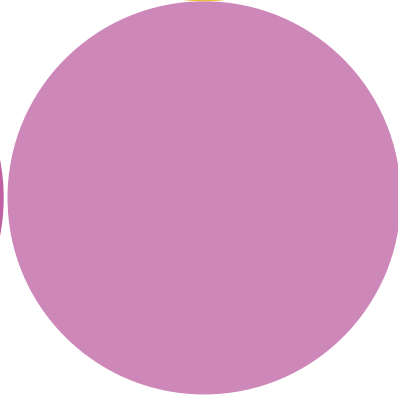
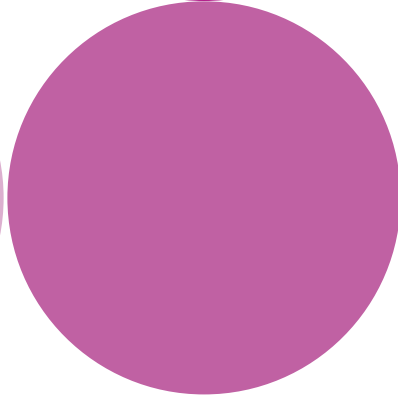
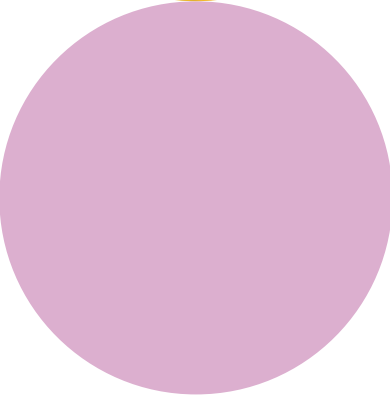
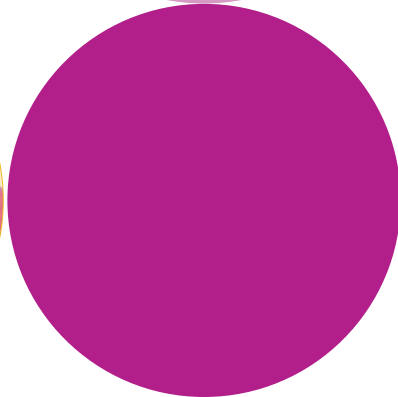
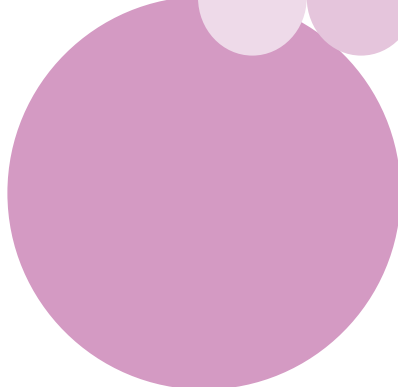




Usdaw

*Union of Shop, Distributive
and Allied Workers*



Working Carers Under Pressure

Executive Council Statement
to the 2016 ADM



This Executive Council Statement called Working Carers Under Pressure highlights the very real stresses and strains facing many of our members.

Over two-thirds of our members are juggling paid work with looking after someone and it has never been harder to balance the two.

Social care budgets have been slashed. Changes to benefits have pulled the rug out from under millions of carers. The bedroom tax has cut support for 40,000 carers by an average of £700 per year, while the axing of Council Tax Benefit has hit 240,000 carers.

An estimated 350,000 carers have been hit by the freeze of Housing Benefit and Income Support, and nearly 25,000 fewer people now get Carer's Allowance.

The value of carers' benefits has fallen steeply. The main carer's benefit, Carer's Allowance, is now worth just £1.78 per hour.

This is no way to treat the millions of people who care for their families and for other vulnerable people in our communities.

Recent research by the University of Leeds has found that carers save the UK economy almost £120 billion per year. It is a disgrace that Government should wash its hands of the urgent need to better support carers, and instead leave them to sink or swim.

Under the last Labour Government Usdaw worked hard to make the case for better legal rights and support for working carers and we were delighted to see real changes that made a difference to our members' lives.

The Labour Government introduced the National Carers' Strategy. This was the first time that the needs of carers had been embedded in Government social policy.

The strategy recognised that carers are themselves in need of care, a far cry from the current Government approach. It led to a whole raft of changes that directly benefited carers and their families.

So the time is right to again put the focus on carers in Usdaw. Carers are under pressure and there is much that we can do to reach out.

This Executive Council Statement does not stand alone but is part of a wider programme of work to sharpen the Union's appeal to carers and to win a better deal at work and from Government for working carers.

Ten years ago Usdaw launched our national Supporting Parents and Carers Campaign. In that time we have developed a much greater understanding of the pressures carers in Usdaw, most of them women, are under.

Carers' issues have become very much a part of our campaigning and bargaining work. We have made great strides in improving rights for carers both with employers and with the Government. We are rightly proud of what we have achieved.

But we do not stand still. Each year another two million people become carers, many of them our members and potential members. Our challenge is to ensure that whenever a worker in one of our industries becomes a carer, they see joining Usdaw as a logical step. That way carers are far more likely to get the support they need at work and will be in a better position to juggle work and home life.

All too often carers feel life is a pressure cooker of competing demands, worries about money, time off work and the health of the person they are caring for.

I hope this Executive Council Statement will assist reps and members wanting to better understand this pressure so we can ensure carers at work get the support they need.

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "John Hannett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'J'.

John Hannett
General Secretary

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There are a lot of misunderstandings about carers.

You may have heard some of them:

- Carers don't want to work.
- They cost the state money.
- They are only carers out of choice.
- You don't need to go to work if you are a carer as you get lots of benefits and other help.

All too often these myths get in the way of carers getting the right support at work.

So let's set the record straight about who cares, why they care and who benefits from all that unpaid caring that millions of people, many of them Usdaw members, do.

How Many People are Carers?

6.5 million people in the UK are carers and this number continues to rise.

In the last 10 years the number of carers in the UK has grown substantially. Northern Ireland has seen one of the biggest increases in carers but the picture is the same wherever you are in the UK.

The main charity supporting carers, Carers UK, estimates that there will be a 40% rise in the number of carers needed by 2037 – an extra 2.6 million carers, meaning the carer population in the UK will reach nine million.

This is partly because right across Europe people are living longer and so all of us will increasingly find ourselves taking up the role of informal carer to support elderly relatives and/or the children of our own children.

So more and more employers will need to deal with the challenges this brings – supporting employees who need time off to care and who simply cannot offer unlimited flexibility because of their caring commitments.

Ushaw members will be hoping that the predicted rise in the numbers of people becoming carers will help shift the focus away from just 'the needs of the business' and towards a more rounded 'how can we help you' approach.

Each year millions of people take on caring responsibilities whilst caring comes to an end for millions of other carers as the person they care for recovers, moves into residential care or passes away.

This 'turnover' means that caring will touch the lives of most of the population as we may all need to provide care or support family members caring for loved ones at some point in our lives.

In fact three in five people will be carers at some point in their lives.

Time Spent Caring

Most carers in the UK care for between 1 and 19 hours each week.

But the numbers caring round the clock, for 50 or more hours each week, are rising fast. In the last 10 years there has been a 25% increase in the number of people caring around the clock.

Caring can have a big impact on your life no matter how many or how few hours you are caring for. For Usdaw members who are working and juggling caring with looking after young children, even a few hours of care a week can have a serious impact on your life.

Valuing Carers

The vast majority of care in the UK is provided by family and friends, who make up the UK's 6.5 million carers.

Social Services and the NHS rely on carers' willingness and ability to provide care and without it they would collapse.

Carers save the nation almost £120 billion per year, or almost as much as the entire cost of the NHS, according to the latest calculation by researchers at Carers UK working with the University of Leeds.

The figure, equivalent to £13.6 million every hour, represents the value of the contribution of the estimated 6.5 million informal carers in the UK when priced at the official unit cost of home care by paid workers, £18 per hour.

As well as coming close to total NHS expenditure, the figure of nearly £120 billion is three times the defence budget. It has risen almost 40% since 2007, when the value of carers was put at £87 billion, a sign of the growing number of people who are taking on caring responsibilities.



Who Cares?

There is no such thing as the typical carer as caring can affect anyone at any time of their lives. But we know there are certain people who are more likely to become carers than others.

The majority of carers are of working age and the peak age for caring is 50-64.

But almost 178,000 under 18s have caring responsibilities. Broader definitions put the figure of young carers higher, as close to three million children live in households with a disabled family member but not all of these will have caring responsibilities.

Women are more likely to be carers than men. Women make up 73% of the people receiving Carer's Allowance for caring 35 hours or more a week.

Caring also tends to affect men and women at different times. Women are much more likely to care in middle age.

One in four women aged 50-64 have caring responsibilities, compared to one in six men.

Women have a 50/50 chance of providing care by the time they are 59 compared with men who have the same chance by the time they are 75 years old. Women are more likely to be sandwich carers (combining eldercare and childcare) and are also more likely to give up work in order to care.

Whilst there are no clear statistics on LGBT carers, Carers UK estimates there are 390,000 LGBT carers in Britain.

What Do Carers Do?

The amount and type of care that carers provide varies considerably. A carer might provide a few hours of care a week – shopping, collecting medication and taking someone to medical appointments – or they may care around the clock. According to the NHS Information Centre Survey of Carers in Households:

- 82% provide practical help such as preparing meals, doing laundry or shopping.
- 76% keep an eye on the person they care for.
- 68% keep them company.
- 62% take the person they care for out.
- 49% help the person they care for with financial matters.
- 47% help the person they care for deal with care services and benefits.
- 38% help with aspects of personal care.
- 38% provide physical help.
- Most carers (40%) care for their parents or parents-in-law.
- Over a quarter (26%) care for their spouse or partner.
- People caring for disabled children under 18 account for 8% of carers and 5% of carers are looking after adult children.
- A further 4% care for their grandparents and 7% care for another relative.

Caring for a person in need is often physically very demanding – buying products, cleaning, some physical help, and also involves using psychological and emotional skills – the person in need is in danger of social isolation and time has to be spent socialising with the person. Moreover this is continuous work, done day-in, day-out and often through the night as well.

What About the Costs of Caring?

Money

Families often face additional costs associated with caring, such as care services and assistive equipment. There can also be higher living costs as ill-health or disability push up household bills like heating and laundry bills and result in additional transport costs and hospital parking charges.

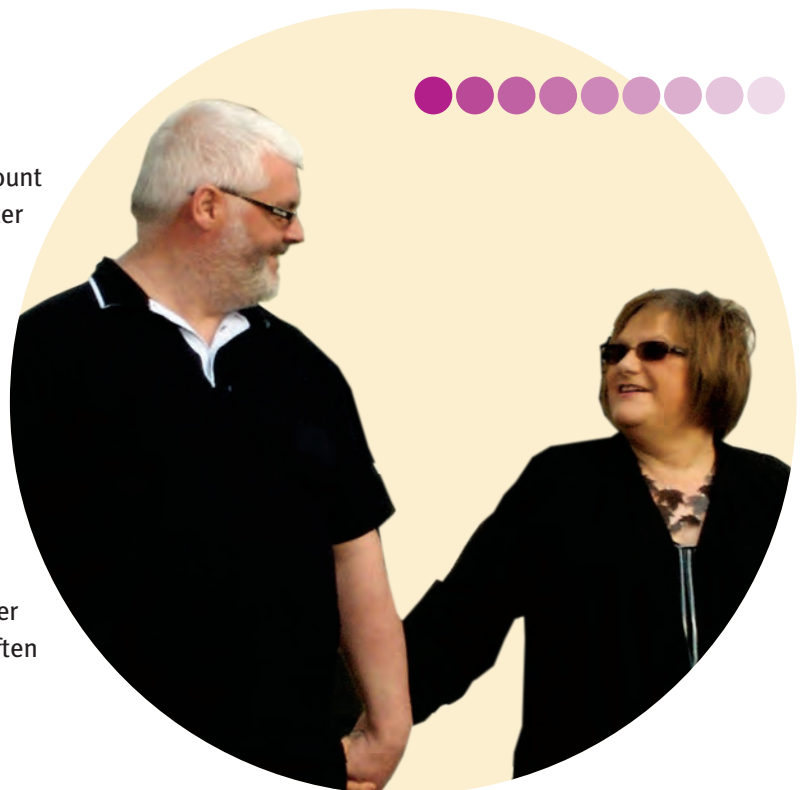
Different carers can face different costs. Living with the person you care for can mean higher utility bills whereas caring for older parents living in a different part of the country can mean high transport costs.

Just as their living costs rise, families also often face a lower income as caring and ill-health or disability reduce their ability to work.

Many carers have had to cut back on essentials like food and heating.

The combination of higher costs and lower incomes can push families into financial crisis and lasting debt.

Carers UK found that 45% of carers said their financial circumstances were affecting their health.



Health

The pressures of caring can take a toll on carers' physical and mental health. Carers can experience depression because of their caring role and may feel more anxious and stressed.

Often carers say it is hard to find time for medical check-ups or treatment for themselves.

Research by Carers Scotland found that almost half of carers with health problems reported that their conditions began after they started caring.

Isolation

Carers may worry about the impact of caring on their relationships with friends and family. Carers often report becoming isolated as a result of their caring responsibilities. This can be because of a lack of understanding about their caring role and being unable to take time off from caring to spend time with friends, colleagues and other family members.

Carers of disabled children report particularly high levels of isolation often made worse by a lack of support from statutory services.

A survey by Carers UK found that 37% of carers say they cared without any support from services or from friends and family, and a further 29% cared with support from friends and family but none from services.

Four in ten carers said they had not had a full day off from caring in over a year and half had not had a holiday away from home in the last five years.

Carers and Work

Three million people combine caring for a loved one with paid work. Around half of the UK's carers combine work with unpaid caring responsibilities. Over two million carers work full-time and one million part-time. Whilst part-time working is much more common amongst carers than non-carers, carers are also more likely to stop working altogether as they struggle to switch to part-time hours.

Carers UK found that over two million people have given up work at some point to care for loved ones and three million have reduced their working hours.

Women in particular report significant drops in their income as a result of reduced working hours. This can have a serious impact on women's sick pay, pension, maternity pay and is a major factor in the gender pay gap.

Caring also affects the type of work which carers are able to take on. Many carers find that the only work that fits around caring is part-time and low paid.

Lack of support from formal care agencies such as local authorities and social services is a major reason why carers have to give up work or reduce their hours of work.



What Financial Help Do Carers Get

Surveys of carers regularly show that the majority struggle with the additional costs that caring brings.

A survey by the charity Carers Trust found that over half of all carers who work earn less than £10,000 per year, with three-fifths having to spend all of their savings to support the person they care for. Nearly 9 out of 10 carers said they were financially worse off as a result of caring and, consequently a shocking two-fifths feared they would lose their home.

Benefits for carers have never been generous but recent cuts to the support carers get has made the situation worse. Carers UK estimate that by 2018, the Government will have cut carers' benefits by over £1 billion – as Housing Benefit and Council Tax support are cut, thousands face losing Carer's Allowance as a result of disability benefit cuts. Carers on means-tested benefits have seen real-terms cuts in their benefits resulting from below-inflation rises in the benefit levels.

The following guidance explains the main benefit carers can get which is called Carer's Allowance. Benefits are changing all the time and this Executive Council Statement does not attempt to provide members with comprehensive advice about what benefits to claim and how to go about doing this.

The Union produces a range of leaflets for carers which are available from Usdaw Central Office or by going to the Usdaw website.

For help and advice on which benefits and other support to claim the Usdaw leaflets '*Working Carers – Know your rights*' (Leaflet 343) and '*Worried About Money – Know your rights*' (Leaflet 385) are particularly helpful.

Carers Allowance

The main benefit for carers is called Carer's Allowance. It is currently paid at £62.10 per week (2015/16 rate). The amount paid is usually increased each April.

Carer's Allowance is not based on your National Insurance record. It is also not a means-tested benefit based on you and your partner's income and savings. However, there is a cap on how much you can earn and still be entitled to claim Carer's Allowance.

Not every carer can get Carer's Allowance. You may be eligible if you meet all the following conditions:

- You look after someone who gets a qualifying disability benefit.
- You look after that person for at least 35 hours per week.
- You are aged 16 or over.
- You are not in full-time education.
- You earn £110 per week (after deductions) or less.
- You look after someone who gets one of the following qualifying disability benefits:
 - Disability Living Allowance (DLA) at either the middle or highest rate for personal care needs.
 - Attendance Allowance (at either rate) or Constant Attendance Allowance of the normal maximum rate paid with the Industrial Injuries or War Pensions schemes.
 - The daily living component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) (at either rate).
 - You must be looking after that person for at least 35 hours per week.

The 35 hours can include:

- Time spent physically helping the person.
- Time you spend 'keeping an eye' on the person you look after, eg preventing them coming to harm by walking out of the house.
- Time spent doing practical tasks for them, eg cooking.
- Time taken doing practical tasks, even if you do not do them in the presence of the person you are looking after may also count (for instance, if you look after someone who visits you regularly for the care they need, time spent preparing for the visit or cleaning up afterwards should count).
- Time spent travelling to and from the person you care for is not included.

If you are in paid work (including self-employment) you cannot get Carer's Allowance if you earn more than £110 per week.

Because of the low level of the payment and other entitlement conditions, including an earnings limit, Carer's Allowance is ineffective in preventing financial hardship.

The financial impact of caring is often exacerbated by delays in accessing benefits and other financial support. Caring can come as a shock and families, unprepared for the impact on their work and household bills, often report trying to cope with the costs of caring for months or years before they find help.

Caring responsibilities which grow over time can also mean that individuals do not immediately recognise they have become a 'carer' or that support may be available. Too often health and social care services fail to identify carers and guide them to support.



We know from our Supporting Parents and Carers Campaign that the pressure of caring can put a real strain on members in the workplace. Not only are carers having to deal with caring for family members, partners, elderly parents, children and grandchildren, they have to balance this with attending work and all of the associated pressures that this brings.

Supporting and advising working carers is a big part of the job of Usdaw reps. Reps are having to deal with queries on a daily basis, whether this be about time off to care, changes to hours, or issues with performance or attendance as a result of caring commitments. This section looks at some of the most common problems that working carers raise with reps. It also suggests some practical steps that reps can use to support members who are carers.

Time Off to Care

This is one of the biggest issues for working carers. Sometimes there is no other alternative than to take time off to provide care. This can place members in a difficult situation at work as they may feel pressured to stay at work or make up the hours which can be very difficult for those with caring commitments.

There are a wide range of reasons why members might need time off – some of the most common are:

- Family illness.
- Attending appointments or events at school.
- Attending doctors or hospital appointments.
- Settling someone into hospital or care.
- To deal with a breakdown in existing care arrangements.

The amount of time off work a member needs could vary from a few hours to a period of several weeks or even months.

So what can reps do to help a member who needs to take some time off work to care? Reps may want to consider the following questions when supporting members.

Has the member asked the manager for time off?

It might seem obvious but a good starting point is for the member to approach their manager, explain what the problem is and ask “can you support me?” Waving policies and procedures around at the outset can get things off on the wrong foot.

If the manager says “no we can’t help”, then you will want to know what the company policy and the law say to see if they can help.

Does the member have a legal right to time off?

Everyone has the right to take a reasonable amount of unpaid time off work to deal with an emergency involving someone who depends on them. This right is called ‘Time Off for Dependants’ and it enables members to take time off work to take action which is necessary to deal with an unexpected or sudden problem concerning a dependant and make any necessary longer-term arrangements.

To count as an emergency the situation does not need to be life-threatening, it simply needs to be something that has happened unexpectedly. The following situations count as an emergency and would mean that a member could take unpaid Time Off for Dependants:

- If a dependant falls ill or has been injured or assaulted:
 - The illness or injury need not be serious or life-threatening, and may be mental or physical.
 - It may be an occasion when an existing condition deteriorates.
 - If the dependant is assaulted but not injured, members can take time off work to comfort or help them.

- To make longer-term care arrangements for an ill or injured dependant:
 - For example, making arrangements to employ a temporary carer, or taking a sick child to stay with relatives.
- When a dependant is having a baby:
 - Members can take time off to assist a dependant while she is having a baby.
 - This does not include time off after the birth to care for the child. Fathers/partners can take paid paternity leave to do this, or parental leave.
- The death of a dependant:
 - Time off to make funeral arrangements, as well as to attend a funeral. Many companies have bereavement leave agreements/policies that allow some paid time off following the death of a close relative.
 - If the funeral is overseas, reps can help the member agree a reasonable length of time off with the employer.
- To deal with an unexpected breakdown of care arrangements:
 - Where the usual carer of the dependant is unexpectedly absent, for example, a childminder or nurse fails to turn up.
 - A school, nursery or nursing home unexpectedly closes.
- To deal with an unexpected incident at school; members can take time off to deal with a serious incident involving their child during school hours, for example:
 - Their child has been in a fight.
 - Their child is injured or distressed.
 - Their child is being suspended from school.

This right can be used for unexpected situations. This does not have to mean in an emergency though it might do. So for instance if a member knows in advance that their usual care arrangements are going to be disrupted, they can still use Time Off for Dependants.

Time Off for Dependants will not help in every situation because the reason for the leave will not be covered by the law. An example of this would be going to see a child in a school play.

Who Counts as a Dependant?

To be entitled to time off, the emergency needs to involve someone who is a 'dependant'. This means they must either be a close relative or someone who lives in the same house as the member.

This clearly covers non-married partners, including same sex partners, and children, such as step children, who may not be the member's children but who live in the same house as them.

The definition also potentially covers other family or friends who live together. So, for example, an elderly aunt or grandparent who lives in the member's house could also qualify as a dependant but a tenant, boarder or lodger will not.

In certain situations such as when a person falls ill or is injured, it can also include any person (not necessarily in the same household) who reasonably relies on the member for assistance.

Does the Company's Policy Give the Member Extra Rights?

In many cases Usdaw and the company will have negotiated additional rights to support members who need time off to care. The company may have its own policy about how such requests should be handled. For instance there may be a facility to shift swap or use annual leave. This might suit members better as they would not then be losing pay when they take the time off.

How Much Notice Does the Member Need to Give?

It is in the member's best interests to give as much notice as possible. This does not have to be in writing. The employer will need to know the reason for the absence and how long the member needs to be away from work for.

How Much Time Off Does the Member Need?

Time Off for Dependants gives members the right to a reasonable amount of time off. What is reasonable will depend on the circumstances. Government guidance says that one or two days would normally be sufficient. There may be circumstances where the member needs longer and the Government's guidance says that managers should take personal circumstances into account. There is no limit under the law to the number of times an employee can be absent using Time Off for Dependants. However, if there is a recurring problem it may be that relying on Time Off for Dependants is not the best way to support the member.

Sometimes there is an underlying reason why the member needs time off to care. It would be better to encourage the member to sit down with their manager and see if there is a better solution than several periods of emergency leave.

What Happens When the Member Comes Back to Work?

You will want to be certain that the member is not being penalised for taking authorised time off.

Employees who take Time Off for Dependants, or who take leave under a company's family or emergency leave policy, should not be disciplined or suffer any other kind of detriment for doing so. If a member is being disciplined because of their level of absence it is important to check that absences taken in these circumstances have not been included in any absence percentage calculation.

Changes to Hours

Sometimes members might need to change their working hours, either on a temporary or a permanent basis. If someone has become a carer for instance it may be necessary for them to work different hours.

Equally, it is increasingly common for workplaces to require more flexibility or shift changes of their employees. However, the commitments that carers have outside of work can make it very difficult to make changes to their hours, and will restrict their flexibility when it comes to short-term changes.

Whether the request to change hours is coming from the member or from the company, members are likely to ask their rep for assistance. Whatever the situation, reps should be aware of the following information:

If the member needs to change their hours

The best approach to begin with is probably an informal conversation with the member's manager. You can use this opportunity to discuss the change in the member's circumstances, the reasons they need to change their hours and what shift patterns would be more suitable for them.

If this does not result in the outcome the member wants then they could think about making a formal request.



The right to request flexible working

All employees with 26 weeks' service have a legal right to ask their employer for a change in their working arrangements; this is called the 'Right to Request Flexible Working'. The employer must consider the request and deal with it in a reasonable manner – they cannot just say no without giving clear reasons for being unable to accommodate the request.

Members must make their request in writing, including the following information:

1. It must say that this is a formal application made under the legal right to request flexible working.
2. It has to be dated, explain the changes the member wants and the date they want the change to start from.
3. The member needs to sell their case to the employer – tell the employer why they should agree to the change and what is in it for them.
4. It must also say whether or not the member has made a previous request under this procedure, and if so, when.
5. Finally, the member must sign and date their letter.

The important thing about this right is that the employer should meet with the individual to discuss their request, and they must respond within a certain timescale. This means that everyone involved has the chance to discuss the member's request, explore what changes the member is seeking and how these might be made to work.

The employer must deal with and respond to the request within three months of receiving it. It may be necessary to meet more than once during this time and members should always ask to be accompanied by a rep to these meetings. Both the member and the manager may need to compromise to achieve an outcome that works for everyone.

If the employer refuses the request, they must give a clear business reason why it cannot be agreed. It is not enough to simply say 'no' or 'it's the needs of the business'.

Any change agreed under the flexible working procedure would be a permanent change to the member's contracted hours but there is nothing to stop the member asking for a temporary change which can then be reviewed later.

If the employer is asking the member to change their hours

Companies regularly ask our members to change their hours, whether on a permanent or a temporary basis. It can be particularly difficult for working carers to comply with these requests, and members can often feel trapped by these competing demands. There are a number of things that reps should consider when members are being asked to change their hours.

Is there an agreement covering how the proposed changes should be handled?

Reps are advised to check with their Area Organiser to find out whether a process has been agreed nationally or locally with the Union and the company as to how changes in hours or other aspects of the member's job should be handled. In many cases a process will have been agreed.

Has there been proper consultation?

There should be proper discussion about the proposed change and this should take into account the member's personal circumstances and concerns. There may need to be several meetings between the member, their rep and the manager. Both the member and the manager may need to compromise and not stick rigidly to their starting position.

Have the member's caring commitments been considered?

Members who are parents or carers have the right to have their family and caring commitments taken into account when decisions about new hours are being made. This does not mean parents and carers can pick and choose the hours they work but it does mean that any restrictions placed upon them because of their caring responsibilities must be seriously considered by the company.

Where caring commitments make it very difficult for a parent or carer to agree the new hours, the company should seriously explore alternative options.

If an employer does not seriously consider the restrictions that caring commitments place on a member's ability to comply with changes to their job, then the employer may be indirectly discriminating against the member on the grounds of sex. You can find out more about this in the Usdaw leaflet called *'Working Carers – Know your rights'* (Leaflet 343).

Has the business case for changing the member's hours been properly explained?

Reps will want to be sure that there is a genuine business need for the change and that this has been properly explained to the member. It is not simply enough for a manager to say there is a business need, they must be able to demonstrate a legitimate business case for the proposed changes and clearly show that other options have been considered before the proposal to change hours has been put forward for discussion.

Has the member had their hours or any other part of their job changed before?

The Union would not expect staff to be put in the situation where their hours are being changed on a regular basis. If this were to happen, the cumulative effect of what may have been reasonable individual changes could amount to an unreasonable change and this should be challenged.

Is the change reasonable?

The member may feel that the change is not reasonable because it means their hours or the nature of their job has changed too much.

What is reasonable depends on each person but you can look at things like:

- What will be the impact on the member's family and caring commitments? Do the new hours or new place of work fit in with childcare or school for instance?
- Are the new hours at a similar time of day or night?
- Is there an impact on the member's pay?
- What will be the impact on the member's journey to work? Will it mean missing the last bus home for instance or the member having to pay a significant amount more money in travel costs?

Is the member disabled?

If so, the company will need to take into account the member's rights under the Equality Act 2010 (or the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in Northern Ireland).

Is the member pregnant or a new mother?

If the member is being asked to change her hours there are important health and safety issues to consider.

Have other options been considered?

Is there an alternative to the change that is being proposed? Could the change be done on a temporary basis? Could the extra hours needed be covered by using overtime? Does the business need a permanent change or could it be done by a short-term or temporary change? This might include using other measures such as overtime, staff who are already on flexi contracts or a temporary change to the member's job with their agreement.

What will be the impact of the change on the member's overall income?

A change in hours or job role could affect the amount of money the member gets in wages and benefits. Does the change in hours mean the member will be moving out of a premium window? Has the member got advice about what the change could mean for any benefits they are claiming? Working less or more hours is likely to affect entitlement to benefits and tax credits.

In most cases it should be possible to come to a compromise that works for the member and the company. However, where this is not possible the company may decide to give the member contractual notice. This is formal notification that the member's current contract is going to end and will be immediately replaced by a new contract containing the new hours of work. If this happens reps should contact their Area Organiser as soon as possible.

Impact on Performance or Attendance

Caring for a loved one, while a very rewarding experience, can also be very stressful and tiring, particularly if a change in the situation at home means a member is having to provide additional care, or take time out to arrange more formal care.

It is only natural that this can have an impact on a member's work life. It may be that having to provide care through the night is impacting on a member's ability to get into work on time. Perhaps the burden of caring is leading to performance issues. The member may have increased absence if the stress of caring becomes too much for them, which is not uncommon due to the lack of support available to carers.

All of these issues have the potential to lead to disciplinary action if the member is not supported properly at work. Reps may want to consider the following points if members approach them with problems surrounding performance or attendance.

Performance issues

Most companies set certain standards or targets to allow them to measure and improve staff performance. For example, staff on checkouts may have 'throughput' targets, or distribution workers may have 'pick rates'.

However, performance targets should not be used as a disciplinary tool, but as a method of encouraging, coaching and developing staff to perform well in their role. Disciplinary action relating to poor performance should only ever be used as a last resort once all avenues have been exhausted.

If a member's caring commitments are impacting on their performance at work, reps should ensure that managers are aware of the member's situation – if they do not know about it they will be unable to offer any support.

It may be that the member needs some temporary support to get them through a particularly difficult period in their caring commitments. If this is the case, things to consider could include temporary changes to their job role, moving to a different department or asking other colleagues to support the member. It may help the member to take some leave at short notice, or agree a temporary change to their start/finish times.

There may be instances where a member needs longer-term support where it may be necessary to make more permanent changes. In such circumstances, members may need to use their Right to Request Flexible Working (see section on changes to hours – page 12).

Attendance issues

A member's attendance may be affected by their caring commitments, either as a result of having to take time off to care (see earlier section), but also because of the impact of caring on the carer's mental and physical health.

Reps should always ensure that any time taken away from work under the Time Off for Dependents legislation is excluded from consideration for disciplinary action. Equally, if a member has taken time off under a company policy that goes beyond legislation, this might also need to be disregarded – so always check the details of the policy.

Again, one of the first things reps should do if carers are having issues with their attendance is let the manager know their situation. This will give them the opportunity to discuss what can be done to support them.

Issues with attendance should not automatically lead straight to a disciplinary warning. Managers should take the member's personal circumstances into account and offer support in the first instance. What that support is will depend on the needs of the member – whether it is temporary or permanent for example. However, with the right support in place the member is more likely to be able to improve their attendance than if they are simply issued with a warning.



This section will help reps who want to let carers know that the Union understands the pressures they are under.

Where your workplace is well organised carers stand a much better chance of getting a fair hearing. Therefore winning for carers and building Union organisation go hand-in-hand.

A well-organised workplace where carers feel supported would look like this:

A High Union Profile

Literature on carers is on display, there is an effective Union notice board and the reps are well-known.

Activists are Knowledgeable and Engaged

Reps and other activists understand the workplace and the issues that affect members with caring commitments there.

Membership Understanding

The Union is helping members understand their rights around flexible working and caring and ensures that complex issues are explained in simple terms.

Membership Involvement

Reps have got members involved in taking up issues so that it is not just viewed as the Union rep taking up an issue but instead is viewed as the whole workforce getting involved.

Good Membership – Getting Clout

There are high levels of membership making it possible to win for members who are carers.

Winning for Members

An essential part of organising the workplace otherwise we are wasting our time.

Reaching Out to Carers

Reps who want to reach out to carers and encourage them to join and get involved in the Union might find the following checklist helpful:

How Many Boxes Can You Tick?

Do members who are carers know about the Right to Request Flexible Working?

Do members know that the Union is winning for members with caring commitments?

Do members know that if they become a carer this is an issue they should talk to their rep about?

Many carers really need to keep the hours they have got otherwise they cannot juggle work and home life. Do members understand their rights if they are being asked to change their hours by the employer?

Do carers in your workplace want the Union to try and win them a better deal on, for instance, emergency time off or carer's leave?

If so, have you used your consultative or negotiating structures to raise these or other carers' issues?

If you would like some ideas to help you organise your workplace around the issues for carers then read on.

Survey Your Workplace

On the opposite page you will find a very short survey reps can use on issues for carers. You might want to start by discussing at your reps' meeting how best to approach members and non-members with it and also how to take the findings to management.

The survey may show that there are issues at your workplace for different groups of members around carers working that you did not know about. It will also help to raise awareness that Usdaw is taking up the issue.



Usdaw cares about Carers

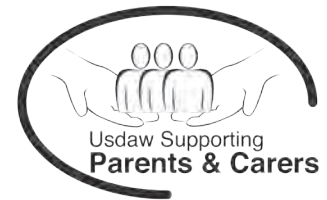
Survey

More and more Usdaw members are becoming carers. Usdaw understands that changes to hours at work and cuts in benefits and support services are making life hard for carers.

We would like to find out more about the pressures members are under.

Could you spare us a few minutes to answer the following questions?

Your response will be confidential and you do not have to provide personal details.



1. Are you:

Male Female

2. Age:

16-24 25-39 40-49 50+

3. Do you currently have any caring responsibilities?

Yes No

4. Are you aware that you have the right to request flexible working hours once you have worked for your employer for 26 weeks or more?

Yes No

5. Are you aware that carers have the right to take unpaid time off in a caring emergency?

Yes No

6. Have you been financially affected by cuts to carers benefits?

Yes No

7. If yes are you...?

Worse off Better off About the same

Usdaw
Union of Shop, Distributive
and Allied Workers

Improving workers' lives – Winning for members

8. Have you been affected by cuts to carers support services?

Yes No

9. If yes, how has this affected your caring responsibilities?

Made it more difficult/ added pressure Made it easier/ relieved pressure No change

10. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being very good – no further action needed and 5 being very poor – a lot more could be done) how do you rate your employer on the following?

	1	2	3	4	5
(a) Has flexible working arrangements to help parents and carers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Allows employees to take holiday at short notice to cover caring commitments?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Allows parents and carers to swap shifts to attend things like hospital appointments, sports days or parents evenings etc?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) Understands carer's need to take emergency leave?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e) Has some form of paid leave for carers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(f) Understands that carers and parents have commitments outside of work and supports them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. Are you a member of Usdaw?

Yes No

If no, would you like to join?

Yes No

If yes, you can join online at www.usdaw.org.uk/join

Your response will be confidential and you do not have to provide personal details.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

email: _____



www.usdaw.org.uk/careforcarers

#CareForCarers



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On completion just write: **FREEPOST USDRAW** on the envelope and put it in the post.

Email your views on the Supporting Parents and Carers Campaign to: parentsandcarers@usdaw.org.uk



Improving workers' lives – Winning for members



It is now 10 years since Usdaw launched its Supporting Parents and Carers Campaign and in that time the Union has negotiated some much needed support for members with caring commitments.

The Supporting Parents and Carers Campaign aims to make sure carers know about their rights but also crucially seeks to improve those rights with both Government and employers.

Thanks to the hard work and determination of Usdaw officials and reps, most members are now covered by agreements that give better rights to carers than they would otherwise get.

Here are some examples of what we have achieved:

Argos

Compassionate leave may be granted in cases of bereavement, funerals or for domestic or family reasons. The leave can be paid at the discretion of management. Where compassionate leave is not granted, parental leave, holiday, time off for dependants or emergency domestic leave may be available. In exceptional circumstances compassionate leave may be granted beyond the normal maximum period of five days.

Family is defined as an employee's partner, spouse, parent, child, sister, brother, grandmother, grandfather or grandchild. There may be other circumstances which fall within the spirit of this definition such as in-laws, guardian and foster child.

Poundland

Compassionate leave can be used for things like the long-term illness of a close family relative or time off because a colleague has just discovered that they have a critical illness. Close relatives are immediate relatives such as spouse, mother, father, brother, sister, grandparents or children. Generally, time off is unpaid but paid leave can be given at the manager's discretion of between three to five days.

Tesco

The Union's agreement with the company states that where someone needs time off to care for a member of their family or to deal with an exceptional domestic crisis the company will consider any request for holidays or other practical arrangements that best support the individual. This might include shift swaps or making up the hours. Where this is not practical or appropriate then unpaid compassionate leave can be given up to a maximum of three months.

In exceptional circumstances it may be possible for some or part of the leave to be paid.

Morrisons

The Union has negotiated a compassionate leave policy that is designed to give members extra support when a member of their immediate family is seriously ill. This allows the person caring to spend time with the person concerned, care for them or make arrangements for their care.

The company will also support members when they come back to work following compassionate leave, and, where needed, make sensible adjustments to help them.

Members are encouraged to talk to managers on a regular basis so they can understand the situation and make appropriate arrangements. The leave is not usually paid but can be at the manager's discretion.

The Business Case for Supporting Working Carers

Employers for Carers is a national charity which encourages employers to do more to support working carers.

They believe there are clear benefits for employers who support carers.

Most people's lives will include at least one episode of caring. Already one in nine employees in any workforce will be caring for someone who is older, disabled or seriously ill. But with the number of carers in the UK set to rise from 6.5 million to 9 million over the next 30 years, the proportion of carers in the workforce is also likely to increase significantly.

90% of working carers are aged 30 plus – employees in their prime employment years. The peak age for caring is also 50-64 when many employees will have gained valuable skills and experience. With fewer young people entering the job market – and in the current economic climate – there has never been a more important time to focus on keeping skilled workers rather than incurring the costs of recruiting and retraining new staff.

When carers are forced to give up work or to change work patterns to take up caring responsibilities it is not just the employee that loses out, but their employer also. Absenteeism and workplace stress have productivity costs.

The cost of having invested in the development of employee skills has to be carried as does the costs incurred of recruiting and training a new member of staff. It would seem that it is therefore in the interests of the organisation to look at ways of supporting carers in the workplace.

If businesses promote a caring and supporting culture then there are many benefits which are likely to ensue which will have a direct impact on productivity. Staff morale, engagement and loyalty are all likely to increase alongside staff retention. There are likely to be reductions in sickness, absenteeism and recruitment and training costs.



Government Support

It is not just employers who need to do more to support carers. Government has the main role in ensuring that carers get the right support. Caring brings enormous benefits to society and it is only right that the people doing the caring should be given more support.

Government has a strong interest in ensuring that people can combine unpaid caring with paid work. That is why so many governments across the world have given carers legal rights to flexible working, paid leave to care and other forms of support.

In the UK the Labour Government introduced a legal right called 'The Right to Request Flexible Working'. This gave carers the right to ask their employer for a change in their working arrangements to help them balance work and home life. The employer had to give the request serious consideration and could only refuse the employees request if there were legitimate business reasons for doing so.

The last Tory-led Coalition Government extended this right to all employees not just carers but at the same time watered it down. Nonetheless it is still a really useful tool and has helped many of our members with caring commitments get the right support at work.

Before the last General Election the Labour Party proposed to introduce a legal right to a period of adjustment leave, designed to help carers deal with immediate caring crises and allow time to adjust to a new caring role. This idea came about through listening to Usdaw members who were carers and who described to Labour MPs the pressures they were under particularly when they first became carers for grandchildren or disabled partners or parents.

Other countries are much better at supporting working carers than the UK is.

In Canada for instance there is a statutory right to compassionate care leave. Employees can take up to eight weeks' unpaid leave to care for a gravely ill family member. The family member must have a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death within 26 weeks (a doctor's certificate is required).

This leave can be shared between family members if they are looking after the same person. If their family member is still gravely ill after 26 weeks, then the employee is entitled to up to a further eight weeks. Although this leave is unpaid, people may be eligible for up to six weeks of compassionate care benefits during this time.

In the Republic of Ireland employees can leave their employment to provide temporary full-time care and attention to a family member, a partner, friend or colleague. The person being cared for must be considered to be in need of full-time care and attention by a Deciding Officer of the Department of Social Protection. This decision is reached on the basis of information provided by the family doctor (GP) of the person whom the employee will be caring for.

The employee must have worked for their employer for a continuous period of 12 months. The entitlement allows at least 13 weeks up to a maximum of 104 weeks. The Carer's Leave Act 2001 ensures that the employee has their job kept open for them for the duration of the leave.

Trade Union Action

It is worth bearing in mind that better legal rights for carers often come about because trade unions and other campaigners make the case for more support.

A good example of this is the case of Sharon Coleman a UK worker who felt forced to resign due to her employer refusing her flexible working arrangements to enable her to work and care for her son, who was born with serious respiratory problems.

She claimed she was discriminated against and treated less favourably than other employees whose children were not disabled.

The case was referred to the European Court of Justice by an employment tribunal. The court ruled that European laws covering employment discrimination on the grounds of disability also applied to those caring for disabled children.

Sharon Coleman said:

“All I was ever asking for was an equal playing field with the same flexibility afforded to my colleagues without disabled children. This has been a long, hard battle and it is not over yet, but I am thrilled that the European Court has ruled in my favour. This decision will mean so much to so many people.”

This ruling helped ensure that the law was changed in the UK to better protect carers in the workplace.



Government has a crucial and leading role to play in making sure carers get the right support.

More than anyone else it is the Government's role to ensure that carers are themselves cared for.

Launching the UK's first ever National Carers Strategy in 1999 the Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair said:

“Caring is personal. It is individual. But it is social too; and the Government can help in its own way.”

Caring doesn't just help the person being looked after. It brings enormous benefits to society; public services could not function without the massive contribution made by over six million carers in the UK. Carers look after the physical and mental wellbeing of millions of people which would otherwise cost the state £18 per hour, meaning that each carer saves the state an average £18,473 per year.

It makes good economic sense to make it as easy as possible for people to care.

Therefore, it is of real concern that the current Tory Government has, in the words of the campaigning Women's Budget Group, lit a “bonfire of carers' rights”.

The following statement by the Women's Budget Group neatly sums up what has been going on:

“The Government is attacking and restricting the ability of women to provide paid caring services in fair employment conditions, and to provide unpaid care for others whilst earning a living that will allow them to exist outside of poverty throughout their lives. Furthermore, the Government has shown little interest in redistributing both paid and unpaid care more equally between the genders.”

A key part of the Government's so-called efficiency drive has been to make cuts to local authority budgets. As social care budgets are run by councils, these cuts have had a devastating impact on social care, as it is usually by far the largest area of spending by local authorities.

Very often it is low paid worker's and their families who are hardest hit by cuts to public services as they are least able to cushion the blow, and local authorities in areas with higher levels of poverty have been the hardest hit. Over the course of the last Parliament, councils serving the 10 most deprived areas had their spending power per head cut by 16 times the amount of the 10 most affluent areas – a clear indication of the Tories priorities.

The Government announced in the Autumn Spending Review that councils will have the option to increase Council Tax by an extra 2%. However, the Labour Party has shown that the social care funding gap is currently growing by £700 million per year. Even if every council raises council tax by the full 2%, it would not be anywhere near enough to fill this gap. With councils in the most deprived areas facing such dramatic cuts, this small increase in Council Tax will be no more than a sticking plaster.

The Government has shown a total disregard for carers and has swept away many of the services and benefits they rely on.

Cuts to Benefits

Benefits are an issue of strong concern for Usdaw and we know that many of our members who are carers rely on this extra support to help with the costs of caring.

This might mean Tax Credits, disability benefits to help with the additional costs of being disabled or for caring for a disabled child or Housing Benefit to help meet high rents on low pay.

There have been so many cuts of working age benefits over the last six years that some are already being forgotten.

Reductions in welfare spending have impacted particularly hard on carers and their families, pushing many who were already struggling on a limited income into financial hardship.

Carers UK has estimated that the cumulative total of cuts to carers' incomes will be over £1 billion by 2018 as a result of:

- The introduction of the 'bedroom tax', hitting 60,000 carers.
- The localisation of council tax support, meaning 240,000 carers are having to pay extra council tax.
- The household benefit cap, placing a limit on the weekly amount that households can receive from social security.
- The impact of switching from the Retail Prices Index to the Consumer Prices Index for uprating benefits, CPI usually being considerably lower.
- The impact of the cap of 1% on annual increases to benefits from 2010 – 2015 and the freeze announced from 2015 onwards.
- The impact of the introduction of Personal Independence Payment on the number of people entitled to Carer's Allowance – 24,000 people will no longer qualify.

There has been a small piece of good news recently as the High Court ruled that those in receipt of Carer's Allowance should not be subject to the benefits cap. However, this is of no help to the millions of carers who do not qualify for this benefit and therefore will still be subject to the cap.

Besides the plethora of cuts for disabled people over the last six years, future cuts under Universal Credit will hit even harder:

- Halving the allowance for a disabled child in Child Tax Credit from around £56 per week to around £28 per week.
- Abolishing the Severe Disability Premium, costing families with a young carer up to £55.30 per week.

- Abolishing the Enhanced Disability Premium, currently worth £14.05 per week.
- Eliminating the higher Work Allowance for working people with a disability, meaning disabled people will have a double whammy as the lower rate of Universal Credit compared to Tax Credits being reduced still further by any increase in income.

These are not the actions of a Government committed to supporting carers.

Cuts to Services

It is not only cuts to benefits that are impacting on carers; many councils are being forced to make cuts to vital frontline services. Councils have been trying to mitigate the effects of austerity by making small changes across the board, but even these small changes can have a big impact, particularly on the people that rely on these services. Things like centralising services to make savings can have a disproportionate effect on disabled people who may then struggle to access the services. The cuts are also putting extra strain on services which are having to be run with fewer resources at a time when demand is on the increase, meaning that they are not delivering the care they are set up to give.



The National Audit Office have said that:

“ [the] Government do not know whether the care and health systems can continue to absorb these cumulative pressures, and how long they can carry on doing so.”

The Government itself has made no attempt to assess the impact of these cuts, just assuming that people and services will be able to cope.

This complete disregard for the scale of the cuts goes right to the top of Government, with even the Prime Minister apparently unaware of their impact. It recently came to light that David Cameron had written to his own constituency to say that he was “disappointed” by the council’s proposals “to make significant cuts to frontline services – from elderly day centres, to libraries, to museums” despite there having been only “a slight fall in Government grants in cash terms”.

These comments show a complete ignorance of cuts his Government has forced through – that particular council, by no means one of the worst affected, has had to deal with a 37% drop in funding, costing £626 million in total since 2010. Clearly the Government does not know or does not care how their cuts are affecting real people’s lives.

Support for Carers

Carers often need financial support for a range of reasons. For example, when someone takes on a caring role, they are often facing a large drop in their income if they have to reduce hours or leave work. This can often be a double loss if they are caring for a partner who has had to give up work.

There are also additional costs associated with caring for someone with a disability. Carers UK has conducted research which showed that carers can face higher utility bills, higher transport costs, higher shopping bills, additional spending on care services and the high cost of home adaptations. All of which can put an additional financial strain on families.

So the cuts being made to the welfare budget, and local authority budgets, which are disproportionately

affecting disabled people and carers, are being targeted at those that can least afford to see a further drop in their income.

Carer’s Allowance

Elsewhere in this Executive Council Statement you can read about the main rules governing Carer’s Allowance. This is the main benefit that carers, although not all of them, can claim.

Any discussion of this Government’s attack on carers’ rights would not be complete without reference to Carer’s Allowance. The Government has acknowledged that Carer’s Allowance is not sufficient, stating that it is “neither effective in poverty prevention nor in meeting the wider needs of carers.” Despite this, unsurprisingly, there have been no moves to improve this benefit.

Some of the main flaws of Carer’s Allowance include:

- The value of the payment – it is the lowest benefit of its kind. For carers providing 24/7 care, it equates to just 35p per hour.
- Exclusion of older carers. Hundreds of thousands of older carers are unable to receive Carer’s Allowance because it is seen to ‘overlap’ with the State Pension.
- The strict earnings limit creates clear disincentives to taking on paid work as exceeding the limit by even £1 means all entitlement to the benefit is lost.
- Carers can lose entitlement to support if they are in education for more than 21 hours per week, denying them the chance to train to work or prepare for the future.
- Any other benefits can be reduced as a result of claiming, cancelling out any gain.

The Government’s policy of undermining the welfare state and slashing public services is having a devastating impact on both carers and the people they care for. This situation is unsustainable.

The cuts and impacts outlined in this section are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of this Government's plans. The Government claims to be making a 'bonfire of red tape'. But what is under attack are those rights that foster a more equal labour market, and which allow people to provide unpaid care for one another as well as earn a living.

Usdaw is committed to campaigning against these attacks and against the idea that society cannot afford to care for those who care.

But it is not enough to say what we are opposed to, we also need to be clear about what our vision is for carers.

Winning better rights for carers takes time and there is much work for employers, Government and unions to do.

It helps to know where we want to get to. The following measures would help ensure carers get the right support:

- A legal right to a period of adjustment leave when someone first becomes a carer to help them deal with immediate caring crises and allow time to adjust to a new caring role.
- A right to temporarily reduce your hours of work while smoothing loss of pay over a longer period.
- A much greater willingness on the part of employers to support carers including flexibility to allow for changes in working patterns and hours.
- Better training and support for line managers so that they understand the benefits of supporting carers and are encouraged to do so.
- Women often have to reduce their hours, pay and employment prospects once they become carers. Many women are working in part-time, low paid jobs because of their multiple caring responsibilities. Employers should ensure that all employees are given the training, coaching and encouragement in order to develop their skills and progress in their careers. This should include advertising the fact that flexible working is an option.
- Collective bargaining has an important role in promoting better rights for carers and should be promoted. The Government should stop trying to reduce trade union rights and focus on encouraging employers and unions to work together to address the challenges of an ageing population.
- A new national carers strategy to include a commitment to offering carers a break from caring in a range of settings, a personal health and wellbeing check and much easier access to support through GPs and hospitals.





Appendix: Useful Organisations and Support

If you are supporting a member with caring responsibilities it is always a good idea to ask them what support they are getting. Many carers do not know about the help they can get.

All carers have a legal right to a Carer's Assessment.

Any carer who appears to have needs for support should be offered an assessment by social services. Carers of adults over the age of 18 who are disabled, ill or elderly are entitled to an assessment regardless of the amount or type of care they provide, their income or the level of support they need.

Carers can have an assessment whether or not the person they care for has had a community care assessment/needs assessment, or if the local council have decided they are not eligible for support.

A Carer's Assessment is an opportunity to tell social services about the things that could make caring easier for the carer.

It will look at how caring affects someone's life, including for example, physical, mental and emotional needs.

There are a number of sources of support for carers and it is not possible to list them all here as much of it varies depending on where you live. You can find out what services are available in your local area by contacting social services. Alternatively carer's organisations such as Carers UK can direct you to local support organisations in your area.

The main types of help carers can get are: help at home; day care; aids and equipment and adapting the home.

You can find out more about these in the Usdaw leaflet called '*Working Carers – Know your rights*' (Leaflet 343).

In addition most local authorities have support services for carers. The help available depends on where you live but could include things like help with taxi fares, a mobile phone or help with housework. Financial help may also be available. Again there are more details in Usdaw's Working Carers leaflet.

Useful Organisations for Carers

Carers UK

Carers UK are the leading charity for carers.

Helpline: 0808 808 777

Website: www.carersuk.org

Carers Trust

Carers can email for support and advice.

Email: support@carers.org

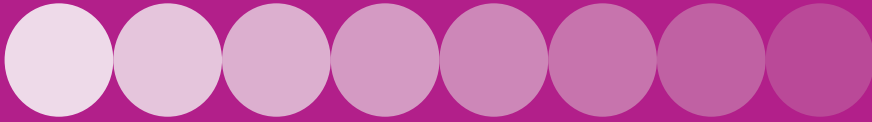
Website: www.carers.org

Employers for Carers

Employers for Carers offer advice to employers who want to support carers in the workplace.

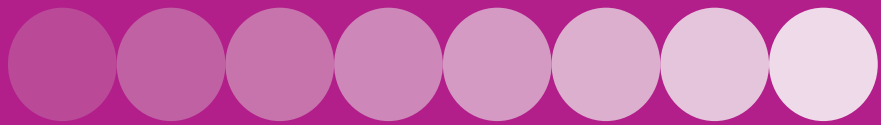
Telephone: 020 7378 4956

Website: www.employersforcarers.org



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