

Support from unpaid caregivers 'overlooked' and 'undervalued' suggests new analysis

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The support given by unpaid carers to adults with learning disabilities risks being 'overlooked and undervalued' according to a new report on

the value of unpaid care.

The independent analysis by the Fraser of Allander Institute at the University of Strathclyde, found that on average, the support delivered by each unpaid carer in the sample saved the taxpayer £114,000 per year. This compares to an annual carers allowance of around £4,000 a year, which includes a Scottish supplement.

Poverty line

More than half of the unpaid carers sampled who provided information to the survey were below or close to the [poverty line](#) due to constraints on their ability to work.

Reported wellbeing was also much lower than the national average. This was particularly notable for measures of loneliness and burnout. 72% of people reported feeling lonely, compared to only around 20% for the Scottish population as a whole.

When asked for their priorities for better support, the vast majority asked for more respite and services for the person they care for.

The total hours of unpaid care ranged from eight to 16 hours for those living with the person they cared for, including care through the night.

Care gaps

During the COVID-19 pandemic, unpaid carers have filled in the gaps left by the care system, leaving many exhausted, but none of the unpaid carers in the sample have seen support return to pre-pandemic levels.

Even where the adult with learning disability lived in supported

accommodation, unpaid carers provided up to 8.5 hours of unpaid care a day to ensure safety and wellbeing.

Knowledge Exchange Fellow Emma Congreve, who leads the Institute's work on poverty, inequality and inclusive growth, said: "The support provided by unpaid carers clearly has value in that it enriches the lives of loved ones and ensures their safety. But because it doesn't result in the transfer of money, it's not recorded anywhere financially, nor are the carers deemed active in the labor market, meaning their contribution can be overlooked and undervalued.

"The true value of the care can't be reduced to a financial sum of money but by demonstrating the economic value of unpaid care means we can illustrate the [cost savings](#) to the public purse and put the work, which is often done with very little recognition, into context. Unpaid carers face an uncertain future post-COVID, and overwhelmingly we heard that unpaid carers need more support."

The report is the latest in a program of work by the FAI into how adults with learning difficulties are looked after in Scotland.

Whilst not representative of all unpaid carers who look after adults with learning difficulties, the report provides an insight into the circumstances of unpaid carers and their value.

Provided by University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

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