



# Huntington's Disease Association

## No choice but to care: Carers Week report 2024

### Key findings

The link to the report is [here](#).

The YouGov Omnibus polling, of nearly 6,500 people, found that:

- 62% of those who are currently providing or those who have previously provided unpaid care said that they had no choice in taking on the role because no other care options were available – this is around 10 million people.
- The impact of caring has been more negative than positive for all areas unpaid carers were asked about, particularly for employment, finances and savings, and physical and mental health.

### Impact of caring on mental health

- **By far the biggest negative impact has been on mental health** with 63% of current and former unpaid carers saying that caring had a negative impact on their mental health, with 24% saying it had a 'very negative' impact.
- An estimated 10.1m current and former unpaid carers in the UK experienced a negative impact on their mental health as a result of caring.
- Women were significantly more likely than men to say caring had a 'very' negative impact on mental health (27% compared with 19%).

### Impact of caring on relationships

- Caring can come with high personal costs. Many unpaid carers find that their friendships and relationships are impacted, with less time to spend with family and friends. This can lead to loneliness and isolation, with many unpaid carers feeling unsupported and undervalued.
- 37% of people who are currently providing or have previously provided care said caring had a 'slightly' or 'negative' impact on their relationships.

### Impact of caring on physical health

- Many unpaid carers have their own health conditions and some feel that the demands of caring mean they are unable to prioritise their own health and wellbeing, by taking breaks or doing the things they enjoy. The huge

pressures in the NHS often result in delays in obtaining both primary and secondary healthcare appointments, together with the record levels of demand for social care services, means many unpaid carers are not getting the support they need.

- 53% of current and former unpaid carers said that caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their physical health – estimated to be 8.5m people – with 17% saying that, it has a very negative effect.

### **Impact of caring on finances and savings**

- Providing unpaid care often limits someone's ability to earn a full income and adds new and inescapable costs. The inadequacy of social security benefits, including carer benefits, also works to compound the effect on unpaid carers, leaving many permanently struggling to make ends meet.
- 47% of current and former unpaid carers said that caring had a negative impact on their finances and savings – around 7.6m people.
- Those in less well-off households (C2DE) were more likely to say that unpaid caring had a negative impact on their finances and savings than those in the more well-off households (ABC1) (50% compared with 44%).

### **Impact of caring on employment**

- Nearly 2.5m people in employment are providing unpaid care in England and Wales – 9% of the total number of people in employment.
- Providing unpaid carers with the right support to enter stay in and return to the labour market therefore has benefits to the carer as well as to the wider economy and society.
- YouGov Omnibus polling has found that nearly half of current and former unpaid carers (48%) said that caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their job and ability to work – an estimated 7.7m people<sup>24</sup> – with one in five people (20%) saying it had a 'very' negative impact.

### **Public support for unpaid carers**

- 73% of the UK population said that the next Government should provide more support for unpaid carers.
- 53% of the general public thought the next Government should focus on financial support for unpaid carers
- 53% of the general public thought the next Government should focus on investment in social care to enable unpaid carers to take a break

### **Recommendations**

The next UK Government should:

- Deliver strategic cross-Government action by introducing a National Carers Strategy for England and Wales to join up work between Government Departments and set a clear ambition to improve the lives of unpaid carers of all ages. The strategy should be backed by significant investment, set out future commitments to supporting unpaid carers, identify specific actions that focus on delivering tangible progress and additional support for carers, including young carers, their families, and those they care for.

## Support unpaid carers' health and wellbeing

- Legislate to place a new statutory duty on the NHS in England to regard unpaid carers and support their well-being, ensuring systematic identification of carers in all NHS settings.
- Invest an additional £1.5 billion in carers' breaks so that unpaid carers are able to access the breaks they need and improve their mental and physical health and wellbeing.
- Invest in a programme of activities to improve unpaid carers' mental health and address other factors which affect carers' mental health such as poverty, discrimination, housing and other related issues.

## Support finances and pensions

- Raise the level of Carer's Allowance and associated Carer Addition, Element and Premium for means-tested benefits and reform the eligibility rules for Carer's Allowance to enable more unpaid carers to access financial support.
- Remove the 21 hour study rule from the eligibility criteria for Carer's Allowance in England and Wales to remove barriers to education for unpaid carers.
- Provide additional financial support to carers of State Pension age, including a new non-means-tested payment.
- Modernise and digitise the delivery of Carer's Allowance to simplify the system and reduce the burden on unpaid carers to protect them from overpayments.
- Take steps to ensure that unpaid carers' pension futures are more secure and compensate them for the negative effects of caring in the run-up to and during retirement. This includes ensuring that the State Pension age does not increase, as this would significantly disadvantage unpaid carers.