

HALF A MILLION SCOTS CARERS
SEEK GREATER HELP

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A campaign is underway to ensure fair investment in Scotland's army of unpaid carers.

The unsung care providers were estimated to save the NHS in Scotland almost £5.5 BILLION per annum at the time of the 2001 census, which put carer numbers at 480,000 – broadly equivalent to the entire population of Edinburgh.

Newer estimates put the figure in excess of 650,000 – providing value to the tune of around £8 BILLION .

Yet investment in supporting this dedicated group runs at a tiny fraction of that staggering figure – and it is the carers who often pay for that lack of investment through poor health, damaged employment prospects and loneliness and depression.

Now the carers have launched a campaign to seek to persuade every local authority and local NHS Board to strengthen its efforts and identify what it will do to support the vital work they deliver. This follows the Scottish Government /COSLA 2007 Concordat which provides councils with greater spending autonomy and higher allowances in return for agreeing to meet specific outcome targets.

That means that carers' organisations, which have worked hard to forge constructive links with Government, are now working to strengthen their relationships with councils throughout the country in an effort to ensure carers' get the essential support they need.

A coalition of carers' organisations, operating under the banner National Carers' Organisation, want to see:

- Increased investment in respite care for carers
- Increased investment in training for carers
- Increased levels of assessment of need for carers
- Greater investment in services for young carers

Conversely, there are real dangers that failure to increase spending will see their invaluable work put at serious risk through inadequate support contributing to much higher levels of ill health and exhaustion amongst carers.

- 1 in 5 carers suffers from poor health
- Carers are one-third more likely to become permanently sick or disabled than those with no caring responsibilities, with isolation, stress and lack of breaks key factors
- It costs Scotland £1 million for every 85 carers forced to give up through ill-health
- Around 40% of carers have not had a break of more than two days from their responsibilities

A Government-backed working group estimated a shortfall of almost 270,000 WEEKS of respite care per year. Whilst the caring organisations do not expect that huge gap to be fully funded, they are determined to see real improvement.

Respite care not only provides badly needed breaks for carers it also offers huge financial advantages to the taxpayer. The annual cost of providing a mixed package of home-based respite care and short break residential care for 100 older people is about £260,000 according to the Government's own figures.

The annual net cost for 100 older people in full time residential care is almost £1.6 million – SIX times more expensive.

Don Williamson, on behalf of the National Carers' Organisations, said: "We want to ensure that unpaid carers throughout Scotland – many of whom spend 50 hours a week or more looking after a relative or loved one – can have access to more support and help.

"This is vital as research has clearly shown that these people are at far higher than average risk of suffering health problems themselves, because of their workload, stress and lack of breaks.

"The unrelenting nature of caring means that one of our key aims is to persuade local authorities to work with us to ensure that carers have access to suitable breaks through the provision of respite care. The Government has provided local authorities with additional resource to increase capacity by 10,000 weeks by 2011 and we want to ensure this happens, and then go further.

"We also want to see local carer organisations funded to provide greater levels of support and advice to carers, and we want improved access to training. Carers do what they do for love and their own sense of responsibility, but they do need a better level of help and support."

The groups are seeking meetings with Leaders and Chief Executives of local authorities throughout Scotland, as well as with Social Work chiefs and NHS bosses.

Don added: "The quality of support for carers varies significantly throughout Scotland. We note that seven local councils did not even mention carers in their key strategy documents. There are examples of really good practice, and areas where there is a lot of room for improvement. We are keen to engage with all local authorities to talk constructively with them about the level of provision in their area."

Shona Robison MSP, The Minister for Public Health, and Councillor Ronnie McColl, CoSLA Spokesperson for Health and Well Being, will address a major national conference 'Getting it Right for Carers' in Glasgow on the 27th January. The event brings together carers and service providers with key decision makers from health and social care. The event is being organised by Glasgow Caledonian University in partnership with the National Carer Organisations, with support from the Scottish Government, ADSW, NHS Boards and the Big Lottery. Satellite events will take place simultaneously in Aberdeen, Dundee, Inverness and Galashiels with arrangements for delegates from the islands to participate.

Notes to Editors:

The Organisations involved are Carers Scotland, Coalition of Carers in Scotland, Princess Royal Trust for Carers, Scottish Young Carers Services Alliance, Shared Care Scotland

Figures quoted are a combination of the 2001 census, and estimates contained within the most recent Scottish Community Care Statistics.

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