

Consultation Response

Paying for Care in Wales - February 2009

Introduction

About Carers Wales

Carers Wales is a campaigning organisation of carers. We want people to recognise the true value of carers' contribution to society and for carers to get the practical, financial and emotional support they need. For a number of years, Carers Wales has called for a radical review of care services. We believe we need more, and better quality, services that give real choices both to the people who need care and to family carers, who currently face unjust penalties for providing the lion's share of care. Carers Wales therefore wholeheartedly welcomes this national debate on how care services should be funded. We do not believe that it will be possible to achieve an improved and more just system of care without increasing substantially the funding that supports it.

Carers provide unpaid care by looking after an ill, frail or disabled family member, friend or partner. They provide at least 70% of all care. Carers give so much to society yet, as a consequence of caring, they experience ill health, poverty and discrimination. Carers Wales fights to end this injustice. We work to improve the lives of carers in Wales, 90,000 of whom look after someone for more than 50 hours a week.¹ Carers with major caring responsibilities face many challenges in terms of their own health and well-being, in their need for effective social care services, and access to education, leisure and employment.

Carers Wales provides the secretariat for the Wales Carers Alliance, a coalition of national voluntary sector organisations in Wales. The Alliance will respond separately to this consultation but the views of the Alliance are similar to this response.

In 2007, as part of our work with the Wales Carers Alliance, Carers Wales consulted widely with carers about their priorities for our Carers Manifesto. The main concern voiced then by carers, was the need for more and better care services for the people they look after, and, to achieve this, we called for major investment in social care.

The debate on Paying for Care is very complex and when the green paper in Wales is published, it will require widespread consultation and detailed consideration. Our response to this preliminary consultation is therefore a brief outline of our position, based on our extensive knowledge of and engagement with carers. We have not, at this stage, carried out new consultation with carers but will do so when the Green Paper is published. The Director of Carers Wales represents the Wales Carers Alliance on the Assembly's Paying for Care Advisory Group and, through this group, we will be contributing to more detailed discussions on the topics outlined in the consultation document.

¹ Census 2001

Sharing the responsibility for paying for care

Carers Wales believes that the responsibility for paying for care should be shared across society, paid for by taxation and free at the point of use. This is the model for health, education and most other public services and we do not accept that a different model should apply to care. We would like to see an integrated health and social care system, with pooled budgets and shared resources.

We also wish to point out that many families of people who need care currently pay very substantially to support family members. This is often with money but also in kind as most of the care for frail older people and support for people with disabilities and long term conditions is through the unpaid care provided by spouses, partners and other family members. Many of these family members pay very major penalties in terms of their income, savings, health, well-being and employment opportunities. A model of paying for care that required them to make even greater financial contributions would be both unjust and unsustainable.

Setting fair rules

National or local?

If the method of payment for care is through taxation, we believe it is both inevitable and right that the basic framework for eligibility needs to be set at national (UK) level. People need to have confidence in the system if they have to pay significant contributions over most of their lives, and therefore, it needs to be easy to understand. This means that basic eligibility and the levels of care that are likely to be covered need to be consistent across the country. The way that agreed types of care are delivered can vary locally as long as they do not fall below agreed minimum standards.

Different systems for different needs?

The care that people receive should be based on what each individual needs to be kept safe and which will allow them to be as independent as possible and able to contribute to their family, community and wider society. The care they receive should not be based on their ability to pay or how they have come to need care.

More support for people with low income and few assets?

The care people receive should be based on their assessed need for support and not on their income level or assets. The model for social care should be the same as for health where citizenship entitles people to help when they need it and free at the point of use.

Roz Williamson
Director, Carers Wales

25th February 2009