

PE2079/F: Introduce legislation to provide for exemptions in paying medical facility parking charges and to create a new classification of parking badge for care-givers.

Carers Scotland written submission, 9 October 2024

Carers Scotland welcome the opportunity to contribute to the call for evidence on this petition. Our response provides information and evidence on key issues for consideration in support of the principle of the petition.

Unpaid carers are an essential support for people with disabilities and older people. However, despite [the care they provide saving Scotland £13.1 billion each year](#), unpaid carers often face poverty and ill health simply because they care.

Carers Scotland's research illustrates the critical role of unpaid carers in supporting the person they care for to access health services. In Carers Scotland's State of Caring 2023 survey, we found that 29% of unpaid carers supported the person(s) they care for with 10 or more medical appointments in the past year, with a further 25% of carers supporting with between 5 and 9 appointments. In addition, 69% of unpaid carers visited community pharmacies on behalf of the person they care to collect prescriptions.

For those on the lowest incomes – in receipt of Carer's Allowance or an income replacement benefit such as Universal Credit or Pension Credit with a carer addition/element – 31% supported the person they care for with 10 or more appointments and 29% for between 5 and 9 appointments. If parking costs are involved for even a small proportion of these appointments, this represents an unwarranted strain on already stretched household budgets, simply to access necessary health services.

Unpaid carers also have their own health needs. Carers Scotland's research found that 54% of unpaid carers physical health had suffered because of caring and over a quarter (28%) experienced bad or very bad mental health. However, a worrying 41% said they had put off their own health treatment because of their caring role. For those who are struggling to make ends meet these figures rise significantly, with 73% experiencing physical health struggles 46% poor mental health. An astonishing 63% said they had delayed their own health treatment.

“I have arthritis, fibromyalgia, high blood pressure depression anxiety all symptoms worsened because of my role.” (Unpaid carer, State of Caring 2023)

Many unpaid carers described the practical challenges of caring for their own health whilst providing care and we believe that any action national and local government can take to remove barriers to accessing health services is both welcome and essential.

Beyond the level of health support unpaid carers provide and their own health needs, it is well evidenced that carers are more likely to live in poverty. [Recent research published by Carers Scotland](#) found that 28% unpaid carers across the Scotland are living in poverty, with 1 in 12 in deep poverty which is 50% below the poverty line. The rate of poverty amongst unpaid carers is 56% higher than those who do not provide unpaid care. Those unpaid carers in receipt of income related benefits have the highest rate of poverty, with a shocking 65% living in poverty.

[Further research in 2023 by Carers Scotland](#) showed similar levels of poverty amongst carers, with 28% of carers struggling to make ends meet, rising to 41% for those living on Carer's Allowance. One in five (21%) carers were struggling to afford the cost of food and 16% were struggling to afford to heat their homes. Four in 10 (41%) of those struggling to make ends meet had cut back on food or other essentials such as heating. Over a third (37%) of these carers are in debt because of caring and 1 in 6 (16%) said they simply have nothing left to cut back on.

It is clear that caring is too often devastating to the financial security of unpaid carers, and many carers already have no spare income to meet essentials. Unpaid carers in this research described that they were already struggling to afford the cost of running their car: an essential item in supporting the person they care for to access services to support their health and care needs.

“There have been appointments that I have been unable to take my cared for people to because I couldn't afford the fuel for the car.” (Unpaid carer, State of Caring 2023)

“Our daughter has needed a lot of support and weekly CAMHS appointments, petrol has been expensive to travel to the city.” (Unpaid carer, State of Caring 2023)

Parking charges for access to essential services add additional strain. Unpaid carers already face unenviable choices between heating and eating and it is not acceptable that additional costs incurred to access to health services exacerbate this further.

Some areas have considered a parking permit for unpaid carers. For example, [Edinburgh City Council are in the process of introducing a Carers Permit for providing care](#). This is an extension of their existing healthcare workers permit and recognises that health and care can be provided by different professionals including paid and unpaid carers. It is limited to those who can evidence that they receive DWP Carer's Allowance (and Social Security Scotland's Carer Support Payment) or the Carers Credit.

However, the charge is significantly more than for healthcare workers and is aligned with the cost of a residential parking permit which, depending on the zone of parking, can be expensive and indeed prohibitive for those on limited incomes.

Carers Scotland is aware that unpaid carers may be able to park for free when with the individual with a blue badge (subject to certain restrictions). However, for those who care for someone without the relevant benefit mobility qualification, for example, for an older person on Attendance Allowance, there are additional assessment hurdles and, many unpaid carers care for someone with limited mobility but who

would not necessarily reach this mobility barrier or who have other conditions such as ones affecting their mental health. As such, they will have the cost of parking placed upon their limited incomes.

Furthermore, access to a blue badge does not assist with the underlying challenge. Unpaid carers carrying out necessary caring responsibilities such as picking up prescriptions, shopping for food and accessing other services can only use such a badge where the person is present. In addition, it does not assist with the parking costs associated with enabling unpaid carers to access services and activities to meet their own health and wellbeing needs. Carers Scotland has raised similar issues with the concessionary travel scheme which can allow for a companion to travel free but does not allow a carer to travel independently of the disabled person, even when carrying out tasks in support of the health and wellbeing of the individual.

Given the crucial role of unpaid carers in supporting health and care, the barriers they face in looking after their own health and wellbeing and the opportunity to reduce at least some of the costs of caring that unpaid carers face, Carers Scotland believe that the petitioners proposal to introduce a Carers Permit has merit and warrants further exploration by the Scottish Government.