

Cream paper – Carers

- **Unpaid carers provide a wide range of services which would otherwise fall to the health and social care services to fund. The value of these services is currently estimated at £7.68 billion a year in Scotland.**
- **The implications of the Welfare Reform Act for carers are unclear but are likely to involve reductions in the numbers who can claim and also in stability in familial caring relationships, particularly in rural areas.**

Informal, unpaid carers form an important part of the health and social care system. Carers provide a wide range of services and functions to the people they care for and have the capacity to reduce the need for hospital and care home admissions. Young Carers are children who provide care, usually to a parent. (Scottish Government 2006. Scottish Government, 2010)

The value of the work unpaid carers carry out in Scotland has been estimate at £7.68 billion a year (the Scottish Government, 2010).

“Carers play a crucial role in the delivery of the health and social care system in Scotland. This role will become more important as a result of demographic and social changes. Carers need to be at the heart of a reformed health and social care system with a shift from residential, institutional and crisis care to community care, early intervention and preventative care. We make clear that in making radical changes to the health and social care system, carers should not be burdened, but supported and sustained in their caring role.” Scottish Government, 2006)

Carers are key to ameliorating the impact of demographic change in Scotland. It is anticipated that carers will play an increasingly important role in the support, care and treatment of people with long-term and/or multiple conditions, disabilities and illnesses, including dementia and alcohol and drug dependency. (Scottish Government, 2010)

However, the Welfare Reform Act is likely to affect carers in ways which are not yet clear, because much of the detail will be contained in secondary legislation.

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) acts as a gateway benefit to Carers Allowance. In changing from DLA to Personal Independence Payments (PIP) the Government has stated its intention to make savings of 20%. Fraud within DLA is thought, by the Department of Work and Pensions, to sit at around 0.5% and there are, therefore, few savings to be made by eliminating fraudulent claims. Almost all of the savings will, therefore, have to come from people who actually need this benefit to meet the additional cost of their care and mobility requirements. This, in turn, means that 20% fewer claimants will receive the benefit, or that all claimants will receive 20% less, or some combination of the two.

The Government has recently announced that Carers Allowance would be tied to both the Standard and Enhanced care rates within PIP. This is good news as far as it goes: however if the new rules result in 20% fewer people being awarded PIP than currently receive DLA, there will also be 20% fewer people in receipt of Carers Allowance.

In addition, some of the changes to Housing Benefit, particularly those relating to occupancy, may affect carers and caring relationships. It is not clear what level of care would be required to entitle a person to benefit for an additional room in which a carer could stay overnight.

In rural areas households who under-occupy their socially-rented homes may have to move out of the area to find more appropriately-configured accommodation. As people are often housed because of connections within the community this requirement is likely to interfere with both the current and, particularly, future supply of informal carers as rural communities' family connections are dissipated.

References:

The Scottish Government (2006) The future of unpaid care in Scotland. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government

The Scottish Government (2010) Caring together: the carers' strategy for Scotland 2010 – 2015
Edinburgh: The Scottish Government