

Carers Week open letter to the Prime Minister: A Recovery and Respite Plan for Unpaid Carers



Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London, SW1A 2AA

06 June 2022

Dear Prime Minister,

As leaders of the charities supporting Carers Week 2022 – the largest carer awareness raising campaign in the UK, taking place this year from 6-12 June – we are writing to ask that the Government develops and publishes a Recovery and Respite Plan for Unpaid Carers. Doing so would recognise the vital role carers play in our society and economy, complement the Government's other existing health and care strategies, and ensure carers get the support they need to continue caring safely and well.

As you will know, Carers Week 2022 comes following an extraordinary two and a half years for carers, who have been under unprecedented pressure throughout the pandemic. Both individually, and collectively, the level of care and support people have provided to family and friends has been staggering, with an estimated economic value of over £400 billion since March 2020.

The efforts millions of carers have gone to undoubtedly stopped the total collapse of our formal health and care systems at the height of the crisis, but often came at great cost to carers' own health and wellbeing, their financial resilience, and their ability to lead a healthy and meaningful life beyond their caring responsibilities. Indeed, the impacts on many carers have been severe and wide ranging and have served to exacerbate many of the existing challenges they faced prior to the pandemic.

While we welcome the fact that many parts of society are opening up, it should be noted that the pandemic is not over for carers and the people they support. Many families are still isolating, are very concerned about infection control, unable to access care and support services which they used to rely on and are still providing significantly increased hours of care compared to before the pandemic, leaving them burnt out and exhausted. The cost of living crisis has also hit carers particularly hard because of the additional energy, food and transport costs many have to pay for, and much more needs to be done to protect carers on the lowest incomes – especially those who have had to give up paid work to care.

We believe that Government must invest further in support for unpaid carers so they can live a life beyond their unpaid caring responsibilities, continue to care safely and well without experiencing hardship and poverty, and in recognition of the enormous impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on them and the people they care for.

To that end, we are asking you to put in place a Recovery and Respite Plan for Unpaid Carers, outlining immediate additional support for carers across a range of areas – including breaks, respite and care services, financial help, and support to juggle work and care. Doing so would recognise the enormous impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on carers own lives, as well as the people they care for. We envisage that this would be a one-year funded programme of activity to tackle some of the legacy issues for carers from the pandemic as well as ensuring they get safely through winter. Our hope is that this would be a bridge to the development of a full National Carers' Strategy, in Summer 2023.

We, and more than 10 million carers across the UK, look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Walker, Chief Executive, Carers UK
Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director, Age UK
Kirsty McHugh, Chief Executive, Carers Trust
Sally Light, Chief Executive, MND Association
Danny Sriskandarajah, Chief Executive, Oxfam GB
Mark Winstanley, Chief Executive, Rethink Mental Illness
Jacqui Cannon, Chief Executive, The Lewy Body Society

Please note, copies of this letter have also been sent to the following Ministers:

- *Secretary of State for Health and Social Care*
- *Secretary of State for Work and Pensions*
- *Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy*
- *Minister for Care and Mental Health*
- *Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work*
- *Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets*

This open letter was organised by Carers UK and the other charities supporting Carers Week in 2022: Age UK, Carers Trust, MND Association, Oxfam GB, Rethink Mental Illness and The Lewy Body Society.

