

The new National Carers Strategy

10th June 2008

What does it mean for me?



Introduction

The government's new National Carers Strategy is called *Carers at the heart of 21st century families and communities*. Its strap-line is "A caring system on your side. A life of your own." It is a ten year plan that includes £255m of new money for carers, including local health trusts receiving £150m over the next two years for breaks and respite. The Strategy applies in full to England. The commitments on employment apply UK-wide.

In the preface, the Prime Minister says that the Strategy is the "start of a process rather than the end" and that he "acknowledges that carers need more help and support than has been available in the past" and "above all we recognise the need – repeated so many times throughout our consultation – for better support for respite and short breaks."

The forward is signed by seven Secretaries of State. It says that "every day 6,000 people take on new caring responsibilities" and that "people who provide a lot of care tend to have lower incomes, poorer health, and are less likely to be in work than their counterparts."

Suggested new definition of "carer"

The Strategy asks for your views on whether this should be the new definition of "carer" used by all of government:

"A carer spends a significant proportion of their life providing unpaid support to family or potentially friends. This could be caring for a relative, partner or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or substance misuse problems." This suggested definition will **not** immediately affect assessments or benefits – at the moment, it is a suggestion for people to think about.

The Government's Vision for carers

The Strategy says: "Our vision is that by 2018, carers will be universally recognised and valued as being fundamental to strong families and stable communities. Support will be tailored to meet individuals' needs, enabling carers to maintain a balance between their caring responsibilities and a life outside caring, whilst enabling the person they support to be a full and equal citizen."

By 2018, the Strategy promises that:

- carers will be respected as expert care partners by paid workers and be supported in their caring role;
- carers will be able to have a life of their own alongside their caring role;
- carers will be supported so that they are not forced into financial hardship by their caring role;
- carers will be supported to stay mentally and physically well and treated with dignity;
- children will be protected from inappropriate caring and be supported to learn, develop and thrive

New commitments in the Strategy

On the whole, the Strategy is a very positive document, with a range of useful commitments backed up by new money. The Strategy commits the government to spending these amounts over the next two years:

- £150m to local health trusts for flexible breaks, meeting the needs of both carers and the people they support.
- Up to £38m to help carers stay in work or re-enter the job market.
- £6m to ensure young carers are protected from inappropriate caring and receive support.
- The government had already announced £22m for emergency planning and support for carers.

The strategy also promises that by 2011 the government will:

- Find ways of joining up services offered by the NHS, councils and charities.
- Experiment with new ways of GPs supporting carers and try out providing an annual health checks to carers.
- Improving the emotional support offered to carers.
- Provide training to help people feel more confident in their caring role.
- Train professionals in lots of agencies, such as health, social services and housing.
- Ensure that carers support charities can reach more carers.
- Provide every carer with local information services and a national carers advice line and website.

The longer term, 2011-2018

The strategy sets out some goals from 2011 onwards, such as:

- Finding out if we need a lead professional for carers in every area.
- Review benefits available to carers and the people they look after.
- Consider more increases to breaks and respite.
- Consider providing replacement care for carers to attend hospital appointments and screenings;
- Review the law around information sharing with carers and confidentiality.
- Consider allowing payment of carers via Direct Payments given to service users by social services.

Chapter 2: Support and local carers' charities

The Strategy recognises that “many carers prefer to deal with third sector organisations than with the statutory services for a variety of reasons” and “We recognise the vital role that these organisations play in ensuring that carers have the greatest possible flexibility in receiving and accessing support and services”

Many local carers services are facing funding cuts from their councils or local health trusts. The new money for carers will not be “ring-fenced” so councils and health trusts will not be made to spend it on carers. The government will need to do more to make sure money intended for carers is spent on them locally.

Chapter 4: Income and employment

This Chapter steers away from raising benefit levels, saying that the best way to make sure carers can enjoy a reasonable income “is if they, where possible, combine paid employment with their caring role.” This will be achieved “through the provision of better services for the person being supported, increased break provision, easier access to training and skills and encouraging more flexible working opportunities.” Many carers already have the right to make flexible working requests, and the government will consider extending this right to carers who do not yet have that right, because they don't live with the person they care for and are not closely related..

“Care partnership managers” will be introduced at JobCentre Plus branches, along with new training for staff, marking job vacancies as “carer friendly” and funding replacement care for carers who want to go on approved training courses. A good practice guide for all employers on the benefits of employing carers will be produced.

Chapter 5: Health and well-being

This chapter gives doctors and others the clear message that “carers must be treated by professionals as partners in care” (p101). “Carers often find that their caring responsibilities prevent them from accessing health services both for their own needs and on behalf of the person they support. It is important, therefore, that both carers and the people they care for are given as much choice and control as possible when accessing NHS services.” The Princess Royal Trust for Carers and the Royal College of GPs will shortly publish a new guide for doctors on how to recognise and support carers: see www.carers.org/professionals from Autumn 2008.

Chapter 6: Young carers

The government wants to reduce the numbers of children relied upon for inappropriate caring by supporting parents and families with disabilities or illnesses better. There will still be young carers though, and the Strategy sets out some plans to help support them, with schools packs of lessons and assemblies and training for staff (especially those working in adult mental health and substance misuse services), as well as new money for local

services. We have a briefing on the strategy specially for young carers, which is available at www.carers.org/professionals or from dmanzi@carers.org

What's missing?

Many carers will be very disappointed that the Strategy does not make any promises to raise Carers Allowance or other benefits straight away. Instead, the government says it will reform all benefits over the next few years and will talk to people about how best to do that. We have expressed our disappointment to government and reminded them that many carers are currently living in poverty and facing the effects of fuel and price rises. We would like to hear your views on how this aspect of the Strategy will affect you.

The Strategy does not give much detail about how it will change things for groups and communities of carers who often get less support at the moment, such as black and minority ethnic carers or carers of people with substance misuse problems. Also, it does not offer carers any new legal protection from discrimination, either at work or when trying to access services from councils and health trusts. We believe that carers from all groups and communities deserve to have their rights recognised and better protection from discrimination.

Have your views heard

Some questions you might want to comment on:

1. Will the new suggested definition of "carer" work?
2. Which bits of the Strategy do you most welcome?
3. What's missing from the Strategy or should be changed?
4. What needs to happen in your area to make the government's vision for carers (on page 1) into reality?
5. Will the Strategy do enough to make sure local carers' services get more help from councils, health trusts and government?

We can help you have your views heard by government. You could:

- Give your views to your local carers charity, who can build up a picture of the views of carers in your area, and pass them on to The Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Crossroads nationally.
- Post your comments on the carers' message board at www.carers.org/forums

Copies of the Strategy are available from

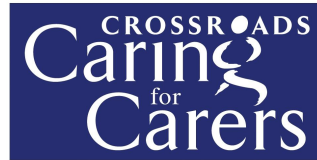
www.dh.gov.uk/publications or dh@prolog.uk.com

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Feedback form for carers.



Please return this form to:
THE CARERS' RESOURCE
11, North Park Road
Harrogate HG1 5PD

Thanks for taking the time to respond to our briefing on the new National Carers Strategy. We will find out what carers want in Harrogate, Craven and Airedale and make sure local and national policy makers know what you think.

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Any other comments:

If you want us to respond to you personally, please write your name and address here: