

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport  
Jeane Freeman MSP  
Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People  
Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot

T: 0300 244 4000  
E: [scottish.ministers@gov.scot](mailto:scottish.ministers@gov.scot)

Simon Hodgson  
Carers Scotland

[simon.hodgson@carerscotland.org](mailto:simon.hodgson@carerscotland.org)

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Dear Simon,

After reading the Carers UK report 'Caring Behind Closed Doors', we wanted to thank you for continuing to highlight the issues that carers in Scotland face and to take the opportunity to outline the work to support carers across Ministerial portfolios during this very challenging time.

The Scottish Government appreciates hugely the support provided by Scotland's unpaid carers. They are dealing with pressures that are already great, and we understand that many are experiencing added pressure at this time. That is why this government wants to ensure that carers are supported and to express our gratitude, in the ways that we can, for the invaluable contribution they are making.

This letter therefore outlines key actions against each of Carers UK's urgent recommendations to all four nations, as well as the one directed at the Scottish Government.

### **Increase awareness and recognition of the role of unpaid carers**

The pandemic has placed in stark focus the importance of the care provided to those in our communities, not only by our health and social care workforce, but also our family members, friends and neighbours. We regularly highlight the value of unpaid care and pressures on carers in our public communications and will continue to do so.

As you will know, just before this crisis, we had been planning to launch a Scotland-wide marketing campaign to raise awareness of caring and encourage carers to self-identify and come forward for support. Although the campaign launch has been put on hold for now as a consequence of the pandemic, it is our intention to run it at an appropriate time in the future.

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**Ensure that the impact of reduced services on carers and their families are closely monitored in terms of carers' health and wellbeing and ability to care to avoid burn-out. Support must be reinstated and restored as soon as possible**

Although most local carer services are unable to provide face to face support at present, most are providing advice and emotional support over the telephone or online. We have established a £500,000 fund to help local carer organisations adapt to remote working so they can continue to support carers during this time.

We have made clear to Local Authorities that they should act to do what is right to deal with the virus, and not be constrained by funding issues. While recognising that there are unprecedented pressures on the system, we have clearly signalled that it is not acceptable that care packages are cut. In addition to the funding directed towards social care from the 2020-21 budget, we have agreed with COSLA that Scottish Government will meet additional social care costs incurred because of the impact of the pandemic. That agreement was specifically to ensure that both existing and new demand in social care could be met.

**Raise the level of Carer's Allowance**

As the Caring Behind Closed Doors report rightly recognises, Scotland has already raised the level of Carer's Allowance through our Carer's Allowance Supplement, an increase of 13%. Carers can receive two payments of £230.10 this financial year.

However, we recognise that carers will be experiencing added pressure at this time, and we were pleased to announce today that the Coronavirus (Scotland) Bill 2 being introduced to the Scottish Parliament next week includes provisions to make an extra payment of £230.10 to Carer's Allowance recipients this June, on top of Carer's Allowance Supplement.

If passed, the proposed Coronavirus Carer's Allowance Supplement payment would support around 83,000 carers with the additional costs of caring during the pandemic, helping protect their health and wellbeing. This would be an investment of £19.2 million to benefit unpaid carers on low incomes with some of the most intensive caring roles.

The extra payment would be made automatically alongside the June Carer's Allowance Supplement to carers who were living in Scotland and receiving Carer's Allowance on the qualifying date of 13 April 2020.

We have also worked with the Department of Work and Pensions to make changes which will protect carers' access to support during this time.

Regulations have been laid to relax the rules on breaks in care where a carer is unable to provide care due to self-isolation or infection with coronavirus of either them or the person they care for. Guidance has also been changed so the carer no longer needs to provide care in person where this is not possible due to self-isolation. Care such as emotional support can now count towards the 35 hours of care for receipt of Carer's Allowance.

For those not in receipt of Carer's Allowance, our Young Carer Grant, a payment of £305.10 for young carers aged 16, 17 or 18 with significant caring responsibilities, is available as normal during this time.

We are encouraging young carers who may be newly eligible for this support to apply. In addition, provisions have been put in place so that young carers who were eligible for the Young Carer Grant but unable to apply before their 19th birthday due to the disruption caused by coronavirus can still apply, with their application being considered as though it was made on time.

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## **Ensure testing is increased and delivered quickly, including testing for unpaid carers**

Our approach to testing must make sure the capacity we have is directed in the most effective way to protect those most vulnerable and to save lives – that is why we have prioritised testing in hospitals and care homes. Our approach also focusses on keeping key workers at work and ensuring that the most critical staff in key sectors can be at work to ensure essential services continue to run.

Social care staff are delivering essential services during these challenging times and their safety is of paramount importance. As key workers symptomatic social care staff, and symptomatic household members, are eligible for testing.

We have included unpaid carers in the priority groups for testing, which can be found on the [Scottish Government website](#). The NHS Inform website includes information on how those who are eligible for testing, can access it through a simple and easy to use [guide](#). This will take unpaid carers to the self-referral portal of the UK testing programme which includes sites at Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen airports, Inverness and Perth. There are also 13 mobile testing units which will move around towns.

Scottish Government officials opened a further discussion with Carers Scotland and other national carer organisations on testing for unpaid carers last week. We want to ensure, as a priority, that carers have access to the most appropriate testing route for their situation, especially for those who are not able to access the testing sites or are not digitally connected.

## **Ensure that local authorities have sufficient resources to carry out contingency planning with carers. Local government and local partners need to find a way to support carers in delivering this. This must also go hand in hand with effective risk mapping**

Because of their rights in Scotland, many carers already have emergency plans in place. Scotland's local carer centres are helping more carers to do this.

As mentioned above, local authorities have been assured that the additional financial support they need to scale up social care services to meet additional demands arising from the pandemic will be met by the Scottish Government.

Ministers and COSLA wrote to local authorities encouraging them to prioritise additional carer support in their local plans for responding to the pandemic. This is on top of the extra £11.6 million for carer support in the 2020-21 budget.

We also encouraged them to involve local carer services in local resilience work given their important role in supporting unpaid carers through the crisis.



**Ensure that all national guidance aimed at service delivery that suggests carers take on more responsibilities also consider the risks to carers; and**

**Continue to place a high priority on guidance, information and advice for carers, that adapts to their needs**

We are working alongside key organisations to ensure carers have the advice they need to help protect themselves and their loved ones as well as advice on how to access support and changes to benefits for carers. We understand you and the other carer organisations are in regular touch with officials about feedback from carers and local carer organisations to inform this work; and also that carer organisations sit on the National Contingency Planning Group on the social care response to the pandemic.

Our long term investment in local carer services means there are carer centres in every local authority area providing information and advice to carers.

**Increase the delivery of PPE to social care and ensure unpaid carers are also included where they are caring for those who are most vulnerable**

We are the only UK nation to have extended our personal protective equipment (PPE) arrangements to unpaid carers. The Scottish Government has published [advice](#) for unpaid carers who visit or live with a friend or family member to provide help with personal care such as washing or dressing. The advice details the situations in which unpaid carers may require PPE and how they can access it locally.

**Ensure systems are in place for carers to provide access to food and reduce the challenges carers face in getting food**

Scotland has worked quickly to establish a coordinated response for non-shielded groups through investment of £30 million in local authorities, national third sector infrastructure, local community responses, as well as a national helpline to direct individuals in need to appropriate local sources of support.

Where individuals at risk of COVID-19 do not have family or community support in place they can call the national helpline on 0800 111 4000. Callers are automatically connected to their local authority who will support them to access the service they need including accessing food supplies. This helpline has been promoted through the national carer organisations.

**Ensure that if this crisis continues, those unable to work because of caring are continued to be supported to retain their jobs for as long as possible, as well as ongoing flexibility for carers to continue to juggle work and care**

As you will be aware, employment rights are currently still reserved to the UK Government. UK-wide guidance is clear that employees who have caring responsibilities resulting from coronavirus can be furloughed. We would expect employers to consider these requests within the context of our wider approach to Fair Work in Scotland.

We will continue to promote the Carer Positive scheme to encourage employers to act to support their staff balancing work and caring. We understand Carers Scotland is contacting Carer Positive employers to collect and share examples of good practice in supporting carers in the workplace.

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## **Increase investment in mental health and wellbeing support for carers**

It is vital that during this period of uncertainty anyone who requires support for their mental health can receive it. As well as the support provided by local carers centres, we have also invested an additional £3.8 million to support the NHS 24 Mental Health Hub and Breathing Space and to provide increased access to digital therapies.

We launched a national campaign to help people cope during the coronavirus pandemic. The '[Clear Your Head](#)' campaign highlights the practical things people can do to help them feel better whilst continuing to stay at home.

We are also working in collaboration with the Coalition of Carers in Scotland and Carers Trust Scotland to develop a section for unpaid carers in the forthcoming online Wellbeing Hub which will launch on 11 May. We hope that having a variety of wellbeing resources and information in one place will be of assistance to carers.

Being able to take a break from caring is important to allow carers to recharge their batteries and avoid burnout. We recognise that this is more of a challenge for carers at this time for a number of reasons. That is why we have been working with partners to ensure carers have access to short breaks that are suitable for those who are self-isolating and social distancing through the £3 million Short Breaks Fund. This includes extending the eligibility criteria of the Time to Live Fund which provides carers of adults with micro-grants for something that helps them have break so that carers of disabled children can also apply.

The Young Scot platform for young carers has also launched new opportunities for use at home such as ASDA e-vouchers, Netflix subscriptions and mobile phone top-ups. They will continue to add others to ensure young people with caring responsibilities have a break and some leisure time.

## **Continue to ensure that there are creative ways of supporting carers, through technology, through local communities and with the continuation of key support**

The £500,000 fund for local carers centres mentioned above was put in place in response to feedback from local services to support them to transition to remote working. Examples of technology purchased through this fund have been video conferencing subscriptions, new laptops and mobile phones but also items such as stamps to support carers who are not online in new ways.

We understand the importance of finding new ways to support carers during this challenging time, with carers centres at the heart of this.

## **Ensure that there is sufficient investment in end of life care, death and bereavement services**

As you will know, every local area must have an information and advice service for carers and this must include information about bereavement support services for carers following the death of a cared-for person.

We are working closely with all NHS Boards and Integration Authorities to respond to the additional demands arising from the current unprecedented emergency and provide support where needed. This includes for end of life, death and bereavement services.

Additionally, we expect to receive consequentials in the region of £19 million to provide support to hospices. We are committed to passing on the final level of funding to hospices to

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provide support at this difficult time and are working with hospices to find an appropriate mechanism to do this.

**Provide a Carer Wellbeing Fund equivalent to the Student Fund of £5M directly to carers centres and young carers services to enable those centres to help carers facing financial hardship as a consequence of COVID-19.**

For unpaid carers in receipt of Carer's Allowance we are proposing to provide additional support through an extra payment of Carer's Allowance Supplement as set out above.

For unpaid carers not in receipt of Carer's Allowance there is a range of financial and wider support available at this time. We are working with Citizens Advice Scotland to provide financial advice and recommend unpaid carers visit [cas.org.uk](http://cas.org.uk) or call 0800 028 1456 for help in finding out what is available. We would urge them to apply for all the support that they are entitled to.

In particular, families and individuals facing financial hardship, including unpaid carers, can apply to their local authority for a grant from the Scottish Welfare Fund. We have committed an extra £45 million to local authorities for Fund, more than doubling its value to help meet the additional financial pressures that people on low incomes face during the coronavirus outbreak.

We hope that the information provided in this letter demonstrates the importance we place on supporting carers in Scotland. We understand that you and other carer organisations are meeting officials regularly to discuss these and other issues. We will continue to listen to carers and those who represent them to understand and meet their needs.

Kind regards,



**JEANE FREEMAN**

**SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE**

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