WELSH GOVERNMENT INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Title of Strategy:	**National Strategy for Unpaid Carers 2026**
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SECTION 1. WHAT ACTION IS THE WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSIDERING AND WHY?

The Welsh Government is proposing a National Strategy for Unpaid Carers (2026), setting out coordinated action across seven priority areas, including recognition, access to services, financial and employment support, respite, and mental health and wellbeing.

The Strategy was co-produced by the Ministerial Advisory Group for Unpaid Carers and its Steering Group, comprising unpaid carers, third sector organisations, Welsh Government officials, and representatives from local health boards and local authorities.

Informed by extensive engagement, including a public consultation, the Strategy responds to concerns about carers being unrecognised and unsupported, inconsistent access to services, financial pressures, challenges balancing work and caring responsibilities, and limited access to respite and wellbeing support. It aims to address these issues and improve outcomes for unpaid carers, recognising their vital role as partners in care.

Around 12% of people in Wales are unpaid carers[1], although this figure is thought to be an underestimate. Unpaid caring in Wales is most prevalent among people aged 55 to 59, with older carers more likely to provide intensive support of 50 hours or more per week[2]. Requests for support from young carers more than doubled between 2020/21 and 2023/24, increasing from 1,163 to 2,366. This may reflect improved identification of young carers and/or growing demand for support[3].

Subject to approval, the Strategy will be supported by an annual delivery plan, overseen by the Ministerial Advisory Group for Unpaid Carers. This will help drive implementation, improve outcomes for unpaid carers, and ensure support continues to respond to changing needs over time.

Prevention: The Strategy focuses on prevention through early intervention, addressing the root causes of the challenges unpaid carers face. It recognises that financial pressures, barriers to support, and a lack of recognition can have lasting impacts on carers' wellbeing, opportunities and quality of life. By improving access to support and removing structural barriers, the Strategy aims to prevent these challenges from escalating and to address them at their source. Our vision is a carer aware nation, where unpaid carers are identified early, valued and supported to maintain their wellbeing. This means embedding carer awareness across public services and communities, ensuring carers are recognised as equal partners in care and discharge planning, and reducing wider impacts such as stress, poor wellbeing, and educational disadvantage for young carers.

Integration: Unpaid carers are a priority across a range of the Welsh Government policies, including mental health, dementia, substance misuse, child poverty, suicide prevention, ageing and gender equality. They are also a priority for the Gender Equality Forum and Wales' response to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's 2023 Concluding Observations. This Strategy aligns with the Programme for Government, well-being objectives[4], Public Service Board priorities[5] and the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015). It takes a cross-government approach, embedding support for unpaid carers across policy areas, including older people, health, education and employability, while complementing statutory duties under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014[6]. This

[1] National Social Care Data Portal For Wales
2 Key facts and figures about caring | Carers Wales
3 Briefing Paper - HSC Committee - 22 January 2026 - Inquiry into improving access to support for Unpaid Carers
[4] The Well-being of Future Generations | GOV.WALES
[5] Public Services Boards | GOV.WALES
[6] Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

joined-up approach is reinforced through the Welsh Government Charter for Unpaid Carers[7] and links to key strategies including All-Age Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024 to 2034[8], the Child Poverty Strategy[9], the Suicide Prevention and Self-Harm Strategy 2025[10] to 2028.

Collaboration: Partners across local government, health and social care, and key third sector organisations are active partners in this Strategy and have helped shape its design and delivery. Effective implementation will rely on coordinated, cross-sector working to provide consistent, high-quality support for unpaid carers.

Involvement and engagement with stakeholders: The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 promotes the principle of co-production, voice and control, and the involvement of carers in shaping services. The Strategy has been informed by extensive engagement with unpaid carers and stakeholders, including through the Ministerial Advisory Group for Unpaid Carers, public consultation, academic research and third sector evidence. The Senedd Health and Social Care Committee's 2026 inquiry[11] highlighted ongoing challenges, including carers not being consistently identified, listened to, or treated as equal partners, and fragmented support that does not reflect lived experience. These findings reinforce the need for a more consistent, person-centred approach to recognising and supporting unpaid carers across Wales.

Costs and Savings: Carers Wales[12] estimates that replacing the care provided by unpaid carers would cost health and social care services £10.6 billion each year. The National Strategy for Unpaid Carers will be submitted for Ministerial approval and published in November 2026. Subject to approval, we will work with local government, health boards and other partners to deliver the Strategy's commitments and consider any future funding requirements.

Mechanism: Legislation is not proposed as part of this work and as such a regulatory impact assessment is not required.

[7] Charter for unpaid carers | GOV.WALES
[8] All-Age Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-2034
[9] Child poverty strategy for Wales: strategy and progress | GOV.WALES
[10] Suicide prevention and self-harm strategy: delivery plan 2025 to 2028 | GOV.WALES
[11] Senedd Cymru - Unpaid carers “at breaking point”
[12] Carers Wales - Poverty and financial hardship of unpaid carers in Wales

SECTION 2. WHAT WILL BE THE EFFECT ON SOCIAL WELL-BEING?

2.1 People and Communities

The National Strategy for Unpaid Carers 2026 is likely to have a significant positive impact on people and communities across Wales, particularly for unpaid carers. It directly targets groups who currently experience disadvantage - including young carers, women, and carers from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities - by seeking to improve recognition, access to support, and help to access or remain in employment and mental wellbeing. Actions outlined in the Strategy will positively affect people living in and connected to communities across Wales by aiming to make services more consistent, inclusive, and accessible. This includes improving awareness of carers' rights, increasing availability of support such as respite care, and addressing barriers like digital exclusion and language differences. The Strategy will support increased consistency and approach across Wales

For people accessing health, social care, education, and third-sector services, the impact is expected to be significant, as the Strategy seeks to strengthen identification of carers, improves assessments and care planning. The Strategy aims to have a positive impact on workers and fair work, supporting unpaid carers to remain in or return to employment through flexible working, improved employer awareness, and recognition of caring experience as valuable. This aligns with broader fair work ambitions.

Although the Strategy is expected to make positive impacts, the level of improvements may vary due to uneven implementation. Without consistent delivery, some carers may continue to face barriers such as limited access to respite care, persistent inequalities in service provision, or exclusion due to digital or cultural barriers. Overall, the Strategy represents a positive shift, with the potential to substantially improve wellbeing, equality, and economic participation for unpaid carers and the communities connected to them.

2.2 Children's Rights

The Children's Rights Scheme 2014 process has been completed and a full CRIA was required. The assessment finds no negative impact on children's rights arising from the Strategy. Overall, the evidence suggests a positive impact for young carers through actions outlined in the Strategy.

Engagement and evidence: The Strategy has been informed by extensive engagement with carers and representative bodies, including the Ministerial Advisory Group on Unpaid Carers and the National Strategy Steering Group. A public consultation was undertaken with accessible formats, including a version for young people and an Easy Read. Responses were received from organisations representing children and young people and highlighted key challenges for young carers. Responses indicated that young carers could face pressures in completing education, wellbeing and access to support, and that some groups, including those from ethnic minority communities, may experience additional barriers such as language barriers, cultural expectations around family caregiving

Impact on children and young people: The Strategy is expected to benefit young carers by improving identification, access to information and support, opportunities for respite, and support within education. Under-identification remains a key issue, often linked to stigma or lack of awareness, which

can limit access to help. Access to timely information and advice is essential to prevent crisis and support wellbeing, but services are not always tailored to younger people. Some young carers experience mental health pressures, educational disruption, and limited time for rest or social activities. Strengthening links between schools and young carer services, improving access to breaks and psychological support, and addressing barriers such as digital exclusion are important to mitigate these impacts.

UNCRC considerations

The Strategy aligns with key UNCRC rights, including participation (Article 12), access to appropriate information (Article 17), health and wellbeing (Article 24), education (Article 28), and time for rest and leisure (Article 31). It does not raise concerns in relation to privacy (Article 16) and supports opportunities for association and peer support (Article 15). Ongoing co-production with children and young people, will be important to ensure these rights are fully realised.

2.3 Equality

The National Strategy for Unpaid Carers is expected to have positive equality impacts for unpaid carers in Wales. We have considered the needs of underrepresented groups and those with protected characteristics. It seeks to improve recognition of unpaid carers, increase access to support, reduce financial hardship, strengthen opportunities to stay in or return to work and widen access to breaks from caring. These priorities reflect what unpaid carers and stakeholders told us, including the experiences of young carers, older carers, carers supporting people with complex needs, carers from ethnic minority communities, and BSL users and people with learning disabilities who face additional linguistic, digital and cultural barriers.

2.4 Rural Proofing

Unpaid carers living in rural and semi-rural areas of Wales are likely to experience additional and compounded disadvantages as a result of geography, service configuration, and infrastructure constraints.

From engagement with unpaid carers in rural communities undertaken as part of our engagement exercise and local carer groups, we know that people living in rural areas face longer travel distances to access health, social care, respite services and third-sector support, with more limited availability of local provision. This impact assessment is also informed by responses to the public consultation process. This confirmed our understanding that unpaid carers are identified as a group particularly affected by these challenges, as caring responsibilities can limit their ability to travel long distances or attend appointments consistently. These barriers can delay access to support, increase stress, cause additional expense and significantly undermine the carers' own health, financial position and wellbeing[13,].

Limited public transport in rural areas further exacerbates access issues for unpaid carers, particularly where services are centralised or require frequent attendance. Where carers rely on private transport, higher travel costs and fuel prices can place additional financial pressure on households already

[13] Wales Annual Impact Report 2025 - Local Partnerships

experiencing reduced incomes due to caring responsibilities. Evidence to the Senedd has highlighted that where a carer lives is a significant determinant of their ability to access statutory support, including assessments and respite services[14].

The availability of replacement or emergency care is often more restricted in rural areas, due to smaller provider markets, workforce shortages, and limited service flexibility. National and Wales-specific evidence shows that unpaid carers frequently struggle to access respite and short breaks, and that support is often only available once carers reach crisis point. These issues are compounded in rural areas, increasing the risk of carer burnout and care breakdown[15].

Digital exclusion presents a further barrier for rural unpaid carers. Rural areas are more likely to experience poor broadband and mobile connectivity, alongside higher costs of access. As health, social care and support services increasingly move online, unpaid carers who are digitally excluded may face difficulties accessing information, booking appointments, or engaging with remote support. Evidence identifies unpaid carers as a group particularly affected by barriers of affordability, connectivity, and digital skills, with rural geography intensifying these challenges[16].

Unpaid carers in rural areas may experience greater social isolation, due to dispersed communities, fewer local support groups, and reduced opportunities for peer contact. Evidence from engagement across rural Wales highlights that carers can feel overlooked, with limited informal networks and reduced access to social and emotional support. Isolation can negatively affect carers' mental health and reduce the sustainability of caring arrangements[17].

If the impacts you have identified are significant enough to warrant a more detailed assessment then you should complete a full Error! Reference source not found.**, at annex C below**

Please explain your decision about whether or not to conduct a full rural proofing impact assessment.

Based on the evidence provide above a full rural proofing impact assessment will be conducted. The outcomes of this assessment will be considered when finalising the draft strategy.

2.5 Health

2.5a How (either positively or negatively), and to what extent (significant/moderate/minimal impact), will the Strategy impact health determinants?

The proposed seven priorities are expected to have an overall positive impact on health and wellbeing, with several priorities likely to generate significant benefits for unpaid carers across key health determinants identified in the Welsh Health Impact Assessment framework.

14 Sustainable Farming Scheme | GOV.WALES
15 Census (Wales) Regulations 2020: integrated impact assessment | GOV.WALES
16 Centre for Care - DIGITAL-EXCLUSION-briefing-Nov-2025-FINAL-resized.pdf
17 Llais Wales Spotlight on rural health and social care in Wales.pdf

There are anticipated positive impacts on mental wellbeing, with improved recognition, access to respite, targeted mental health support and inclusion in care planning reducing stress, anxiety, isolation and caring-related burnout. These impacts are expected to be significant for carers experiencing high caring intensity, including young carers and those from marginalised communities.

The priorities will positively influence social and community factors affecting health by increasing awareness of unpaid caring, strengthening support networks, and reducing stigma and exclusion. Targeted outreach and co-production approaches are expected to improve engagement among Black, Asian and minority ethnic carers and other under-represented groups, contributing to reduced health inequalities.

Positive impacts are also expected on economic conditions affecting health, particularly through income maximisation, benefit uptake and support to remain in or return to paid employment. These measures are likely to reduce poverty-related stress, improve financial security and support better living conditions, all of which are key determinants of physical and mental health. The extent of impact is assessed as moderate to significant.

Improvements in access to and quality of services are expected to generate significant health benefits. Timely assessments, involvement of carers in care planning and improved continuity of care will reduce unmet need, prevent crisis situations and enable carers to better manage their own health needs.

There are positive, though mainly indirect, impacts on lifestyles and living conditions affecting health, particularly through access to respite and breaks, which enable carers to rest, attend to their own health, maintain social relationships and adopt healthier daily routines. Cares Wales[18] has estimated that 40% of unpaid carers have postponed or cancelled their own medical appointments (GP visits, tests, treatment or therapy) because of their caring role[19]

No negative impacts have been identified in relation to macroeconomic, environmental or sustainability factors. Indirect positive impacts may arise through reduced reliance on crisis health and social care services and improved system sustainability as carers are better supported to maintain their health and wellbeing.

Overall, the Strategy is expected to contribute to reduced health inequalities, improved prevention, and better long-term health outcomes for unpaid carers, in line with the Welsh Government public health and well-being objectives. Unpaid carers are often unable to attend, delay, or cancel their own health appointments due to caring responsibilities, which can negatively affect their physical and mental health and wellbeing[20]. The Strategy includes respite as a priority and seeks to improve access to suitable respite options, including short breaks, working with local authorities to identify gaps and co-produce improvements with unpaid carers. It proposes that local authorities, Regional Partnership Boards, ADSS Cymru and the Welsh Government work together to review and improve respite care, provide clear information for unpaid carers, and continue support for the Short Breaks Scheme until 2029.

18 State of Caring in Wales overview | Carers Wales
19 Cares Trust - Nearly half of UK adults with caring responsibilities say their health has been impacted since caring, reporting new or worsening conditions[carers.org]
20 Nearly half of UK adults with caring responsibilities say their health has been impacted since caring, reporting new or worsening conditions | Carers UK

2.5b. Could there be a differential health impact on particular groups?

Age-related groups
There is expected to be a significant positive impact on young carers, who are at higher risk of poor mental health, educational disruption and long-term adverse health outcomes than their peers. Improved recognition, regular assessment and targeted support reduce excessive caring responsibilities and protect emotional wellbeing and healthy development. For working-age carers, positive impacts are anticipated through improved access to services, employment support and respite, helping to reduce stress-related mental and physical health conditions. Older carers are also likely to benefit from reduced caring strain, improved access to assessments and respite, with moderate positive impacts on physical health, social isolation and mental wellbeing.

Income-related groups
Carers on low incomes or at risk of poverty are expected to experience moderate to significant positive health impacts, particularly in relation to mental wellbeing, stress reduction and living conditions. Income maximisation, benefit uptake and employment support address financial insecurity, which is a key determinant of health. These measures are likely to reduce health inequalities by targeting groups who experience the poorest health outcomes.

Groups who experience discrimination or other social disadvantage
Positive impacts are expected for carers who face discrimination or social exclusion, including Black, Asian and minority ethnic carers, disabled carers, carers with mental health conditions and those with insecure immigration or housing status. Targeted outreach, culturally appropriate information and increased professional awareness help reduce barriers to access, improve trust in services and support earlier intervention. The impact is assessed as moderate, with potential to be significant where engagement is effective, though outcomes will depend on consistent implementation across services.

Geographical groups
Although rurality brings its challenges the aim of the Strategy is an improved offer of respite across all areas of Wales and consistency in approaches such as carers needs assessments

Overall assessment

Overall, while the Strategy does not create negative health impacts for specific groups, it is likely to have greater positive effects for those currently experiencing the highest levels of disadvantage. This differential impact is appropriate and aligns with the preventative and inequalities-focused intent of the policy, supporting the Welsh Government's commitments to fairer health outcomes and proportionate universalism.

2.5d Duty of Quality (Health) – Only if your policy has any impacts on the provision of health services or on health outcomes, will you need to complete this section of the IIA.

The National Strategy for Unpaid Carers 2026 has **indirect and direct impact on health services and population health outcomes** in Wales. Unpaid carers are integral to the functioning of the health and social care system; improving their wellbeing, recognition, and support contributes to improved patient care, reduced system pressure, and better population health outcomes. The Strategy for Unpaid Carers 2026 aligns strongly with the Duty of Quality and is expected to improve health outcomes by supporting carers' physical and mental wellbeing. It enhances the quality of care through better integration and partnership with carers, while reducing pressure on NHS and social care services

through prevention and early intervention. The Strategy also addresses inequalities and improves access.

It supports **safer care** by promoting early identification of carers across health settings, helping prevent crisis situations and safeguarding carers and those they support. Strengthened involvement in hospital discharge planning reduces unsafe discharges and readmissions, while improved workforce training increases understanding of carers' roles and reduces harm.

Clear, accessible information and national campaigns enable earlier intervention, reducing delays and escalation of need.

In terms of **effectiveness**, it embeds whole-system, evidence-informed approaches across health, social care, and wider services. Recognising carers as partners in care planning improves treatment adherence, coordination, and outcomes for both carers and those they support.

It enhances **efficiency** by reducing avoidable demand through prevention, respite, financial advice, and employment support. Improved discharge processes and increased use of preventative support help reduce admissions, improve system flow, and deliver better value for money.

The Strategy advances **equity** by targeting under-represented groups, including ethnic minority communities, young carers, and those facing digital or accessibility barriers. Inclusive, multilingual support improves access and outcomes.

It is strongly **person-centred**, embedding carers' voices in decision-making, care planning, and service design. Co-production and tailored support, including flexible respite and carers' assessments, ensure services meet individual needs.

In terms of **leadership**, it establishes clear responsibilities across organisations, strengthens governance through Regional Partnership Boards, and embeds accountability through monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

The Strategy also promotes a positive **culture** by increasing recognition of carers, reducing isolation, and fostering a more inclusive, supportive, and collaborative system.

It strengthens **data to knowledge** by improving identification and data collection on carers, using this evidence to inform planning, resource allocation, and service improvement.

It supports **learning and improvement** through embedded monitoring, evaluation, and system-wide learning, alongside continued engagement with carers to inform innovation and ongoing development.

A **whole-systems approach** underpins the Strategy, aligning health, social care, education, employment, and wider policy areas to address broader determinants of health and support long-term sustainability.

Finally, it supports the **workforce** by promoting how carers to remain in or return to employment, enhancing professional skills through training, and reducing carer burnout-strengthening both informal and formal workforce resilience.

2.6 Privacy

Will the Strategy involve processing information that could be used to identify individuals?

No

SECTION 3. WHAT WILL BE THE EFFECT ON CULTURAL WELL-BEING AND THE WELSH LANGUAGE?

3.1 Cultural Well-being

The National Strategy for Unpaid Carers is likely to make a positive contribution to both cultural wellbeing and the Welsh language by embedding Welsh-language considerations throughout carer support, strengthening the Active Offer, improving access to Welsh-medium services, and enabling Welsh-speaking carers to participate fully in their communities and caring roles through the language of their choice. This supports wider national ambitions for a vibrant culture and a thriving Welsh language.

3.1a Contribution to the goal to promote and protect culture and heritage and encourage people to participate in the arts sports and recreation

While the Strategy is not directly focused on arts, sport or heritage sectors, it makes a significant indirect contribution by seeking to remove barriers (time, wellbeing, financial hardship, access to information) that prevent unpaid carers from participating in cultural and recreational life, thereby supporting a more inclusive and culturally vibrant Wales.

3.1b Is it possible that the Strategy might have a negative effect on the promotion and protection of culture and heritage, or the ability of people to participate in arts, sport and recreation? If so, what action can you take to avoid or reduce that effect (for example by providing alternative opportunities)?

Overall, the assessment finds that while there are some potential risks which could indirectly limit unpaid carers' ability to participate in culture, heritage, arts, sport and recreation, such as variations in service provision, digital exclusion and workforce pressures, these are not inherent negative impacts of the Strategy itself but reflect wider system challenges. The National Strategy for Unpaid Carers recognises these risks and includes mitigating actions to address them. Its focus on improving early identification, access to clear information, equitable support, and the expansion of respite and wellbeing services will help reduce the practical and personal barriers that can prevent carers from engaging in community and cultural life.

By strengthening person-centred support and supporting carers to access timely breaks, maintain their wellbeing and remain connected to their communities, the Strategy is expected to enhance opportunities for participation in arts, heritage, sport and recreation. The emphasis on inclusive and accessible services ensures that carers are better able to take part in activities that support cultural vitality and social cohesion. Overall, the effect of the Strategy is positive, helping to reduce existing inequalities in participation and supporting a more inclusive environment in which unpaid carers can engage in and contribute to Wales's cultural and recreational life.

3.2 Welsh Language

The full assessment is available at annex E below.

SECTION 4. WHAT WILL BE THE EFFECT ON ECONOMIC WELL-BEING?

Supporting growth in the Welsh economy, and through this tackling poverty, is at the heart of the Welsh Government's Programme for Government.

4.1 Business, the general public and individuals

How (either positively or negatively), and to what extent (significant/moderate/minimal impact), will the Strategy impact business and the public?

The proposed seven priorities are expected to have a predominantly positive impact on economic well-being, with significant long-term benefits for individuals, households and the wider economy, and moderate positive impacts for businesses.

Overall, the impact on individuals and households is assessed as positive, with a moderate impact in the short term and a significant impact in the long term. In the short term, improved recognition of unpaid carers, clearer information on rights, and enhanced access to financial advice and benefits are expected to increase household incomes for some carers and reduce immediate financial stress. Support to remain in or return to paid employment, alongside access to respite, may provide early economic benefits for working-age carers, although the scale of impact will vary depending on caring intensity and labour-market circumstances.

In the long term, these priorities are expected to strengthen unpaid carers' economic security by reducing labour market exit[21], boosting lifetime earnings and pensions, and lowering the risk of persistent poverty. Supporting young carers should deliver lasting benefits through better education and employment outcomes. Improved mental health and wellbeing are also likely to reduce costs linked to ill health[22]. Overall, the Strategy is expected to benefit the public by increasing household resilience, reducing inequality, and lowering long-term public spending on crisis interventions and poor health outcomes.

Impacts are expected to be neutral to positive in the short term and moderately positive in the long term, varying by business size and sector. Over time, benefits include better staff retention, reduced recruitment and training costs, and improved engagement and productivity. Supporting unpaid carers to remain in or return to work also boosts labour supply and helps address skills shortages, with larger and public sector employers likely to see clearer gains[23]. Short-term costs relate mainly to implementation and coordination, while longer-term benefits include reduced poverty, improved productivity, lower health and social care costs, and more sustainable caring arrangements.

21 Carers UK - The 'tipping point'
22 The hidden cost of unpaid care: The economic price of locking carers out of work
23 Carers UK Supporting carers at work: A focus on health and wellbeing

On balance, the seven priorities represent a preventative and proportionate investment in economic well-being. They are expected to deliver significant long-term benefits for unpaid carers, households, employers and the wider Welsh economy, while supporting inclusive growth and reducing future public and private sector costs associated with ill health, unemployment and crisis-driven service use.

4.2 Public Sector including local government and other public bodies

How (either positively or negatively), and to what extent (significant/moderate/minimal impact), will the Strategy impact the public sector?

Based on the best available evidence, the seven priorities are expected to have a predominantly positive impact on the public sector, with moderate short-term costs and significant long-term monetary and non-monetary benefits. The overall balance of impact is assessed as positive when costs and benefits are considered over an appropriate medium- to long-term timeframe.

In the short term, local authorities may note increased demand as a result of increased identification of carers, increased completion of assessments and support planning. Health boards may also utilise more staff and commissioned staff time on identification and signposting of carers and involving them in improved discharge processes. Education providers may focus greater staff time on training and awareness raising to improve response to young carers. These impacts are largely transitional, reflecting a shift toward earlier, preventative intervention and are not new duties.

In the medium to long term, the priorities are expected to deliver significant benefits. Health boards may benefit from improved continuity and discharge planning, while local authorities may achieve longer-term cost avoidance through more sustainable caring arrangements and reduced escalation of need.

There are also important non-monetary system benefits, including improved service quality, stronger partnership working and better outcomes for service users. Enhanced mental health and wellbeing support for carers is expected to reduce long-term pressure on primary and secondary mental health services. Improved support for young carers is likely to deliver substantial long-term public sector benefits by improving educational attainment and reducing future reliance on health, employment and social services.
As public sector employers, health boards, local authorities and other bodies may incur moderate short-term workforce management costs associated with implementing carer-friendly practices.

However, these are expected to be offset over time by improved staff retention, reduced sickness absence and enhanced workforce wellbeing, particularly given the high prevalence of unpaid carers within the public sector workforce.

The priorities support a shift toward prevention, early intervention and system efficiency, aligning with broader public service reform objectives and improving the sustainability of public services in Wales.

4.3 Third Sector

How (either positively or negatively), and to what extent (significant/moderate/minimal impact), will the Strategy impact third sector organisations and what they do?

Overall, the priority areas of the Strategy are expected to have a predominantly positive impact on third sector organisations, with a moderate impact in the short term and a moderate to significant positive

impact in the medium to long term. The Strategy largely builds on and strengthens the role that third sector organisations already play in supporting unpaid carers, rather than creating wholly new expectations.

Contribution and future role of the third sector

Third sector organisations already make a significant contribution to achieving the aims of the Strategy. This includes delivering carer identification and awareness-raising, information and advice services, advocacy, peer support groups, income maximisation support, carer assessments (in some areas), mental health and wellbeing support, and respite or short-break provision. Many organisations also support young carers within education and community settings and work closely with local authorities and health boards.

As a result of the Strategy, the future role of the third sector is likely to be moderately to significantly enhanced. Increased emphasis on early identification, culturally appropriate outreach, co-production and community-based support is expected to increase demand for third sector expertise, particularly in engaging marginalised communities and providing preventative, non-clinical support. The impact is assessed as positive and moderate to significant, depending on local commissioning arrangements.

Funding implications

Many third sector organisations already receive public funding for this or similar work through grants, commissioning arrangements or partnership agreements with local authorities and health boards. In the short term, the priorities may place moderate pressure on organisations if demand increases faster than funding or workforce capacity. In the longer term, clearer strategic recognition of the third sector's role may support more sustainable investment, partnership working and alignment of funding with preventative objectives, representing a significant positive opportunity.

Impact on people receiving high levels of third sector support

The Strategy is expected to have a positive impact on people already receiving high levels of support from the third sector. Improved recognition of carers, clearer pathways into assessment and better coordination with statutory services should enhance continuity and effectiveness of support. However, without sufficient capacity and funding, there is a moderate risk of increased demand placing pressure on existing services. This reinforces the importance of proportionate resourcing and commissioning.

Delivery by the third sector

Several aspects of the Strategy are already delivered by, or are well-suited to delivery by, the third sector, including awareness-raising, outreach to marginalised groups, mental health and wellbeing support, peer networks, advocacy, and some forms of respite or short breaks. It is expected to result in a moderate increase in delivery responsibilities, particularly around preventative and community-based support, with positive implications for service reach and flexibility.

Volunteering

Some aspects of delivery rely on volunteering, particularly peer support, community outreach, and certain respite or befriending activities. The Strategy may lead to a moderate increase in reliance on volunteers, which brings benefits in terms of community engagement and social capital but may also create sustainability and safeguarding considerations. Appropriate support, training and coordination will be important to mitigate risks.

Community facilities and assets

The third sector often uses or manages **community facilities and assets** (such as community centres, hubs and shared spaces) to deliver carer support. Increased demand for services may place **moderate additional pressure** on these assets, but also strengthens their role as anchors for community-based preventative support. Overall, the impact is assessed as **positive**, provided capacity issues are addressed.

Overall assessment

Taken together, the seven priorities are expected to strengthen and formalise the role of the third sector in supporting unpaid carers, with moderate short-term impacts related to capacity and demand, and significant long-term benefits through improved recognition, prevention and partnership working. No significant negative impacts have been identified, though the scale of positive impact will depend on sustainable funding, clear commissioning arrangements and continued co-production with third sector organisations.

SECTION 6. SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY WHAT WILL BE IMPACT ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE?

6.1 The Socio-economic Duty.

Unpaid carers are disproportionately affected by socio-economic disadvantage. Caring responsibilities often reduce an individual's ability to enter, remain in, or progress in paid employment and can increase household costs. As such, unpaid carers represent a group for whom inequalities of outcome linked to socio-economic disadvantage are particularly pronounced.

Socio-economic factors can also impact access to support services. Time poverty, transport costs, digital exclusion, and availability of replacement care can create barriers for carers accessing services. Service redesign or delivery models that reduce face-to-face provision or increase conditionality may disproportionately disadvantage carers experiencing socio-economic hardship.

Unpaid carers in Wales face significant socio-economic pressures, as evidenced by Carers UK/Carers Wales and the Centre for Care[24.] reports that many carers experience rising financial hardship, with substantial proportions cutting back on essentials, falling into debt, and struggling to balance employment with often high-intensity caring roles, contributing to long-term income loss and reduced career progression. Research from the Centre for Care highlights a marked increase in carers providing 50 or more hours of care per week, limiting their capacity to work and exacerbating financial

24 Poverty and financial hardship of unpaid carers in Wales

vulnerability, while demonstrating the substantial economic value of unpaid care despite inadequate financial support[25].

Unpaid carers experience higher levels of stress and poorer physical and mental health outcomes, with impacts often intensified where carers also face deprivation, poor housing, or fuel poverty. Policies that affect access to preventative services, respite, or support may therefore have indirect socio-economic consequences.

The impacts of socio-economic disadvantage on unpaid carers may be compounded for carers who also share protected characteristics, including women, older people, disabled carers, and carers from minority ethnic backgrounds. There is a disproportionate economic strain on ethnic minority carers[26]. This interaction may intensify unequal outcomes.

The seven priorities reduce socioeconomic disadvantage for unpaid carers by improving recognition, access to support and long-term financial and wellbeing outcomes. Early identification, targeted outreach and timely assessments help prevent unmet needs from escalating into poverty or ill health, while recognising carers in care planning reduces crisis-driven costs and employment disruption. Support for young carers protects education and life chances, breaking cycles of intergenerational disadvantage. Income maximisation, employment support and access to respite improve financial security and reduce labour-market exclusion. Strengthened mental health and wellbeing support further enables carers to sustain caring roles alongside work, education and community participation.

SECTION 7. RECORD OF FULL IMPACT ASSESSMENTS REQUIRED

You have now decided which areas need a more detailed impact assessment. Please list them below.

Impact Assessment	**Yes/No**	**If yes, you should**
Children's rights	Yes	Complete the Children's Rights Impact Assessment below
Equality	Yes*	Complete the **Error! Reference source not found.** below
Socio-economic Duty	Yes	Complete the Socio-economic Duty Assessment below
Rural Proofing	Yes	Complete the **Error! Reference source not found.** below
Health	Yes	Refer to the Integrated Impact Assessment Guidance

25 Centre for Care response - Access to support for unpaid carers Welsh Parliament Inquiry
26 updated-briefing-on-ethnic-minority-carers-v2.docx

Privacy	No	Complete the **Error! Reference source not found.** below
Welsh Language	Yes	Complete the Welsh Language Impact Assessment below
Economic / RIA	Yes	Refer to the Integrated Impact Assessment Guidance
Justice	No	Complete the Justice System Impact Identification form on the intranet
Biodiversity	No	Complete the Error! Reference source not found. below
Climate Change	No	Refer to the Integrated Impact Assessment Guidance
Strategic Environmental Assessment	No	Refer to the Integrated Impact Assessment Guidance
Habitat Regulations Assessment	No	Refer to the Integrated Impact Assessment Guidance
Environmental Impact Assessment	No	Refer to the Integrated Impact Assessment Guidance

* Mandatory for all strategies in order to meet statutory obligations.

Please refer to the supporting information found on the Integrated Impact Assessment intranet page. This page contains a list of Integrated Impact Assessment Policy Area Leads & Experts who offer support for impact assessment. An early conversation with an internal expert advisor will set you on the right path.

SECTION 8. CONCLUSION

(Please note that this section will be published)

8.1 How have people most likely to be affected by the Strategy been involved in developing it?

Extensive pre-consultation engagement was undertaken in summer 2025 with unpaid carers across Wales, ensuring lived experience shaped the Strategy's priorities and actions. We met with 11 groups of carers from differing parts of Wales, ethnic minority communities, disabled carers, older and young carers and from other communities. We also met with, or received written contributions from 33 groups of carers and local/ national carer organisations and other stakeholder groups.

A period of public consultation was undertaken in February -April 2026. The Welsh Government received 130 responses to the consultation. Of these, 52 were from individuals and 67 were on behalf of organisations, with the remainder not specifying. Additional feedback was collected by Welsh Government officials at four workshops with carers, in person and online.

Children and young people were engaged directly through young carers' networks and national events, including the Young Carers Advisory Board. Their feedback highlighted the importance of involving young carers in decisions affecting them and ensuring support reflects their specific needs.

8.2 What are the most significant impacts, positive and negative?

The most significant positive impact of the National Strategy for Unpaid Carers is its potential to improve carers' wellbeing, and access to support through better recognition, earlier identification, and more consistent access to information, assessments, respite and mental health support. These benefits are expected to be greatest for carers facing the most disadvantage, including young carers, high-intensity carers, those on low incomes and carers from underrepresented communities. The Strategy should also help carers remain in education, employment and community life, while strengthening partnership working across services.

The main risk is that benefits may not be experienced consistently across Wales. Variations in local capacity, service availability and workforce pressures could affect access to assessments, respite and other support, particularly for carers in rural areas, those who are digitally excluded and those who have complex needs

.**8.3 In light of the impacts identified, how will the Strategy:**

- **maximise contribution to our well-being objectives and the seven well-being goals; and/or,**

- **avoid, reduce or mitigate any negative impacts?**

Effective delivery will depend on strong local partnerships and early identification of carers to ensure timely access to support and prevent needs from escalating. The Strategy's impact is strengthened through alignment with local policies, including child poverty, mental health, employability and digital inclusion, and meaningful co-production with carers. It supports children's rights through improved recognition of young carers and promotes equality by recognising barriers faced by women, disabled carers, ethnic minority carers and those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. Commitments to the Active Offer and bilingual services support Welsh language provision, while respite and wellbeing activities may provide wider benefits.

The main risks relate to local implementation, including variations in capacity, service availability and access. Effective planning, partnership working and monitoring will be essential to ensure consistent support and improved outcomes for unpaid carers across Wales.

8.4 How will the impact of the Strategy be monitored and evaluated as it progresses and when it concludes?

The impact of the National Strategy for Unpaid Carers 2026 will be monitored and evaluated through annual reporting, delivery planning and oversight by the Ministerial Advisory Group for Unpaid Carers. This approach will support review of progress against the Strategy's actions and ensure emerging challenges and opportunities are identified and addressed.

An annual delivery plan will set out key actions, priorities and expected outcomes for the year ahead, providing a clear framework for implementation and ensuring activity remains aligned with the Strategy's aims. Progress will be reviewed regularly to assess what is working well and where additional focus may be needed. An annual progress report will review delivery against commitments and measure progress towards intended outcomes for unpaid carers. Drawing on available evidence, data and stakeholder feedback, it will provide transparency and accountability, highlight good practice and identify areas where further action may be required.

The Ministerial Advisory Group for Unpaid Carers will play a key role in overseeing implementation. Drawing on the experience of carers, third sector organisations and key partners, the group will provide expert advice, challenge and scrutiny to help ensure the Strategy remains responsive to evolving needs and reflects lived experience. Overall progress will be assessed as part of an annual review cycle and findings will inform future policy development and support the next phase of support for unpaid carers in Wales