

Overview

- 1 Many older people make it possible for thousands of people to lead dignified and fulfilled lives at home.
- 2 Northern Ireland is an ageing society, and the number of older carers is expected to grow; between 2001 and 2011, the number of older carers grew by almost 17,000.
- 3 The Northern Ireland Census shows that 23.2% of unpaid care is being provided by people aged 60 and over.
- 4 Older carers in Northern Ireland contributed £1.02 billion to the economy through unpaid caring in 2012.
- 5 More support and services for older carers are required to better assist them in their caring role.
- 6 The level of uptake of Carers Assessments by older carers in Northern Ireland is low.

Background

Northern Ireland is an ageing society, with more and more people living longer and healthier lives than ever before. Older people make a positive contribution to many aspects of life in Northern Ireland, with many providing a significant amount of care for others who have been assessed by social services as needing care and support.

Older carers make it possible for thousands of people to live dignified and fulfilled lives at home, but they also make a huge contribution to the Northern Ireland economy. According to COPNI research, older people provided around £1.02 billion of unpaid care in Northern Ireland during 2012.

In Northern Ireland, carers are entitled to an assessment of their needs if they provide or are intending to provide regular and substantial care. However, there remains a low level of uptake of the Carers Assessment, despite efforts by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the HSC Trusts. The Commissioner identified the low level of uptake of Carers Assessments by older people as a priority for action in her Corporate Plan.

COPNI engaged with older carers and relevant organisations including health professionals in the



HSC Trusts and carers organisations in order to identify the reasons for low uptake and to make recommendations on how this could be improved.

Legislation and Policy

Government has become more aware of the important role which carers, including older carers, play in Northern Ireland. Policy and legislative developments have included making practical support available for carers, such as inclusion of respite for carers within care plans, investment in improving support services, and the introduction of the right for carers to receive an assessment. The table below sets out the development of policy and legislation in Northern Ireland since 1990.

LEGISLATION AND POLICY RELATING TO CARERS

1990: People First: Community Care in Northern Ireland in the 1990s

1991: People First Management

1995: The Carers (Recognition and Services) Act

2002: Valuing Carers: Proposals for a Strategy for Carers in Northern Ireland

2002: Carers and Direct Payments Act

2003: The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order

2006: Caring for Carers: Recognising, Valuing and Supporting the Caring Role

2011: Transforming Your Care

Older carers and Carers Assessments

What is an older carer?

A carer is considered to be someone who provides or intends to provide a substantial amount of care on a regular basis.

An older person as defined in COPNI legislation is a person aged 60 or over, and in exceptional cases, can be someone aged 50 or over.

What is a Carers Assessment?

All carers providing regular and substantial care are entitled to a Carers Assessment. HSC Trusts collect information to assess formally the support needs of carers. The process examines information from all the different aspects of an individual's life as a carer and provides the opportunity for that carer to talk with a social care professional about what could better support them in their caring role.

Carers Assessments in England, Scotland and Wales

England, Scotland and Wales have taken a slightly different legislative approach to the provision of information on and promotion of Carers Assessments. These approaches are based on the fact that the legislation in each country is worded differently.

- In Northern Ireland, the Carers and Direct Payments Act (Northern Ireland) 2002 places a requirement on the HSC Trusts to make sure carers know about their right to a Carers Assessment.
- In Scotland, under the Community Care and Health (Scotland) Act 2002 local authorities have a duty to inform eligible carers of their right to an assessment.
- In Wales, it is a legal requirement under the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995, and the Carers and Disabled Persons Carers Act 2000 that carers should be informed of their right to an assessment.
- In England, under the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995, social services within local authorities have a duty to inform carers of their right to request a Carers Assessment.

Whilst COPNI was concerned at the differential in the level of uptake between each country, it became apparent that a like-for-like comparison could not be made.

DHSSPS Definition of a Carer

A carer is defined by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety as the following:

"Someone who provides or intends to provide a substantial amount of care on a regular basis. The term 'carer' includes a person who may or may not be a relative and who may or may not be living with the person for whom they are caring. A carer provides help and support to someone, such as a family member, friend or neighbour, who may not be able to manage at home without this help because of frailty, illness or disability. A carer can be an adult caring for another adult, parents caring for ill or disabled children or young people of 16 or 17 years of age who care for someone. It does not include someone who is providing care by virtue of a contract of employment, a volunteer working on behalf of a voluntary organisation, a foster carer or anyone who is providing personal assistance for payment either in cash or kind."

An older person as defined in the Commissioner for Older People (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 refers to a person aged 60 or over and in exceptional cases as being aged 50 or over.

There is an inconsistent approach to the way the uptake of older carer statistics are collated and presented. This is further complicated by the different legislative arrangements as previously outlined.

Views of carers and carers organisations

- **Terminology:** The title itself "Carers Assessment" carries a stigma which creates a fear of the assessment having an adverse effect on other benefits or entitlements.
- **Self-identification:** People who carry out caring responsibilities do not always recognise themselves as carers.
- **A more carer-centred approach:** How the assessment of the needs of the carer is carried out needs to be improved and focused more on the needs of the older carer.

- **"Just getting on with it:"** Many older carers don't consider themselves as carers so don't ask for help and decide to "just get on with it."
- **Crisis intervention:** Although prevention and early intervention are promoted, it usually takes a crisis to identify an older carer.
- **Negative views or experiences of the assessment process:** Some older carers are reluctant to discuss the emotional impact that caring has on them or consider it an intrusion of their privacy.

Key findings: Older Carers

- Over 60% of older carers surveyed were not aware they were entitled to a Carers Assessment.
- 32% of older carers who said they were offered an assessment did not accept it.
- 18% of older carers were very dissatisfied with the administration of their assessment.
- 85% of older carers felt HSC Trusts did not understand the impact of their caring role.
- 70% of older carers had not been offered a Carers Assessment.

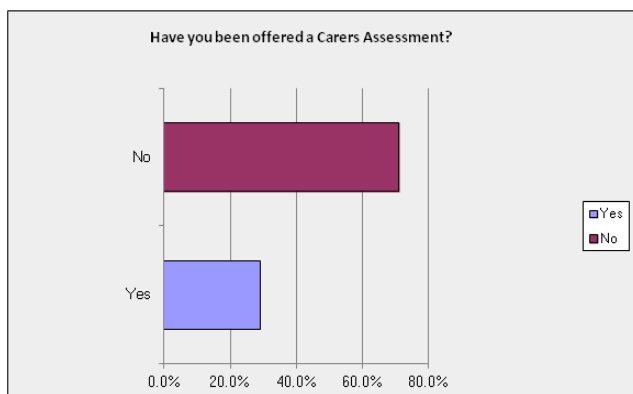


Figure 2: Response from COPNI qualitative survey, March 2014

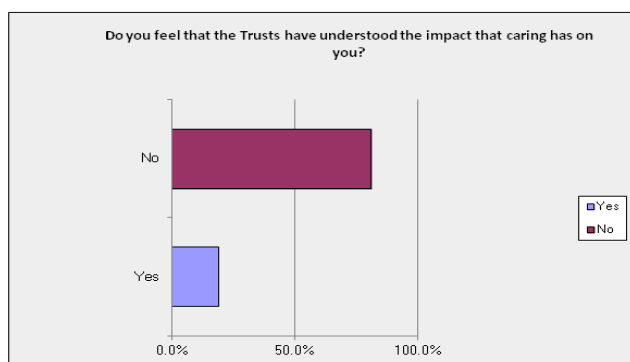


Figure 3: Response from COPNI qualitative survey, March 2014

The Northern Ireland Census 2011 revealed that there are approximately 214,000 carers in Northern Ireland. From this data, COPNI have calculated that 23.2% of unpaid care is being provided by people aged 60 and over.

Many older people provide a significant amount of care for others who have been assessed by social services as needing care and support. This report shows that the level of uptake of Carers Assessments amongst older carers remains low despite efforts by DHSSPS to encourage them to have an assessment of their needs. COPNI's research has identified a number of reasons for this.

The Commissioner's new research helps with understanding the reasons for the low levels of uptake of Carers Assessment by older carers and proposes steps to improve the uptake levels. The conclusions from the research are outlined below, and form the basis of COPNI's recommendations to government which are detailed overleaf.

Conclusions

- The level of uptake of Carers Assessments by older carers remains unacceptably low, despite a statutory obligation by the HSC Trusts to inform carers of their right to an assessment.
- There are no targets set for the HSC Trusts to help to identify older carers and to deliver on their statutory requirement.
- Many older carers do not recognise themselves as carers.
- More information and support would be welcomed by older carers.
- The process is viewed by many older carers as a "paper exercise" without tangible outcomes for the older carer.
- The administration process of the Carers Assessment needs to be carried out in a way that reassures the older carer and is flexible to their needs.
- Fear by older carers that receiving a Carers Assessment is somehow linked to their benefits and entitlements, and could cause a loss of service or support, needs to be acknowledged, with steps taken to allay these fears.

Recommendations

The Commissioner is making a series of recommendations to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which could improve uptake of Carers Assessment by older carers:

- 1 **Clear targets should be set to significantly increase the uptake of Carers Assessments by older carers.** There are gaps in targeting and monitoring the number of carers being assessed and so targets for improving uptake of Carers Assessments by older carers should be put in place to monitor need and demand as well as unmet need.
- 2 **Older carers must be aware of the services, information and support that could better enable them to support people who rely on their care.** This should include public awareness campaigns using a variety of communication mediums to highlight what is meant by an "older carer."
- 3 **Older carers need an assurance that the services and support needs identified in a Carers Assessment will be met and implemented.** This includes high quality respite for the older carer, as well as information, training and emotional support. It is essential that the assessment is not merely a "paper exercise."
- 4 **Increased flexibility and support for Carers Assessment process.** Older carers should be able to undertake a Carers Assessment in a timely manner in a location that is suitable to them, and should be supported by a key point of contact within the Trust. There should also be a consistent review or reassessment process.
- 5 **Changes to Carers Assessment form.** The title "Carers Assessment" should be reconsidered, and the assessment process should be focused on practical help and services available to older carers. This should be accompanied by a commitment to providing that help.



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Transforming Your Care (TYC) (2011) marked a change in direction in health policy in Northern Ireland. TYC sets out that more people will receive more care at home. It is vital that carers are well supported with their caring needs and that their needs are both assessed and met. This policy direction and the increasing numbers of older people is likely to have an impact on both the number of carers needed to provide care and on the level of care being provided at home. Older carers make a vital contribution to supporting older people now and will continue to do so in the future.

Key proposals relating to carers include:

- A holistic and consistent approach to assessment of older people's needs across Northern Ireland and an equitable range of services;
- A policy review of Carers Assessments and more practical support for carers including improved access to respite provision;
- More respite and short breaks provision;
- Enhancing the support for carers to ensure they have access to services in their community which can enhance their quality of life.

Final word...

Older carers cannot be taken for granted. They deserve to be provided with the information, practical, emotional and respite support that they need. Increasing uptake of Carers Assessments will help identify what their needs are. Government must ensure that their needs are assessed and met to help them in their caring role and to ensure they can enjoy fulfilled lives, both as an older carer and an individual.

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