A guide for older carers in Scotland
What this guide is about

Caring for a friend or relative can be a rewarding and fulfilling experience. It can also be stressful and exhausting, but there is support available both for you and for the person you care for.

This guide looks at your rights to help, the practical side of caring and also the potential impact on your own life.
Are you a carer?

Many older carers do not see themselves as carers but see themselves doing what anyone would do to support friends or family. If you look after your partner, relative or friend who needs help because they are ill or have a disability, then you are a carer. It doesn’t matter whether you live with the person you care for, or for how long you help them.

There are different ways to be a carer. You might:

• live near a friend who has a disability and drop in every day to provide a meal and some company
• move in with a relative to help them after they have been in hospital
• provide 24-hour constant care for a close member of your family

You may have chosen to be someone’s carer, or you may have found yourself in a situation where you felt you had no choice.

If you are trying to decide whether to become someone’s carer, think about:

• the support you can actually provide
• how caring may change your relationship with the person you care for
• what support you will need for yourself – practical, emotional and financial?
• who else could help – friends, family or support from the local council or health board?
• what would change in your own life if you became a carer?

Your local carers centre can talk to you about what caring might involve and how you could best manage the changes to your life.
Rights and issues for carers

The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016

The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 defines a carer as someone who “provides or intends to provide care for another individual”. Since 1st April 2018 this has given new rights to carers in Scotland: if you are a carer you have the right to help with your caring role and also support to help you to look after your own health and wellbeing.

These rights to help from your council or, in some areas of Scotland including Highland, your health board are set out in the Carers’ Charter You can see the Carers’ Charter online at www.gov.scot/publications/carers-charter.

The council or health board must make sure there is a local information and advice service for carers which can advise about rights such as the Carers’ Charter, benefits, advocacy services, health and wellbeing, short breaks, bereavement support and care planning.
How can the council or health board help?

If you are a carer and you would benefit from support you can approach the council for the area where the person you care for lives and ask them for an Adult Carer Support Plan. They should arrange to assess your needs within a reasonable period of time.

**The Adult Carer Support Plan must include information about:**

- your personal circumstances and the nature of your caring role
- how much care you are able and willing to provide
- information about the personal outcomes that matter to you, so you can be a carer and also look after your own health, wellbeing and interests
- the support available locally
- the support you qualify for according to the council’s local rules
- a plan for what would happen in an emergency so everyone knows what to expect and what help the person you care for would need.
- if relevant, how you will be involved in planning for the person you care for to be discharged from hospital.

Some of the questions you may be asked for the assessment may seem quite personal and difficult to answer; you will need to explain what care you provide, what support you have and what support would help you.
You could prepare for the assessment by thinking about:

- how much time you spend caring
- the type of caring you provide, such as help with washing, eating, dressing or getting out of bed
- any care you find difficult for health or personal reasons
- anything you have to do as a carer which doesn’t seem safe
- whether you have time to look after yourself – eating, sleeping, looking after your own health, seeing friends and doing things you enjoy
- how caring fits in with your work and family
- any issues that may affect your ability to continue caring

If you qualify for help under their local rules, your council or health board should provide support: they may provide you with support or services or work out a budget you can use to arrange and pay for support for yourself.

The help you receive as part of your Adult Carer Support Plan should be free. If you receive other services, such as support with your own care needs, you may need to pay for these or you may qualify for Free Personal and Nursing Care.

If you are not satisfied with your Adult Carer Support Plan, or with how long it takes to be assessed, get advice about how you can use your council’s complaints procedure.

For information on local rules about who qualifies for help, how to complain or for contact details for your local carers centre, call the Age Scotland helpline on 0800 12 44 222.
Benefits for carers

The main benefit for carers is **Carer’s Allowance**. This can be claimed by carers who:

- spend at least 35 hours a week caring for a person who receives Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance care component (at the higher or middle rate), Personal Independence Payment daily living component (at either rate), Armed Forces Independence Payment or Constant Attendance Allowance.

- do not receive State Pension paid at a higher rate than Carer’s Allowance, as the two benefits “overlap”. If you receive State Pension and are a carer, you may receive more in other benefits if you claim Carer’s Allowance. Get advice about this if you think it applies to you.

- are not in full-time education or earning more than £120 a week 2018/19 or £123 a week 2019/20 (income such as an occupational pension is not taken into account as earnings)

The links between Carer’s Allowance and other benefits are complicated: a claim may increase your entitlement to means tested benefits such as Pension Credit or Council Tax Reduction but could also decrease the means tested benefits of the person you care for, so get advice if you are thinking of making a claim.

In Scotland people who receive Carer’s Allowance also receive **Carer’s Allowance Supplement** as an automatic 6 monthly payment from the Scottish Government.
Other benefits for older people include:

- **Pension Credit** for people who are living on a low income
- **Personal Independence Payment** if someone is under State Pension age and needs help with care or supervision, or has mobility problems
- **Attendance Allowance** if someone has reached State Pension age, is not already receiving Personal Independence Payment or Disability Living Allowance and needs care or supervision

For more information about benefits call the Age Scotland helpline or see Age Scotland’s **Benefits Maze** guide.

**Employment and caring**

If you are employed as well as caring for someone, you may need to ask your employer for flexible working arrangements which would let you work in a way that fits in with your caring responsibilities. You may also sometimes need time off in an emergency. You do not need to tell your employer that you are a carer, but if they know they will understand better if you need to ask for flexible hours or time off.

Get advice about your employment rights from your local **Citizens Advice Bureau**, see their advice website **www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland**.
Looking after yourself

Caring can affect you physically, mentally and emotionally, but when you are looking after someone else it is easy to overlook your own needs.

The things you can do to look after yourself are common sense, but you may forget to take care of yourself if your focus is on looking after someone else, or you might not have the time or energy to think about yourself too.

You should try to:

• eat properly
• get enough sleep
• have some time for yourself
• do something you enjoy, either by yourself or with the person you care for
• accept the support that is offered by other people; you don’t have to do everything yourself

If you feel that caring is affecting your health, speak to your GP or practice nurse. They may be able to help by:

• discussing ways to help you look after your health
• arranging appointments for you and the person you care for at the same time
• arranging for repeat prescriptions to be delivered to your local pharmacy or home
• making sure you are involved in discussions about the person you care for when you can be
• letting you know about support for carers which is available locally, including any options for having breaks from caring and having more time for yourself.

If your GP practice knows you are a carer, they are more likely to understand why you need a home visit if you have to ask for one.
Other support for you and the person you care for

There are services which can help you with practical problems:

**Care needs assessment**

You can contact your council for a care needs assessment which will look at support for the person you care for, whether the help will be free or what it would cost. You should also have some choice about how the care is provided. Under the rules for Self-Directed Support care may be arranged and provided by the council or Health Board, or you and the person you care for may be able to arrange some or all of the care yourselves.

Call the *Age Scotland* helpline for advice or see our guide *Care and support at home: assessment and funding*.

**Fire Safety**

The *Scottish Fire and Rescue Service* can visit the person you care for at home for a free home fire safety visit and can make sure your home is as safe as it can be.

Call **0800 0731 999** or see their website **www.firescotland.gov.uk**

**Care and Repair Services**

Care and Repair services operate in most areas of Scotland. They offer independent advice and assistance about housing repairs and adaptations to homeowners, private tenants and crofters who are aged over 60 or who have a disability.

For details of your local service call *Care and Repair Scotland* on **0141 221 9879** or see **www.careandrepairscotland.co.uk**.
Home Energy Scotland

Home Energy Scotland can give advice about benefits, grants and schemes which may help you make your home more energy efficient and improve your heating. Call 0808 808 2282 or see their website www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/scotland/home-energy-scotland.

Technology support

Technology known as telecare and telehealth can support someone to be safer at home.

The Disabled Living Foundation has information about telecare and telehealth. Call 0300 999 0004 or see their websites www.dlf.org.uk and www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk.

The Scottish Government and NHS24 have created an online Telecare self-check tool. You will be asked a few simple questions about your situation, and it will give you advice and information about telecare based on your answers. Access the tool at www.telecareselfcheck.scot.

Travelling

If you need to travel by bus with the person you care for and they qualify for free travel, you may be entitled to free travel too. Financial help may also be available to you or the person you care for. The charity Turn2us has information about a wide range of charities and what they will fund. Phone 0808 802 2000 or see www.turn2us.org.uk.

Financial help

Financial help may also be available from veterans' organisations or from charities which support people who used to have a particular trade or occupation.

Specialist advice

Specialist advice is available from many charities which focus on the needs of people living with a particular health issue or disability such as dementia or stroke.
Power of Attorney and Guardianship

If someone has the mental capacity to do so they can grant a Continuing Power of Attorney to someone they trust who can then support them to manage their money, either straight way, or only if in future they lose the ability to do this for themselves.

Granting a Welfare Power of Attorney gives someone the ability to make decisions about your welfare if in future you lose the ability to do this for yourself.

If the person you care for has appointed you as their Power of Attorney, you will have legal responsibilities to them as well as caring responsibilities.

If you do not have Power of Attorney for the person you care for you have no automatic right to make decisions about their life or to help them manage their money, so if they have mental capacity to do so, it is a good idea for them set to this up. Call the Age Scotland helpline for advice or see our Guide to Power of Attorney in Scotland.

If the person you care for does not have the mental capacity to grant Power of Attorney, you may need to apply to court for Guardianship to gain the power to make decisions about their money and welfare. The process involved in becoming a Guardian can be costly and may take some time.

For more information on the application process and costs contact the Office of the Public Guardian in Scotland www.publicguardian-scotland.gov.uk or call 01324 678 300.
If you care for a younger person

If you are looking after a younger family member who has care needs, it is a good idea to plan for how they could be looked after if you are less able to provide their care yourself in future, or if their care needs increased so you struggled to look after them even with a care plan in place.

Your local carers centre will be able to talk you through the things you may need to think about and, if possible, discuss them with the person you care for.

You could ask the person you care for about:

- who they would like to help them if you could not support them all the time
- who they would like to deal with official agencies for them if you could not do this for them
- where they would like to live if you could not look after them anymore

You could work with them to make a record of the care you provide, including describing a normal day and their likes and dislikes, what they enjoy, what they find difficult and how they can be supported to manage difficult situations.

You should ask a solicitor how you can ensure that the person you care for is as safe and secure as possible after your death, including issues of money, care, housing and support.
When your caring role changes

If you can no longer provide the help the person you care for needs, you will need to look at other ways of keeping them safe.

You could look at:

- making sure they have a care needs assessment from the local council which reflects their current needs
- having a new or updated Adult Care and Support Plan for yourself
- whether moving to sheltered housing would help them
- whether moving to a care home is the best way of meeting their care needs

See Age Scotland’s guides Care and support at home: assessment and funding, Housing options and Care homes for more information.

If the person you care for dies, try to give yourself time to come to terms with the changes this brings in your life. As well as being bereaved, you may suddenly lose the contact you had with other people involved in their care and the structure of your day. You may need to re-establish contact with family or friends if you have become isolated.
Useful organisations

**Age Scotland Helpline** 0800 12 44 222 provides information, friendship and advice to older people, their relatives and carers.

If you need an interpreter call 0800 12 44 222 and simply state the language you need e.g. Polish or Urdu. Stay on the line for a few minutes and the Age Scotland helpline staff will do the rest.

**Carers Trust** is a charity working with a network of local carers centres. They offer support to carers, including information and advice, respite breaks and training. Tel: 0300 772 7701 / www.carers.org

**Carers UK** is a charity which provides advice and information to carers, as well as support through local carers’ groups. Tel: 0808 808 7777 (Mondays and Tuesdays 10am - 4pm) www.carersuk.org/scotland

**Care Information Scotland** is a Scottish Government website which provides information and advice if you look after someone, need care yourself or are planning for your future care needs. Tel: 0800 011 3200 / www.careinfoscotland.scot

**The Coalition of Carers in Scotland** brings together carers’ groups and individuals to enhance the support available to unpaid carers and raise awareness of the issues they face. They have produced detailed information about your rights under the Carers (Scotland) Act: www.carersnet.org

Your local **Citizens Advice Bureau** (CAB) can help you to find advice and support. Find your local CAB by calling Citizens Advice Direct: 0808 800 90 60 or visit the Citizens Advice Scotland website and enter your post code: www.cas.org.uk/bureaux

**Disability Information Scotland** provides information about services and support available in Scotland. Tel: 0300 323 9961 / www.disabilityscot.org.uk
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