

Carers' Assessments

People with a mental illness benefit a lot from the care of those around them. Friends and family members often provide unpaid support and encouragement that could not be matched by public services. The caring role can be rewarding, but it also comes with pressures. If you are caring for someone with a mental illness, there are various forms of support available. One option is to ask the local authority to assess your needs as a carer. If you are assessed as having needs, services can be put in place to help you to provide care effectively. This could include breaks from caring or other forms of support.

KEY POINTS

- Your right to a carer's assessment is protected by law even if the person you care for is refusing help.
- You may not consider yourself to be a carer, but you will meet the legal definition if you provide substantial care on a regular basis to an adult.
- The assessor should consider your full situation, including whether you would like to work and what would help you to access leisure, education or lifelong learning activities
- Services can include access to short breaks, more care for the person you care for, access to support services and help with household tasks.
- Carers can also direct payments to pay for services they need for themselves.

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1. How do I get a carer's assessment?

Local authorities now have a legal duty to inform you of your right to a carer's assessment if they are carrying out an assessment for the person you care for, or if it appears that you would be entitled to one.¹ However, if this does not happen you can ring or write to your local social services which may have a designated carers' team. Alternatively if the person you are caring for is under the Care Programme Approach (CPA) then you could ask the care coordinator to arrange one for you.

In some areas, all carers' assessments for carers of people with mental illnesses are carried out by the local Community Mental Health Team (CMHT), sometimes known as the Recovery Team.

Who has a right to an assessment?

You will be entitled to a carer's assessment from the local authority if:

- You are over 16, and
- You provide or intend to provide "substantial care on a regular basis" to another person over the age of 18, and
- The local authority thinks that the person you care for could potentially receive help from social services, and
- You are not an employed carer or a volunteer from a charity, and
- You ask for an assessment²

You have this right whether the person you care for is receiving services from the local authority or not. However, the local authority will need to be satisfied that the person you care for has needs that could be met through social services in order for you to have a legal right to an assessment.

There is no definition of "substantial care on a regular basis". The amount of time you spend caring is only one aspect that the local authority should consider. There is no rule that says that you have to provide care for a certain number of hours a week in order to be considered a carer. The key question is whether you feel able to continue providing the same level of support in your caring role (this is called 'assessing the sustainability' of your caring role). For example, if the person you care for has regular crises which you have to resolve, the local authority should take into account the worry that this causes you.³

If there is more than one carer looking after someone, you are both entitled to an assessment.

How will the assessment take place?

Once you have requested a carer's assessment, social services should contact you to make arrangements to carry out the assessment. Local authorities may vary in how they conduct carer's assessments. Some may use an assessment form and others may simply have a discussion with you. However, a full and comprehensive assessment should always be face-to-face. If the person you care for is accepting services then often the same staff member will assess both of your needs. However, if there is any reason why you would like to be assessed by a different worker, then ask whether this is possible.

Can I take someone with me?

Yes. A friend or advocate should be able to accompany you at the assessment.⁴

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2. What should be covered in the assessment?

The carer's assessment should address what needs you have in your caring role and must also consider whether you would like to work or take part in education/training, and how much leisure time you have.⁵ The key focus is whether you feel able to continue to provide the same level of support in your caring role. The guidance on eligibility for carers' services is at the end of this factsheet.

It may help to prepare for your assessment to ensure that you are able to raise important points and ask for the support you need. For example you may want to consider the following:

- What care do you provide?
- Are you willing to continue providing care? Is there anything in particular that you would find difficult to keep on doing?
- Do you get enough sleep?
- Is your health affected? What is the mental, physical, emotional impact of caring?
- Are you able to get out and about?
- Do you get any time for yourself to do things you enjoy?
- Are finances a problem?
- Are your other relationships affected?
- Do you feel you know enough about the illness of the person you care for to help manage their symptoms at home?
- Are you worried you may have to give up work? Or would you like to work?
- Are you interested in training or adult education for yourself?
- Is the person you care for getting enough help?

- Do you feel that you know what to do in an emergency?

The assessor should not assume that you wish to carry on caring. Although you may continue to care *about* a person, you may be unable or reluctant to continue caring *for* them. If you feel unable to continue to meet some or all of the person's needs then the assessor should explore other options to meet the needs of the cared-for person.

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3. What kind of support can I have?

There is flexibility around what services can be provided, and it depends on your needs and what outcomes you would like to achieve. The kinds of services which might be available include the following -

- Arrangements for respite care to give you a break from caring.
- More services and/or activities for the person you care for.
- Access to a carer support worker.
- Emotional support from people who understand and access to carer support groups.
- Help with household tasks.
- Help with tasks during the day/night.

The assessment should be carer-centred and encourage you to think about what would help you maintain your caring role. Practitioners carrying out carer assessments are encouraged to consider flexible and innovative use of services which would help to minimise any negative impact that the caring role might be having on you.⁶

If the person you care for has refused services and this has placed a burden on you as a carer, the local authority could agree to provide services to the person you care for in order to meet your needs, provided that the services are not intimate.⁷

If you have significant long-term health problems or a disability, you should be offered a community care assessment in your own right.

You can find more information about respite care in our **'Respite'** factsheet, which you can download for free from www.rethink.org/factsheets or call 0300 5000 927 and ask for a copy to be sent to you.

Will what I say at the assessment be confidential?

If you would like to say something during the assessment that you haven't told the person you care for, just let the assessor know this. The assessor will keep this information confidential unless there are compelling reasons to disclose it.⁸

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4. Should I get a carer's plan?

Once all of your needs have been assessed, they should be recorded in a carer's plan.⁹ This will set out what your assessed needs are, what outcomes have been agreed, whether any services will be put in place to meet your needs and whether you will have to make a contribution towards the cost of these services.

Carers of people under the 'Care Programme Approach' (CPA)

Old Department of Health guidance, which has since been replaced, stated that carers of people who are under the 'Care Programme Approach' (CPA) should have their own care plans which set out:

- Information about the mental health needs of the person you care for, including information about medication and any side-effects which can be predicted, and services available to support them.
- Action to meet your needs.
- Information on what to do and who to contact in a crisis.
- What will be provided to meet your own mental and physical health needs, and how it will be provided.
- Action needed to access advice on income, housing, educational and employment matters.
- Arrangement for short breaks.
- Arrangements for social support, including access to carer support groups.
- Information about the appeals or complaints procedure.¹⁰

Subsequent guidance has not stated what should be included in care plans. However, it would be good practice for your plan to address the above issues. If your plan doesn't provide the information you would like, discuss this with the person who wrote it.

You can find more information on the Care Programme Approach in our '**Care Programme Approach (CPA)**' factsheet, which you can download for free from www.rethink.org/factsheets or call 0300 5000 927 and ask for a copy to be sent to you.

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5. Can I get Direct Payments?

The local authority can provide you with money which you can use to meet your needs as a carer. This is called a 'direct payment'. You can use a direct payment to purchase any services which will meet your needs as a carer, and which the local authority agree are appropriate. For example, you could pay for:

- Horse riding lessons to have a break from caring and get some exercise
- A washing machine so you don't have to go to the laundrette

- Money towards holiday costs
- A personal assistant
- Driving lessons so you can become more independent.¹¹

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6. Do I have a right to services?

Local authorities are not under a duty to provide services to carers but they should consider each request and must not have a blanket policy not to provide services due to resources.¹²

Your needs as a carer will be assessed based on the risk that is posed to you if they are not met, and each need will be categorised as low, moderate, substantial or critical (see the appendix for more information on what these categories mean). Local authorities can choose to provide services in any category of need but do not have to. However, if any risks are identified as 'critical' it is likely that these would need to be met because it will probably indicate significant risk to the person you care for and perhaps a risk to your own human rights.¹³

The law may change in the near future because the current version of the Care and Support Bill, which goes through parliament in 2013, would put local authorities under a duty to provide carers with services if the carer meets the eligibility criteria and if the service cannot be charged for.¹⁴

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7. How can I resolve problems?

If you are unhappy with the way your assessment was carried out or with your carer's plan, you should contact the person who did your assessment to discuss your concerns. If you cannot resolve the matter informally then you may wish to consider making a complaint.

You can find more information on complaints in our '**Complaints about the NHS or social services**' factsheet, which you can download for free from www.rethink.org/factsheets or call 0300 5000 927 and ask for a copy to be sent to you.

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Appendix – Eligibility bands

Eligibility for carers' services is based on risk to the 'sustainability of the caring role'. These risks are graded into 'critical', 'substantial', 'moderate' or 'low' groups, or 'bands'. The 'extent of risk to the sustainability of the caring role' means how much of an impact a lack of support has on your ability to continue caring.

Local authorities should consider whether they will meet the needs of people in the 'critical, substantial, moderate or low' bands, and the following excerpt explains what the different 'bands' of risk are.

Excerpt from the Department of Health's 2001 guidance document 'Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000. Carers and people with parental responsibility for disabled children: Practice Guidance' at pages 70-71:

Critical risk to sustainability of the caring role arises when:

- their life may be threatened
- major health problems have developed or will develop;
- there is, or will be, an extensive loss of autonomy for the carer in decisions about the nature of tasks they will perform and how much time they will give to their caring role;
- there is, or will be, an inability to look after their own domestic needs and other daily routines while sustaining their caring role;
- involvement in employment or other responsibilities is, or will be, at risk;
- many significant social support systems and relationships are, or will be, at risk.

Substantial risk to sustainability of the caring role arises when:

- significant health problems have developed or will develop;
- there is, or will be, some significant loss of autonomy for the carer in decisions about the nature of tasks they will perform and how much time they will give to their caring role;
- there is, or will be, an inability to look after some of their own domestic needs and other daily routines while sustaining their caring role;
- involvement in some significant aspects of employment or other responsibilities is, or will be, at risk;
- some significant social support systems and relationships are, or will be, at risk

Moderate risk to sustainability of the caring role arises when:

- there is, or will be, some loss of autonomy for the carer in decisions about the nature of tasks they will perform and how much time they will give to their caring role;
- there is, or will be, some inability to look after their own domestic needs and other daily routines while sustaining their caring role;
- several social support systems and relationships are, or will be, at risk.

Low risk to sustainability of the caring role arises when:

- there is, or will be, some inability to carry out one or two domestic tasks while sustaining their caring role;
- one or two social support systems and relationships are, or will be, at risk.

There should be no assumptions made about the causes of risk. Some carers may be at risk because of their age, health status or own disabilities. There are carers who are at risk and suffering stress related illnesses because of the condition of the person they care for. Many carers are at risk because they have become socially isolated due to lack of support for them in their caring role and this has led to the breakdown of key relationships and networks. Although these important factors are not built into the eligibility criteria, they will form part of the information to be gathered as a matter of professional practice in identifying the impact on the carer of the caring role.



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- ¹ The Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004 s1 amends the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995 and the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 to implement this in different settings
 - ² Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 s1
 - ³ Department of Health (2005) 'Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 and Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004 Combined Policy Guidance' at para 49
 - ⁴ Department of Health (2001) 'Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 Carers and people with parental responsibility for disabled children Practice Guidance' at para 60
 - ⁵ Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995 s 1(2C)
 - ⁶ Carers and Disabled Children Combined Policy Guidance Act 2000 and Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004
 - ⁷ See reference 3 at para 54
 - ⁸ Department of Health (2001) A Practitioners Guide to Carers' Assessments under the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 at para 53
 - ⁹ See reference 4 at para 56
 - ¹⁰ Department of Health (1999) National Service Framework for Mental Health, pg 72
 - ¹¹ Department of Health (2009) Guidance on direct payments for community care, services for carers and children's services, pg 75
 - ¹² Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 s2
 - ¹³ Department of Health (2010) Prioritising need in the context of Putting People First at para 100
 - ¹⁴ Care and Support Bill July 2012 (<http://careandsupportbill.dh.gov.uk/home/>) clause 19

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