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The cost of inaction in adult social care to improve support for unpaid carers and for the people they care for

Submission from Dr Nicola Brimblecombe, Assistant Professorial Research Fellow and Dr Javiera Cartagena-Farias, Research Fellow, all at the Care Policy and Evaluation Centre (CPEC), London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). CPEC is an established international research centre carrying out research on adult social care. Unpaid/family care is a particular expertise of both CPEC and Brimblecombe who has published widely on the topic

Unpaid care at higher care hours has both human and financial costs – the latter to both individuals and government. The costs of inaction to support carers, including by reducing their care to manageable and non-detrimental levels through support for the adult they care for, are many. In our study of young adult carers, using analysis of data from a large-scale longitudinal UK Survey (the UK Household Longitudinal Study, sometimes known as Understanding Society), we that individual young adults (16-25) providing care of more than 10 hours a week had worse mental and physical health and lower employment rates and earnings than young people of the same age without caring responsibilities. Female carers, those living in rented accommodation and those with lower qualifications were particularly affected. Estimated costs to government of young adults (16-25) providing care of more than 10 hours a week amounted to £1.48 billion every year in 2017 costs. This was made up of £497 million in forgone tax revenue; £357 million for welfare benefits; and £194 million for health service costs, mainly related to mental ill health.

Using the same data set but in a different study, we extended our analysis to estimate the costs, from the public budget perspective associated with all unpaid carers aged 16 and older providing care. This research estimated that the overall economic costs to the public finances of individuals providing unpaid care could range from 6.1 to 21 billion pounds a year (including forgone tax revenue, welfare benefits, and health service costs).

These human and financial costs represent the costs of not taking action in adult social care to improve support for adult unpaid carers and carers of other ages. This lack of action extends to measures that could reduce the care people provide though better support for the person they care for.

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