

## Hourglass Cymru's Response to the Welsh Government's Carers Nation Plan Wales Consultation.

20<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

### **Questions 1-6 were not applicable to Hourglass Cymru's remit.**

#### **Question 7: Do you agree with the suggested actions identified above?**

Comments: Yes, Hourglass concurs with priority one, outlined under the national priorities for carers. Effectively recognising carers and building awareness of their support needs is integral for the health and wellbeing of carers. Ensuring that carers are well supported and have effective training and recognition is also hugely important for those who carers care for. While the validity of caregiver stress as an abuse theory is still debated, this does not mean that measures should not be taken to alleviate its possibility.

Caregiver Stress Theory or Situational Theory suggests that elder abuse or mistreatment occurs when an adult family member caring for an impaired older adult is not able to manage caregiving responsibilities. The dependence of the victim on the caregiver is such that the caregiver has the potential to become overwhelmed and overburdened by the realities of caregiving and creates an environment where abuse and mistreatment is more likely to occur.

#### **Question 8: Is there anything more public bodies and their partners should do to identify and recognise carers?**

Comments: While support and recognition of carers and their needs is integral to effective care, Hourglass contends that there is scope for public bodies and their partners to do more to identify potential perpetrators or risk factors for domestic and elder abuse in formal and informal care settings. Early identification of alcoholism, drug dependency, depression and mental health issues in caring staff and informal carers is essential. Addressing and alleviating these risk factors with targeted interventions for carers may well be key to both support carers and prevent occurrences of abuse.

Stemming from the theoretical risk model of "caregiver stress theory," caregiver support interventions seek to alleviate the stress and burden of caring for an older person by providing key services. These might include meal preparation and housekeeping help, or day care, or broader caregiving help through education, teaching coping strategies or support groups. About 40% of carers for family members who have dementia have clinically significant anxiety or depression, and a number of others suffer from other significant psychological symptoms, suggesting a great need for mental health provision. Improving the psychological health of the carers will not only improve their lives but ideally the life of those they care for.

As well as initiatives that support daily care tasks, caregiver training programs, which utilise role-playing behaviours and similar methods, have been used to develop skills to prevent conflict behaviour with patients, or to learn coping mechanism in order to manage stress or to deal with difficult patient behaviour. While overall, academic appraisals of the success of such interventive and training services as a means of tackling elder abuse are limited, some studies suggest that the potential of onset of elder abuse may be reduced by such caregiver support interventions, while a number of articles support a reduction of anxiety and depression in carers associated with such programs.

**Question 9: Should the existing wording of Priority One be changed? If yes, how?**

Comments: No.

**Question 10: Do you agree with the suggestions above?**

Comments: Yes. Hourglass agrees with the suggestions above. Supporting life alongside caring is vital to ensuring the safety both of older carers and those caring for an older person. 'Caregiver stress theory' is often over-stated when looking at the causal factors' contributing to the abuse of older people. In any discussions around respite and carer support it is important to understand the abuse of older people as a predominantly structural issue, to do with relationships of power, control and trust, rather than an interpersonal issue solely emerging from caregiver stress.

However, discussions surrounding respite and support need to consider the risks of abuse; schemes working with carers provide a multiplication of safeguarding access points to disclose experiences of abuse, perpetration of abuse or suspected abuse.

The suggestions in the consultations go some way to meeting this need. In particular Hourglass supports the announced funding for counselling and emotional well-being services. However, firstly, the suggestions could go further in focusing on the different needs of older carers and those caring for an older person. We know that older people, particularly women, are more likely to perform informal caring roles and that Wales has the highest proportion of older carers. The national plan should reflect intention to consult with this group of carers, or organisations representing older carers on their needs. Secondly, the suggestions do not reflect the potential for normal respite and support programmes to be curtailed by the ongoing pandemic. Older people are the most at risk to the coronavirus and contingency plans need to be considered to put in place Covid-safe support systems.

**Question 11-14 were not applicable to Hourglass Cymru's remit.**

**Question 15: Do you agree with the suggestions above?**

Comments: Yes. Hourglass agrees that the provision of appropriate information, advice and assistance is key to a preventative approach.

In particular, the duty on local authorities to publicise information on how to raise concerns about the well-being of a person who appears to have needs for care and support. Any communication should include information about adult safeguarding and the signs of abuse, neglect, and harm and how to access support.

The consideration of the digital divide and digital poverty is crucial, and Hourglass is glad to see this raised in the consultation. We have taken care to highlight the best practice of the Welsh Government regarding the national social services safeguarding campaign. The message to 'make the call' spread by this campaign is indeed an example of good practice. The campaign successfully uses multiple medias, improving access to those who are not online. The initiative also usefully joins-up ideas of harm and abuse with adult safeguarding procedures, which for many older victims might be a more viable route to support than seeking refuge from abuse. Communications such as the above example could be tailored to target carers, further joining up the Welsh Government preventative approach.

**Question 16-24 were not applicable to Hourglass Cymru's remit.**

**Question 25: Do you agree with our intention to develop and publish a Charter for Carers?**

Comments: Yes.

A Carers Charter, as demonstrated by the codification of a carers charter in Scotland in 2018, can enshrine the rights of carers, place additional duties on local authorities and help carers self-identify as unpaid carers and know their rights.

Hourglass would want to see the charter reflect the additional needs of older carers. Rightly, much attention has been given to developing programmes and support for young carers. However, any charter would be well placed to develop awareness of the differing needs of older carers, who are more likely to a) not be in full time employment b) have caring needs of their own c) be at increased risk of harm, abuse, and exploitation than their younger adult counterparts.

**Question 26: Should the Charter describe national expectations of organisations supporting carers?**

Comments: Yes.

**Question 27: Do you think a Charter would help to improve the services you deliver or access?**

Comments: Yes.

**Question 28: Do you agree a Charter could help to reduce apparent geographic variation in services to carers?**

Comments: Not sure.

**Question 29: What other ways can we work with partners to measure the success of the national plan for carers?**

Comments: Not sure.

**Question 30-31 were not applicable to Hourglass Cymru's remit.**

**Question 32: We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:**

Comments: Hourglass is a UK-wide charity with a presence in all four nations. It aims to protect and prevent the abuse of vulnerable older people by raising awareness of the issues of safer ageing and abuse, encouraging education, and giving information and support to those in need. It has the only national freephone helpline dedicated to this cause, open Monday to Friday between the hours of 9.00am and 5.00pm on 0808 808 8141 for confidential support and information.

[www.wearehourglass.org](http://www.wearehourglass.org)

Since the first lockdown in March 2020 Hourglass Cymru has warned of a significant increased risk of abuse and neglect to the nation's older population. Our concern intensified with the findings from our February and June attitudes and perceptions polling data. We found that 143,000 older people in Wales have experienced abuse since turning 65. The survey also demonstrated poor recognition nation-wide of the signs and behaviour of neglect. This is particularly relevant in thinking about the impacts of care and support. We found that 2 in 5 of all those surveyed in Wales reported 'not attending to an older person's needs in a timely fashion' doesn't constitute abuse (41 percent). The implications of this to both professional and unpaid care delivery are significant and concerning for the older community.

Older people are in particular danger from increased isolation as normal safeguards offered by regular day to day contact with the outside world no longer operate. This creates an environment where abuse of older people is more likely to occur but is harder to spot. Every effort must be made to maintain the safeguards that protect older people from terrible instances of harm, abuse, and neglect.