# Consultation Response by Change Mental Health

UK Government: ***'Make Work Pay: employment rights for unpaid carers and parents of seriously ill children'***

August 2026

## About Change Mental Health

Change Mental Health welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

We are one of Scotland's leading mental health charities, supporting over 11,000 people every year across urban, rural and island communities. We work alongside people living with mental illnesses, their families and unpaid carers, delivering community-based services that promote recovery, prevent crisis and help people live well in their communities.

Through our direct service delivery, policy work and research, we see first-hand the significant contribution unpaid carers make to society, as well as the personal, financial and emotional pressures they experience. Many of those carers are themselves managing their own mental health while simultaneously balancing employment and caring responsibilities.

We strongly support reforms that enable unpaid carers to remain in meaningful employment whilst continuing to care for those they love.

## General comments

We welcome the Government's decision to review employment rights for unpaid carers and parents of seriously ill children. The consultation recognises that existing employment rights, although an important starting point, do not sufficiently reflect the realities of modern caring.

Change Mental Health believes that good employment policy is also good mental health policy.

Secure employment, financial stability, social connection and flexible workplaces are all recognised protective factors for good mental wellbeing. Conversely, being forced to reduce hours, leave employment or experience financial insecurity because of caring responsibilities can significantly increase stress, anxiety and poorer mental health outcomes.

Employment policies should therefore recognise carers as both workers and individuals, and acknowledge their wellbeing directly impacts the wellbeing of those they support.

## Statutory paid Carer's Leave

Change Mental Health strongly supports the introduction of a statutory entitlement to paid Carer's Leave.

We agree that unpaid leave alone is insufficient for many carers because affordability remains the biggest barrier to taking leave. Paid Carer's Leave would help carers remain in employment, improve mental wellbeing, support financial resilience, reduce stress on families and improve workforce retention.

From our experience supporting people with mental ill health and those who care for them, caring rarely follows predictable patterns. Mental health crises, changes in treatment, hospital admissions and periods of deterioration can arise suddenly. Carers therefore need employment rights that are sufficiently flexible to respond to these realities.

We support:
• A statutory entitlement that can be taken flexibly
• A broad definition of caring responsibilities
• Self-certification rather than burdensome evidence requirements
• Eligibility aligned with the Carer's Leave Act.

## Five days should be the minimum not the ambition

We support introducing five days of statutory paid leave as an immediate first step, with the ambition of increasing this over time to ten days.

## Extended unpaid leave with the right to return

We support proposals for a longer period of protected leave where caring responsibilities become particularly intensive. Providing job protection and a clear right to return would reduce permanent labour market exit while allowing carers to respond to periods of crisis.

## Parents of seriously ill children

We strongly support improved employment rights for parents of seriously ill children. Parents should never have to choose between supporting their child and maintaining their employment.

## Mental health considerations

Government should explicitly recognise the relationship between caring and mental health. Caring can contribute to stress, anxiety, depression, burnout and social isolation. Supporting carers' wellbeing also improves outcomes for those they care for.

## Employers

Introducing a statutory paid entitlement would establish a consistent national minimum standard while helping employers retain experienced staff. Government should accompany legislation with guidance, awareness campaigns and practical support for employers.

## Wider public policy

Employment rights should sit alongside investment in preventative mental health services, social care, respite provision and early intervention, enabling carers to remain economically active while maintaining their wellbeing.

## Conclusion

Change Mental Health strongly supports strengthening employment rights for unpaid carers.

Introducing statutory paid Carer's Leave would improve carers' mental health, reduce financial hardship, strengthen workforce retention and recognise the enormous contribution unpaid carers make to society.

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