

Can we afford **NOT** to care?

A good investment for a more prosperous Britain

Unlocking the potential of parents and carers within the labour force will increase the UK's productivity and competitiveness, by maximising everyone's potential and reducing skills shortages. 40% of mothers, 10% of fathers and 20% of carers have either given up or turned down a job because of difficulties combining it with their caring responsibilities.

Supporting Britain's parents and carers:

- Is good value for money - the unpaid caring work done by parents and carers in the UK is estimated to be worth £277 billion.
- Will generate higher economic output - providing universal childcare could be worth £40 billion net to the economy over the next 65 years, as a result of increased working and earnings among women and improved productivity.
- Increases businesses' profits and competitiveness - BT and the RAC have reduced costs and increased productivity by helping their staff combine work with their home responsibilities.

Support and choice for families to create a sustainable society

With increasing pressure on families, action is needed to help families balance work and caring responsibilities. The UK has an ageing population, a falling birth rate and increasing family breakdown. These factors, as well as labour mobility, lead to loss of extended family networks for many. Women now make up nearly half the workforce, but are five times more likely to work part time than men. Currently, opportunities for part time employment are concentrated in low paid, low status work. As a result, women working part time earn 40% less per hour than full-time men – about the same as 25 years ago.

- Enabling parents to better balance work and caring improves child welfare and family relationships, reduces stress and leads to better outcomes for children.
- Improving the status and opportunities for well-paid part time and flexible working will help to tackle inequality between women and men and to eliminate child poverty.
- Women's caring roles make it difficult to build up an adequate retirement income – a fairer pensions system, which better recognises valuable caring work, would lift millions of pensioners out of poverty.

A winner at the ballot box

There are 12 million parents and over 6 million carers in the UK – winning their votes will be decisive at the next election. In a recent poll, 68% of all adults said that a commitment to more policies to support parents and carers would influence their voting intentions and:

- 87% of parents think the Government should help more with childcare costs for parents who work and provide extra money to help parents spend more time at home during a child's first year.
- 90% of people think the Carer's Allowance should be increased to the level of the basic state pension.
- 89% of parents and carers support the right for all parents and carers, not just parents of young children, to ask their employer for flexible working.

The Parents and Carers Coalition is an alliance of 37 organisations and growing. The Coalition aims to highlight issues that affect millions of parents and carers in the UK today and seek a better deal for the future.



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A vision for the future

Just as in the 20th century, Beveridge's vision led to the creation of the welfare state and NHS with cross-party support, so the 21st century needs a step change in the way we support the modern family. Families need joined up services and support which they can rely on, wherever they live, and at different times in their lives. Some elements are already in place but a new **National Family Strategy** would provide:

- Quality, universal, community-based childcare and extended schools for children aged 0-14, affordable and accessible for all.
- A comprehensive, flexible care service infrastructure, to provide care tailored to the needs of the individual and the carer.
- Choice, with effective financial support and flexibility to families in managing their caring and working roles, including an improved framework of paid leave for mothers, fathers and carers, better access to flexible working and no pension penalties.

For the short term, the Parents and Carers Coalition proposes **nine steps** towards the new strategy. These measures, aimed at increasing choice and opportunities, tailored to a family's key life stages, would build a better Britain, not only for families, but also for business and society as a whole.

When children are born

1. As the next step towards flexible, paid parental leave for the early years, **increase statutory paid maternity leave** so that all women can afford to take it. Options might include raising statutory maternity pay close to previous earnings, and/or extending the period of paid leave from six months to one year.

2. Increase statutory paid paternity leave to give more fathers the opportunity to play a greater part in caring. Options might include raising statutory paternity pay close to previous earnings, and/or extending the length of paid paternity leave from two to six weeks on a flexible basis. The second 6 months of maternity leave should be opened up to both parents to be taken flexibly.

When parents and carers want to work

3. As a step towards universal childcare, **make childcare truly affordable**, free for families on low incomes and accessible to disabled children.

4. Invest in a quality, well-trained, well-paid and diverse **care workforce** focused on the welfare of children and those in need of care.

5. Give all parents and carers the right to request flexible working, so they can combine paid employment with caring, if they choose.

6. Develop advice and information services to help parents and carers returning to work and to help employers maximise the potential of their workforce.

For carers

7. Raise the level of Carer's Allowance to at least the level of the Basic State Pension; introduce a tax credit for carers to enable more people to combine caring with paid employment.

8. Invest in the care infrastructure to provide quality, affordable and flexible services.

And when they retire

9. Remodel the state pension system to ensure that parents and carers are entitled to an adequate pension.

Make this your strategy

We urge all political parties to embrace this strategy and make specific pledges ahead of the next election to ensure that parents and carers get the support they deserve.



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Equal Opportunities Commission Helpline 0845 601 5901

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Interpreting service available for callers to the Helpline

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