

**Rotherham residents
who care for loved
ones - are they
getting the support
they need?**



About us

Healthwatch Rotherham:

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Rotherham. We are here to make sure that those running services put people at the heart of care.

Our sole purpose is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak out on their behalf. We focus on ensuring that peoples' worries and concerns about current services are addressed and work to get services right for the future.

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What we did:

Healthwatch Rotherham were approached by Rotherham Council in March 2023 regarding support to engage with unpaid carers in Rotherham. Over 30,000 people are providing unpaid care in Rotherham, often alongside employment, family life and other commitments. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted how important unpaid carers are and how they were affected by the pandemic, both socially and economically. The council has created a strategic framework for the next 3 years to ensure carers in Rotherham stay mentally and physically healthy, working with colleagues across the council, health and voluntary sector to develop this.

The Council wanted to hear directly from Rotherham residents about their experiences as unpaid carers, what support they were currently accessing and what support they wished they could access to help further inform the strategy for carers. All feedback collected by Healthwatch would then be fed back to Rotherham Council and used to help shape the carers strategy.

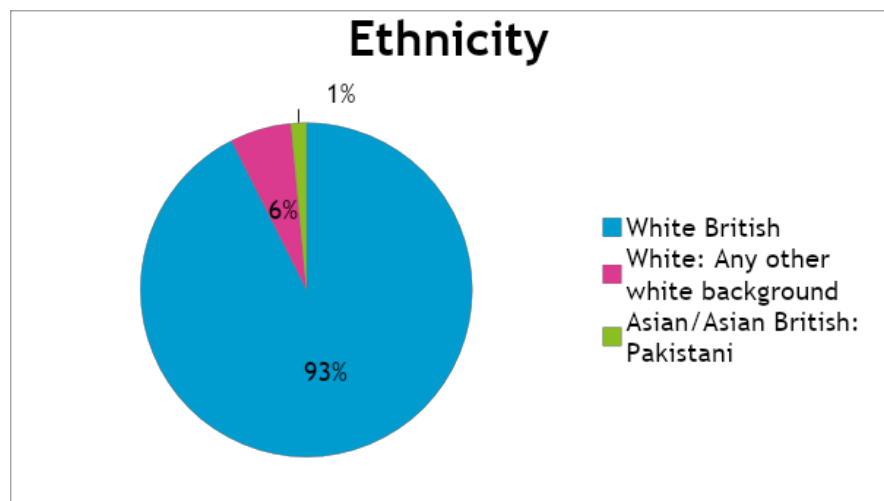
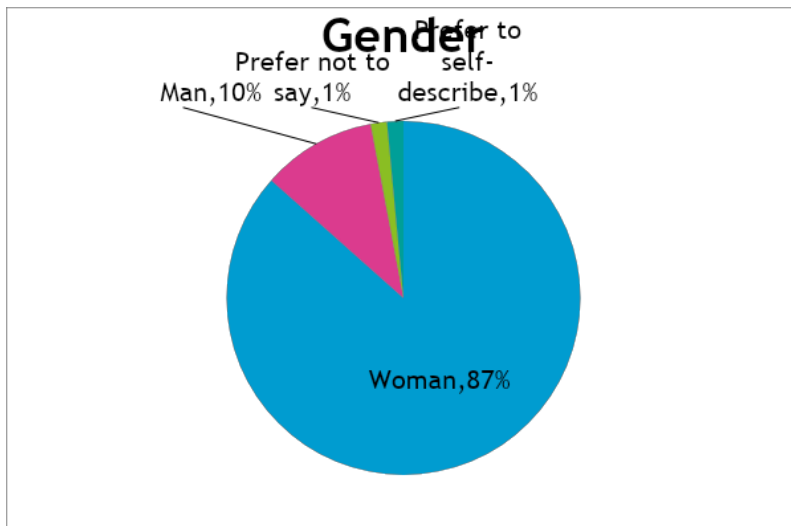
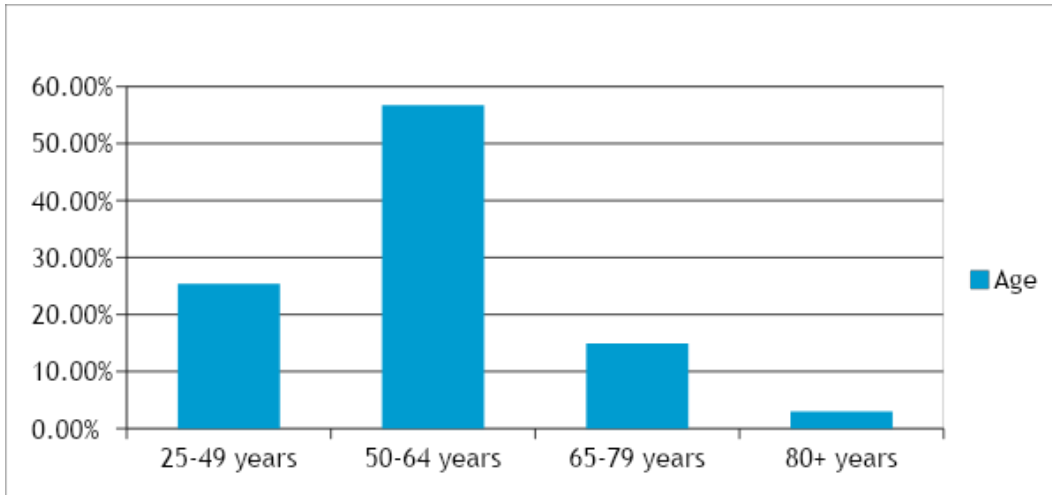
In particular, Healthwatch wanted to hear from those who looked after loved ones/friends, but did not class themselves as a carer. There are many people in Rotherham who are unpaid carers by definition, but do not define themselves as this, particularly if they are looking after a partner or close family member. They view it as their duty. Due to this, they are missing out on vital support and help, reaching crisis point before talking to someone. Healthwatch wanted to target this audience particularly, in order for them to access the help and support needed before they could not cope anymore and the situation became critical.

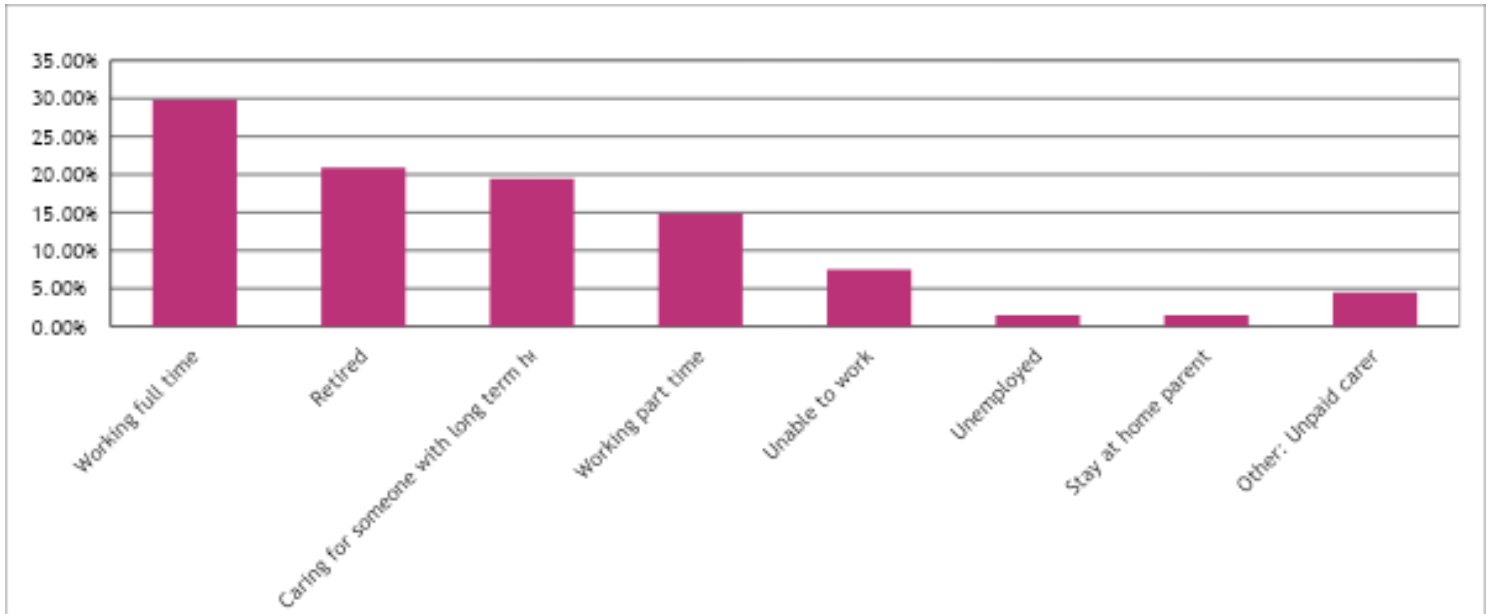
In partnership with the council, Healthwatch designed a digital survey using “Smart Survey” which consisted of 27 questions. The survey was open to Rotherham residents to share their experiences and views anonymously with us. Healthwatch also provided the survey in physical formats, so those who did not have access to the internet could still get involved. The survey was shared on social media, with partner organisations in Rotherham, in the Healthwatch newsletter and website. Our engagement officer Andrea also attended various services in Rotherham to speak with service users directly about their opinions and experiences and assist them in completing the survey. We also networked at Rotherham Show in September 2023 to speak with the public and other services. The project ran for 5 months and 67 detailed responses were collected.

The findings from our survey can be found below. Recommendations, comments and feedback have been shared with the Council to help shape their future Carers Strategy in Rotherham.

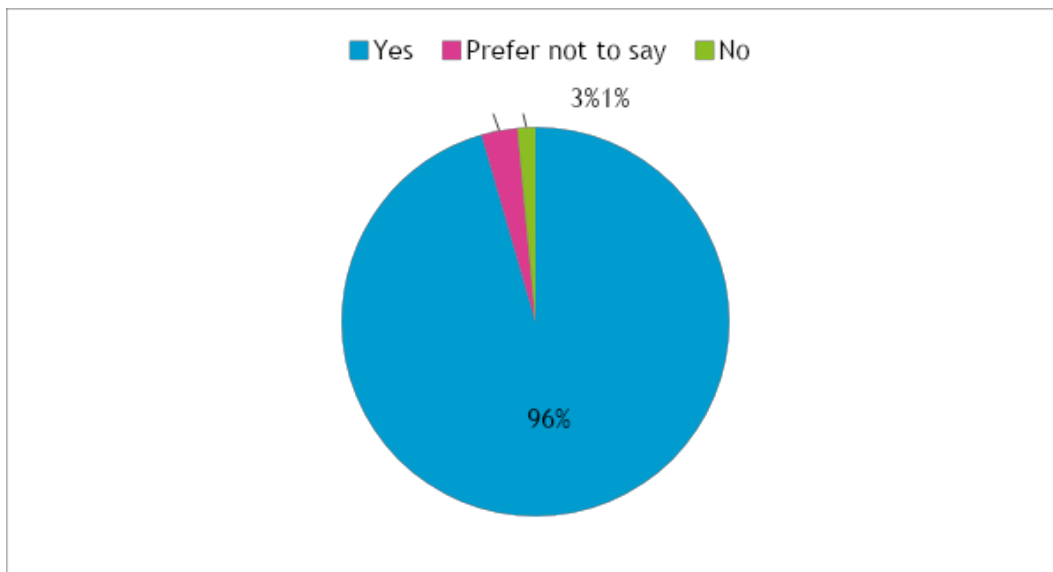
Findings:

Demographics:

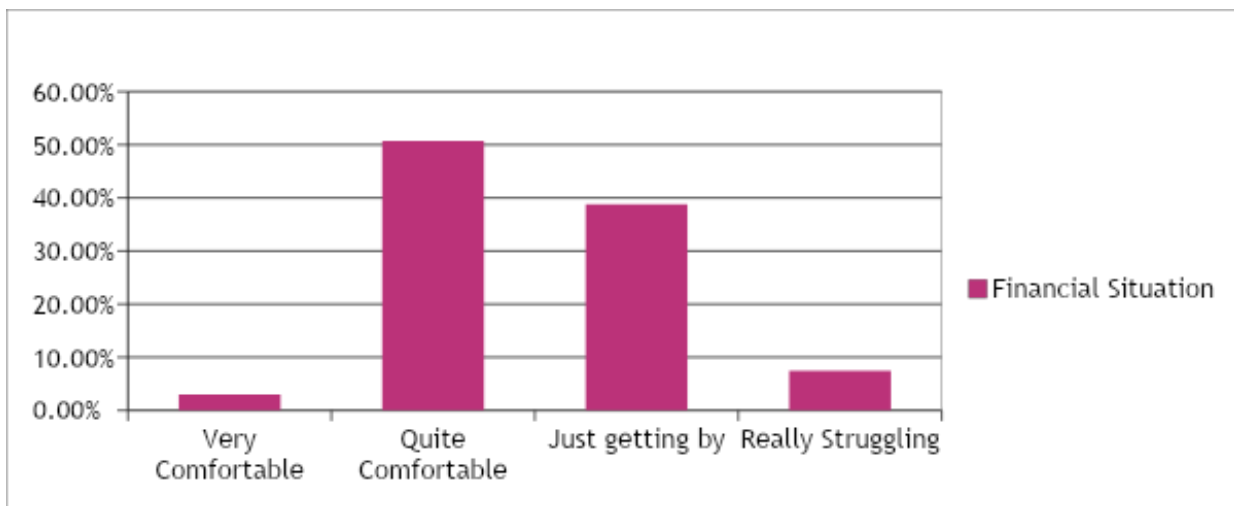




Do you consider yourself to be a carer?



Almost every person we spoke to classed themselves as a carer. Some people believed it was just their duty, but did recognise that they were caring for someone else after speaking with us.

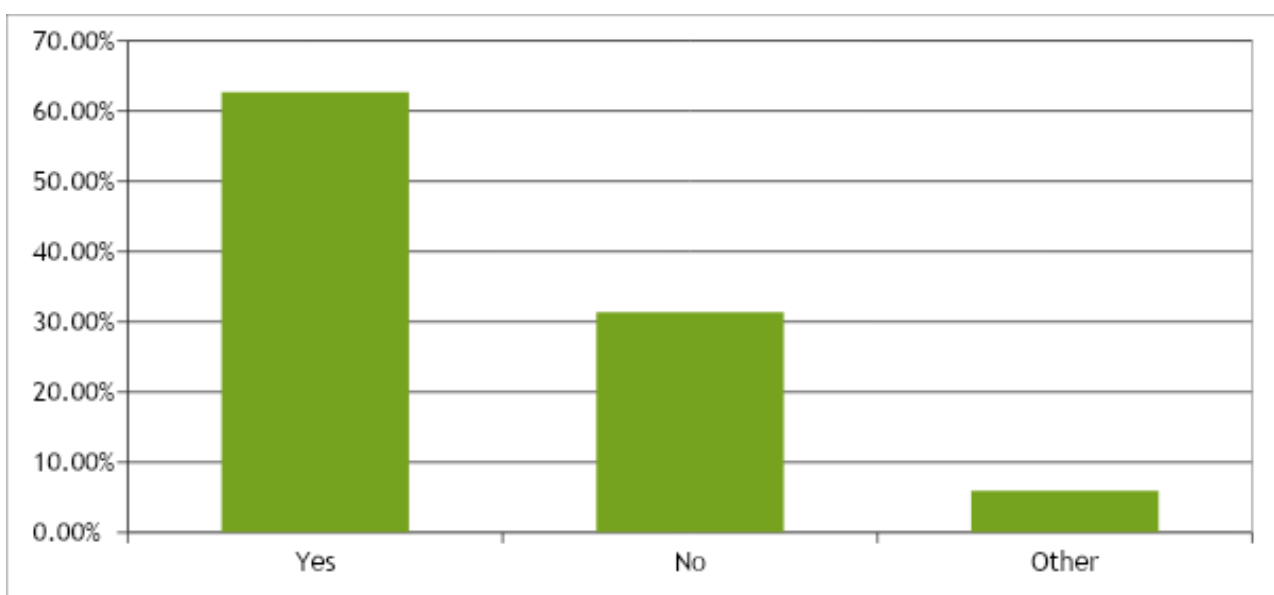


There was quite a contrast of responses when we asked people what their financial situation was, with 50% of carers living quite comfortably, and almost 40% of people only just getting by.

Additionally, almost 80% of respondents said they had become more worried about living costs in the past 6 months.

We then asked carers whether they have attended a dentist or GP appointment in the past 12 months. This was to determine whether people were missing vital medical appointments themselves because they had no time to attend due to being a carer. We found that for those who did not attend a dentist, almost half said it was due to not being registered with a dentist/unable to obtain an appointment. For those who did not attend a GP appointment, the main response was that a GP appointment was not required/difficulty in obtaining an appointment.

Have you attended a dentist appointment in the past 12 months?



“Due to caring responsibilities I was kicked off the NHS list”

“Yes but as a private patient only”

If you have not attended a dentist appointment in the past 12 months, why is this?

Not registered with a dentist - 41.67%

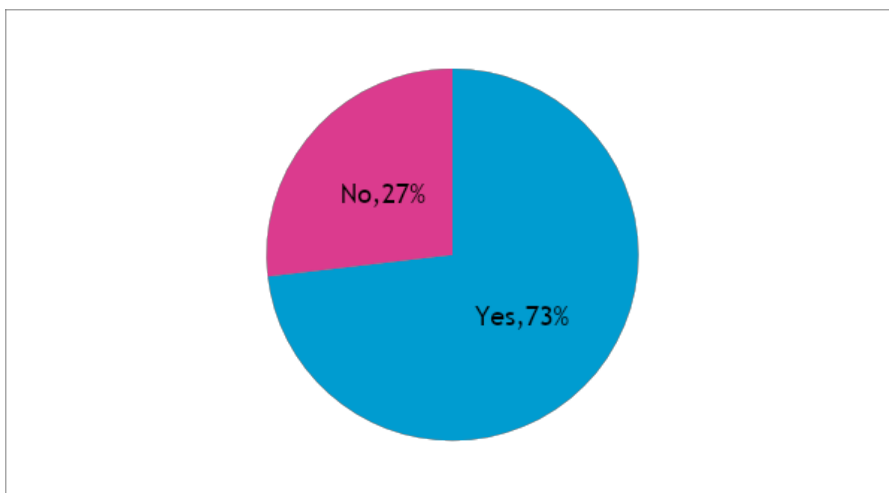
Did not have time - 33.33%

Could not get an appointment - 12.50%

Other: - 25%

- “Costs too much”
- “Can’t find a dentist accepting NHS patients”

Have you attended a GP appointment in the past 12 months?



If no, why is this?

Did not need an appointment - 47.37%

Not able to book an appointment - 31.58%

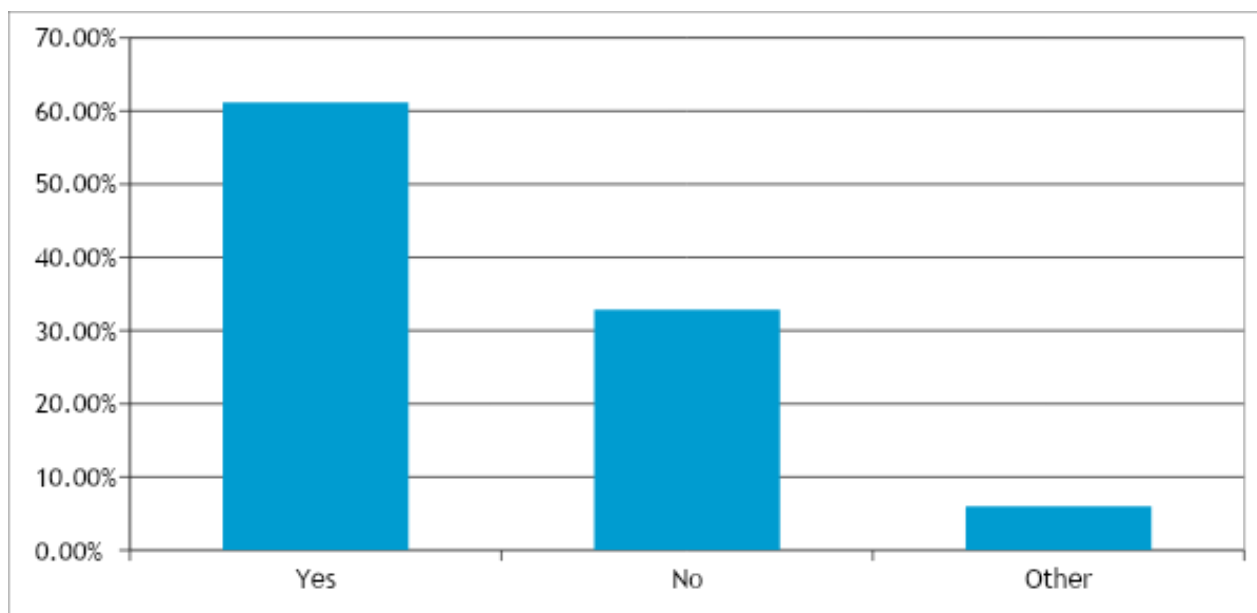
Have not had time to make or attend an appointment - 10.53%

Not registered with a GP surgery in Rotherham - 5.26%

Other: - 5.26%

- “Don’t want to waste anyone’s time”

Are you registered with your GP as a carer?



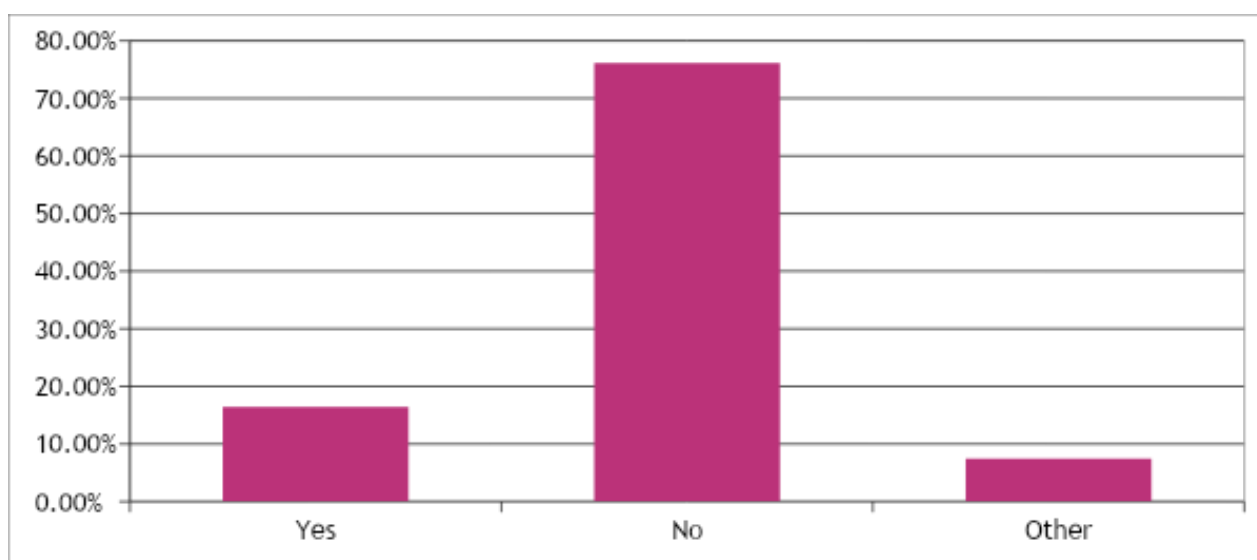
“I didn’t know you could register with your GP as a carer”

“They have never asked about my circumstances”

“Wasn’t told I had to”

If you are providing care to your family/friends/neighbours which is having impact on your health and wellbeing, you are entitled to the Carer Care Act Assessment from your Local Authority - have you had the Carers Assessment?

Just over ¼ of people we spoke to have not had a Carers Assessment from their local authority. Many said they are still waiting for a review, or that they requested one but were told they were not eligible for it. For those who had received the Carers Assessment, many felt that it was unhelpful.



“My son lives in supported living and I couldn’t have one because he doesn’t live with me”

“I had one four years ago but it has not been reviewed/updated since then”

“I am still waiting for a review. Have been told it is just a tick box exercise anyway”

“I asked for one but they said it wasn’t needed as we both work full time”

“Don’t know what this is and whether it would be useful or not”

“Not for years and it seemed pointless and unhelpful when I had it. It felt like lip service only. The needs of carers do not matter”

“No one tells you this is available, you ring and tell them you are struggling, no one does anything or even rings you back when promised. All adds to the stress of it all”

Are you aware that there is help and support for you and the person you look after/care for in Rotherham?

40% of unpaid carers in Rotherham are not aware of what help and support is available for them and/or the person they look after

For the 60% that were aware of help and support available to them, **50% of those did not access any of these services.**

“Not aware what help there is for me”

“All help and support has gone in Rotherham except for Beacon”

“The support for carers is limited and support for my partner who has a brain injury is almost non-existent”

“Support is limited for working carers that support a person with mental health issues”

“The support for carers in Rotherham does not meet my needs”

What help and support have you accessed?

Support services mentioned:

- Beacon
- Crossroads Care
- Sight and Sound
- GP
- Social prescribers
- Support worker
- Counselling
- Respite care

If 'No', why not?

- “Don't know where to start when finding help”
- “Haven't been offered anything”
- “Not sure how to access services”
- “Help not currently required”
- “Don't have the time between working and caring”

“I didn't know about it. No one tells you what's available, you are left to struggle dealing with everything.”

Is there anything you think could be improved about the help and support you have accessed in Rotherham?

The most common comment was around “information”. People in Rotherham want more information available to them about help and support that is available, as many are unsure what is available, who is entitled to it and how they access it. In addition to this, many carers want more support available to them; whether this is through local support groups or more specialised support for the people they care for.

Information:

“To know what is available, especially for elderly people”

“I don't have a smartphone, so can't get information this way”

“A carer support information pack - sent automatically to a person identified as a carer”

“More information online about support for carers”

“More information sent out to people”

“More knowledge for carers”

Groups/Support:

“I don't think people really have an understanding of what carers go through on a day to day basis, it's completely physically and mentally exhausting. I would like more opportunities to “Talk” with someone about how I'm feeling, someone who will just sit and listen to me. Also, more groups to meet people who feel and experience what I do”

“More classes and group outings”

“Regular groups for people with dementia to attend”

“More help in autistic services”

“Carers groups where you can talk about issues regarding caring”

“More support in the Dinnington area, as it is all a drive to access support”

“More support for carers of people with mental health issues”

“More support for those who are employed, not just those on benefits”

“Link up services and agree actions for all. Make sure all services involved knows each other’s roles”

“Carer group’s to be centred on carer needs”

What are your current greatest needs as a carer/person looking after a loved one?

We then asked people what their current greatest needs were as a carer. We got many different answers, with the top 4 being:

1. **Better recognition from local service providers of my role as an unpaid carer - 52.24%**
2. **More health and wellbeing support for myself - 49.25%**
3. **More mental health support for myself - 46.27%**
4. **More information about local services I can access - 44.78%**

Better quality care for the person I am caring for - 37.31%

More financial support - 35.82%

Information on what financial support I am entitled to as an unpaid carer - 32.84%

Access to support groups for myself to reduce isolation - 29.85%

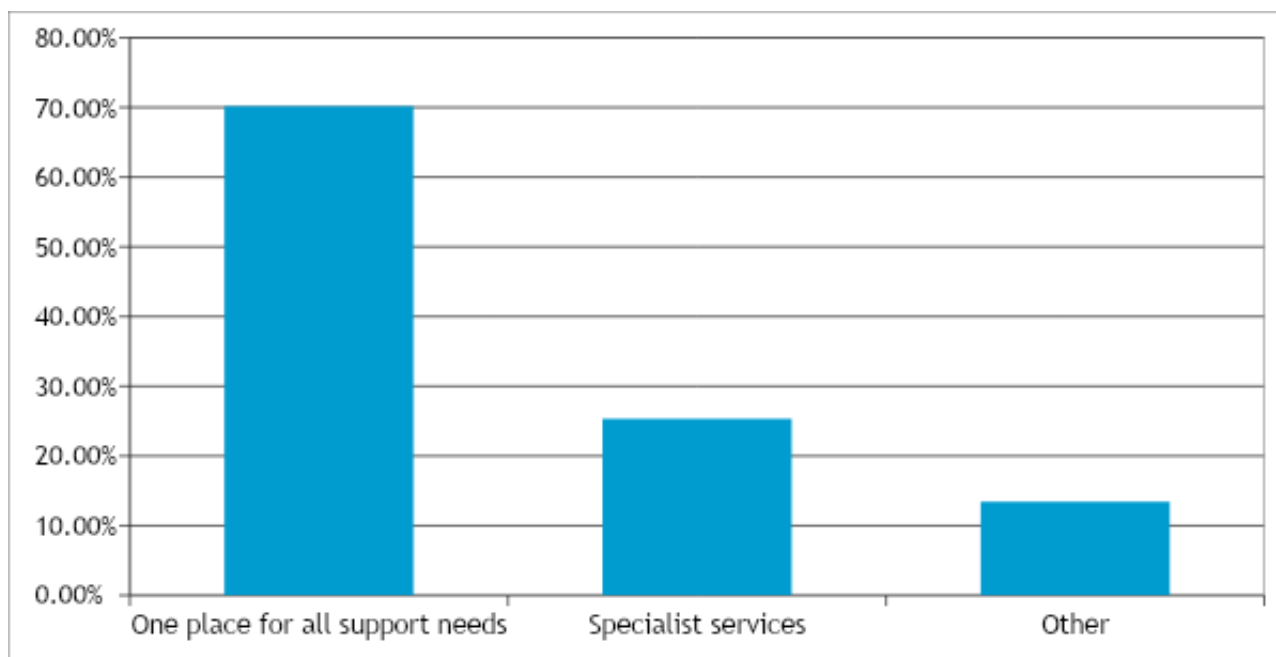
More affordable care services for the person I am caring for - 28.36%

More information and advice about caring - 26.87%

More learning and training opportunities for unpaid carers - 22.39%

Better recognition and support from my employer of my role as an unpaid carer - 17.91%

Would you like to go to one place to get all the support you need, or do you think specialist services are better?



The majority of people we spoke to would prefer to have all information required in one place, particularly as many unpaid carers find it time-consuming and stressful having to contact several different services to access support.

“It depends where the one place is located. If it is on the other side of Rotherham it would be no good”

“I haven’t got the time or energy to make endless different calls and appointments”

“I don’t know what services to access so one place would be better”

“Time is precious, so whichever is quickest”

“A one stop shop, with easily accessible information which acts as a conductor to more specialist services, would be better than choosing one or the other”

What types of information would you like to access as a carer/person looking after a loved one?

Over half of unpaid carers who took part in our survey wanted more mental health information available to them, with just under half requesting more financial information such as benefits and energy advice. As discovered earlier, support groups are highly requested by unpaid carers to get additional support and information from peers and services.

1. **Mental Health - 54.55%**
2. **Financial information (benefits etc) - 48.48%**
3. **Support Groups - 40.91%**

Physical Health - 36.36%

Home Care - 19.70%

Care Homes - 7.58%

Where would you like to get that information?

We had a mixed response when we asked people how they would like to get the above information, with half of respondents saying they would like to get information face to face, and just under half stating they would like to access it on the internet. Many people felt a mixture of the two is best, depending on the information required and the particular situation.

- 1. From a local service (face to face) - 50%
- 2. Internet - 45.45%
- 3. Support group - 40.91%

E-mail - 39.39%

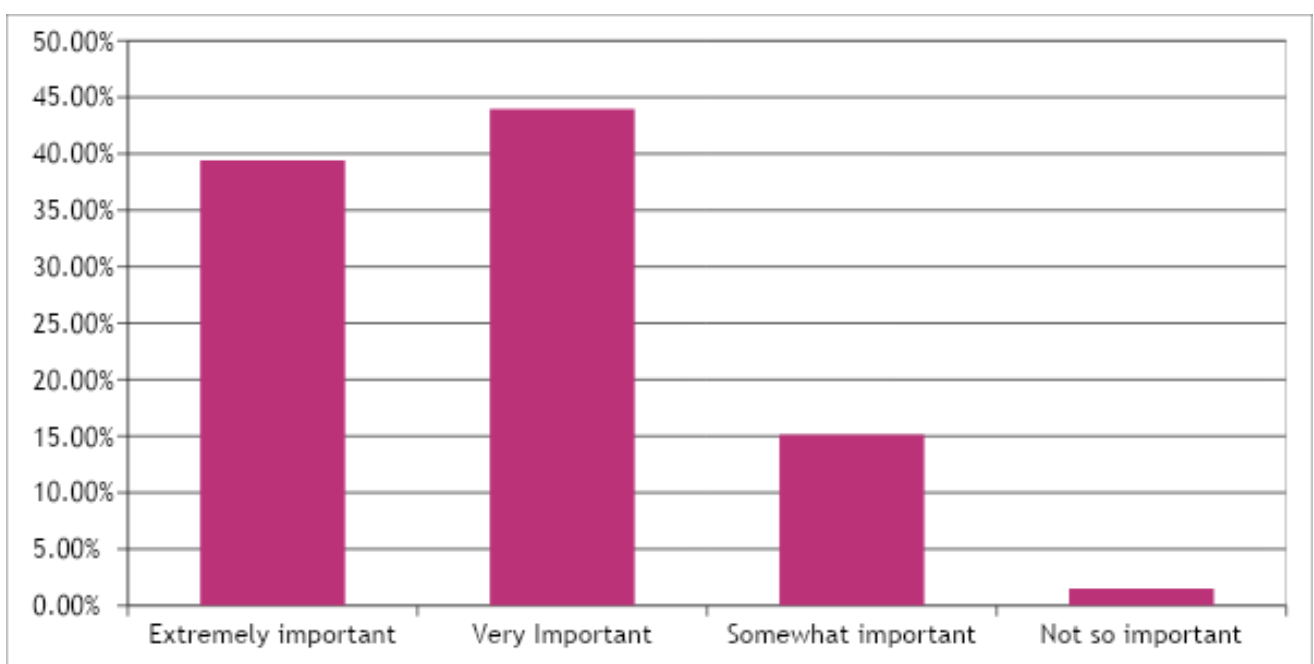
Leaflets/posters - 25.76%

Other - 7.58%

“It would depend on the information I needed so I think a mixture of approaches are needed”

How important is it to you to get the information you need?

Almost all respondents felt it was important to some degree that they got the information needed as an unpaid carer, with 83% feeling it was either very or extremely important.



“This could take a lot of pressure off carers if they are aware of what is out there”

How can professionals/services work together in Rotherham to better support you as a carer/person looking after a loved one?

The main comments were surrounding improved communication. Carer's want services to communicate better with each other to ensure information is passed on to the appropriate person, and the carer does not need to repeat themselves several times or chase up information.

People feel there should be a core team dedicated to helping unpaid carers that can help you if there are any issues, or refer you to other services if needed.

Above all, carer's just want to be listened to and heard by services. Many people feel unsupported and not understood, and don't know how to access any help and support available in Rotherham.

Comments:

- They need a core team with knowledge of social services and the NHS
- A team approach - named people you can talk to who will help you if there is an issue
- Communicate with each other (services)
- Do not assume a person knows how to access help
- Hold clinics at appropriate times for people who work full time
- Carer's assessments need to be carried out quicker
- Understanding more of the needs of carers
- Services working together across health and social care to help the person as one team rather than separate entities
- More empathy from services/people

Conclusions

Throughout this project we really felt the frustration of the people we spoke and engaged with. Many people wanted to access support and information to help them and the person they care for, but had no knowledge of where to start, who to ask and what they qualify for.

This means there are potentially thousands of unpaid carers in Rotherham missing out on vital support and information that can help them and their situation because they don't know how to access it. This needs to change.

When asked, the biggest improvement unpaid carers wanted to see was around an increase in the information available to them on a wealth of topics but in particular: mental health, financial information and support groups.

People would like to access this information through a mixture of the internet and face to face, depending on what information they require and whether they would benefit from speaking to

someone in-person. The majority of people would like to access this information in a 'one stop shop' area rather than attending several services.

Over half of respondents wanted more recognition from their local provider of their role as an unpaid carer, as well as more mental and physical health support.

In addition to this, it is clear that many services in Rotherham are disjointed and do not communicate clearly with other services. Patients would benefit from improved communication and joined up working to avoid having to chase several services at once, when time is already precious.

From our many conversations with unpaid carers over the past 5 months, we have found that they just want to be recognised by the local authority for the fantastic job they do on a daily basis, and to be able to access relevant support and information as and when they need it.

Recommendations:

- More information available for unpaid carers on a wider range of topics. These may include but are not limited to: mental health, health and wellbeing, financial information and details of local support groups
- This information to be made available in both digital and physical formats (as well as being adapted into other languages, Easy Read etc.) to allow people to access these easily
- More support groups available across different areas of Rotherham that cater for specific needs (Carer's of the elderly, carer's of those with mental health issues, general carer's groups etc.)
- Additional flexible support for those who work full time alongside caring and struggle to access help and support within the traditional 9-5 weekday.
- Consider developing a 'one stop shop' for carer's in Rotherham where they can access the information and support they need, rather than having to access several services at a time
- Improve communication between services and produce more 'joined-up' services for carer's/the people they care for that work together as a larger team to improve the patient experience.

Responses from services:

This survey formed part of a co-production programme taking place, to gather the views of unpaid carers, set against the priorities outlined in [The Borough that Cares Strategic Framework - Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council](#)

The findings in this report will help shape over the coming year, how organisations in the statutory and voluntary and community sectors in Rotherham will support unpaid carers, develop services, and enhance the information and advice available to them.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to everyone who took the time to contribute to our survey and share their experiences with us. Your voice matters and can help improve services in Rotherham for yourself and others.