



LGBTQ & Caring



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About this guide

There are 220,000 carers in Northern Ireland, supporting a friend, partner or family member who is older, disabled or seriously ill including people with a mental health condition or an addiction.

At times, caring can be profoundly joyful. There's nothing more natural and human than helping our loved ones get the most out of life. There's also nothing more difficult than focusing on someone else's needs without neglecting our own.

Whether we're caring around the clock, for a few hours a week or balancing caring with work and family life, it can be exhausting. The 'system' can be bewildering. The emotions can be shattering.

For the LGBTQ+ community there may be additional challenges during the caring journey. Some people feel the support services are 'not for them' and won't understand their needs. Some people may access support late or not at all, because they anticipate stigma or discrimination. This adds to the impact on the carer's life, and can increase feelings of isolation.

However caring affects you, we're here. This information explores the experiences of LGBTQ+ carers, and outlines what support is available.

"Due to being non-binary transgender, I have drifted apart from my family. My wife's family did not like me being around them in case my appearance influenced our nephew. We don't have family who can provide support with my caring role, no one to call to ask for advice or just to talk things through"

– Ian

Download factsheet

Throughout this guide this icon indicates a factsheet with further information is available.



"I feel as if during the time I was caring, I spent six years back in the closet, after the journey of coming out"

– Steven

Recognition as an LGBTQ+ carer

As a carer you are entitled to be involved in the decision making and discussions about the care of the person you are looking after, if they want you to be.

This applies irrespective of whether you are looking after a friend or relative.

Caring always involves an element of putting your own needs aside. However, it's important that you look after yourself too, so you can keep going as carers, and because you have needs that are just as valid as those of your loved ones

Caring may be rewarding in it's own ways but it can also be challenging, and carers may not know what help to ask for, how to ask or indeed who to ask.

Self-advocacy means enabling a person to get their own voice heard. For a carer, this means speaking up for themselves and for the person they are caring for.

"My family knew [about my sexuality] but it was pushed out of sight... it was difficult to date, I was wary of telling people I was a carer. As a gay man it seemed such a cliché"

– Steven

"My partner's family didn't know we were a couple, even though I was her main carer. When we were with her family it led to tensions where we had to remember what we should and shouldn't say or how to behave"

– Norena

"We are used to accepting what we are told, as a carer you too have knowledge and experience. Challenge professionals when you think something is unfair"

– Steven



We have produced Being Heard - a self-advocacy guide for carers to help you get your voice heard: carersuk.org/northernireland/policy/self-advocacy-toolkit-ni

Equality and diversity in public services

Legislation has been put in place in Northern Ireland to ensure that public services and employment are fair, accessible, responsive to people's needs, and that communities are inclusive.

People should not be put at a disadvantage by any of the following 'protected characteristics':

- gender
- race
- faith or belief
- sexual orientation
- age
- pregnancy and maternity
- being married or in a civil partnership
- being a disabled person
- being transgender.

If you think you've been unfairly discriminated against you can contact the Equality Commission on 028 90 500 600.

"The hospital discharge felt rushed. The operation and time following felt a bit like going over a waterfall in a barrel. I didn't know what to expect, or what my rights were"

– Janet

"One of the biggest lessons I learnt was to challenge things. Challenging professionals was new ground but if something didn't seem fair or right I challenged it"

– Ian

What LGBTQ+ carers want from public services

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From the Marie Cure report –
Hiding who I am...

“I want my sexual orientation to be fully accepted, not just tolerated”

“That they welcome a same sex partner but don’t comment on it, that they are respectful and open and honest with me”

“It would be good to see a sign, a poster or something to show the services were LGBTQ+ friendly”

– Norena

“My priority is that there should be a decent service for everybody, which respects diversity as part of the day job”

“My appearance can be unconventional, I present as male, female and in between depending on how I feel. To be fair, I have only had either positive or neutral responses from medical professionals”

– Ian



Getting support from the Health and Social Care Trust

Caring can be hard work - physically and emotionally. Often, support from professionals may focus on the person you are looking after, instead of you as a carer.

This can be particularly relevant for carers in the LGBTQ+ community if they feel that their relationship with the person they are looking after is not properly recognised or if they feel that their needs won't be understood by professionals.

However, it's important to find out about the different ways you might be able to get support as a carer, and getting a carer's assessment could be a good place to start.

Carer's assessment

If you are a carer who appears to have a need for support you should be offered a carer's assessment by the Health and Social Care Trust of the person you are looking after.

If you are not offered a carer's assessment, you should contact the Health and Social Care Trust and ask for one.

You can have a carer's assessment no matter what your level of need, the amount of care you provide or your financial means.

If you are not offered a carers assessment, you should contact the Trust and ask for one.

Following the carer's assessment the Health and Social Care Trust will decide if you are eligible for support to be provided either to you or to the person you are looking after to reduce the impact of caring on you.

Support could be provided by the Trust, a local organisation, or in the form of a direct payment.



For more information, visit carersuk.org/northernireland/policy/factsheets

"I wish I had engaged with services earlier, things seem to take longer than expected. I always tell others 'act now, don't wait until you reach crisis point'"

– Steven

Direct payments

If you or someone you care for get help from social services, you can apply for direct payments. These let you choose and buy the services you need yourself, instead of getting them from your Health and Social Care Trust.

A direct payment gives you and the person you are looking after more choice and control over how your needs are met.

This can be particularly relevant for those in the LGBTQ+ community as it could enable you to employ care workers who understand your situation or particular needs or could enable you to purchase services which you feel comfortable with.

For more information on direct payments visit carersuk.org/directpayments

“I could not have coped with my caring role if I hadn’t received support from social services”

– Steven

Making a complaint

If something goes wrong with the services being provided, you may want to find a way to put things right. Some people find making a complaint difficult - you may be feeling frustrated and angry, or the thought of complaining may be frightening or may make you feel like you are moaning.

However, local public bodies have to provide services within a framework of laws and guidance, and both you and the person you care for have a right to receive services that keep you safe and that support you.



For more information on making a complaint visit carersuk.org/practicalsupport

“Using direct payments helped address our fears of having someone we didn’t know providing extra support. We were able to find someone we knew and were comfortable with”

– Andy



Different ways of managing someone's affairs

All carers may want to help manage the affairs of the person they are looking after, or may want to know how to plan for doing this in the future.

There are different ways of managing someone's affairs. Which option is appropriate depends on whether the person you are looking after can currently make their own decisions (which is called having mental capacity) or whether they are unable to make their own decisions (which is called lacking mental capacity).

One of the most common ways of managing someone's affairs is through an enduring power of attorney.

If the person you are looking after can currently make their own decisions but wants to make arrangements in case they are unable to make their own decisions in the future, then they could make an enduring power of attorney.

This means that they appoint a specific person (for example you) to have the authority to make certain decisions on their behalf. This could be useful if you are worried that your views wouldn't be taken into account if the person you are looking after lost mental capacity, as it makes it clear that they wanted you to have this authority. For example, this can include things such as bank accounts, paying bills, collecting benefits or pensions and selling a home.



For more information visit
nidirect.gov.uk

Working LGBTQ+ carers

If you are juggling work with caring for family or friends, you are not alone – there are three million working carers in the UK.

There are rights that most employees have in work which can be helpful for carers, such as the right to request flexible working and the right to time off in emergencies. As well as these statutory rights, you may also have additional contractual rights.

It is your choice whether to tell your employer about your caring role. However, there may be additional contractual rights or support at work for carers and so it may be worth exploring if your employers do offer any such support.

If you are struggling to juggle work and care and are thinking of leaving work it is important to consider the full implications it could have on your

income, quality of life and future pension entitlements.

At some point in your caring role you may decide you want to combine work with caring, or you may want to work if your caring role changes or ends. The thought of working for the first time, or getting back into work, may feel like a big step, but there is support available.



For further information on your rights in work as a carer, and on returning to work, visit carersuk.org/work

“My employer has an incredible support network for carers, which offers support and advice to all colleagues with caring responsibilities. It is always worth exploring what possibilities there are with employers if you find yourself becoming a carer”

– Andy



Andy and Mark's Story



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“ When my Dad fell ill we moved him into our house to recuperate for what we originally thought would be just a few months, but in reality, turned out to be almost seven years!

We converted our dining room into a living room for him, lock stock and barrel with his furniture from his old home, I couldn't consider the possibility of moving him into a care home.

I'm so glad that I got in touch with Social Services. After an assessment at our home, we soon had care workers twice a day to assist with his meals, showering, dressing and helping him back into bed in the evenings. They also made some changes around the home for us, such as a powered hospital bed, a raised toilet seat, additional supports for chairs and an emergency contact system.

We consider ourselves very fortunate to have quickly found that we had a great support network in place around us, ranging from the twice daily carers to weekly district nurse visits. As well as these, we arranged for his medication tray to be delivered weekly from the chemist, and his weekly meals from our local supplier.

All of these people in our support network quickly became his friends, and he so used to look forward to them calling at the house, mainly to chat about sport or politics with them, as although he was in a bad way physically, his mind was as sharp as a pin.

Mark and I could also not have cared for my Dad at home if it were not for the fantastic understanding of my employer (Lloyds Banking Group). My employer has an incredible support network for carers, which offers support and advice to all colleagues with caring responsibilities.

We found other assistance out there worth looking into – discounts on electricity for example – if the person you are caring for meets the eligibility criteria.

At the end of Dad's life, we were so grateful for the support of the St David's hospice nurse, again arranged by Social Services quickly when we

"We feel the caring journey was a positive experience which helped us both to enjoy time with my dad"

– Andy

could see the end was very near. She sat with us, at his bedside, and talked us through Dad's final hours, helping us understand what was going on and what to expect. Both Mark and I are now volunteers for St David's, it's a small way of giving something back to the community that helped us when we needed help the most.

Although my Dad has now sadly gone, all of these people who supported us remain close friends of ours.

”



Getting help and support

Caring can be an isolating experience, and being a member of the LGBTQ+ community can add additional challenges.

Looking after someone can be tough, but you are not on your own.

Online support

There are online communities where you can talk honestly, share experiences and receive support from people who know exactly what you're going through.

The Carers UK online forum may be a good place to speak to other carers about how you are feeling:

carersuk.org/forum

You will find online support groups on Facebook and within condition specific and LGBTQ+ organisations. If there isn't a carers' discussion thread, why not start one?

Information, advice and support

Caring can present all types of challenges, from filling in forms to coping with emotions.

Carers Northern Ireland, part of Carers UK, is here to listen, to give you expert information and advice that's tailored to your situation, to champion your rights and support you in finding new ways to manage at home, at work, or wherever you are.

"Being a carer, while also being on your own journey regarding your gender, you really appreciate good and understanding friends. Being open with friends can make all the difference"

– Ian



"We found a support group for my partner's condition which was run by a religious organisation. The group was great but we needed to hide our true relationship and said we were just friends. We weren't able to be totally open about things we wanted to discuss"

– Norena

Every day Carers Northern Ireland hears from people who need help with looking after a friend, family member or partner. They might be new to caring and struggling with navigating the maze of services or they may need extra support to cope with the pressures of caring, they may be wary of accessing service or not feel supported by the community in which they live. Having the right information at the right time can make a huge difference for the carer and the person they care for.

Carers Northern Ireland have a booklet called Looking after someone – information and support for carers which gives an overview of the support that may be available to carers in Northern Ireland:
carersuk.org/northernireland/policy/looking-after-someone-northern-ireland

Our website is the first port of call if you're looking for information about any aspect of caring. Whether you're grappling with Carer's Allowance, trying to find practical help or exploring what technology is available to make caring easier, our

advice pages and factsheets offer the help you need: carersuk.org/help-and-advice

If you are new to caring and don't know where to turn first, using our free online tool, Upfront will point you in the right direction. Upfront is an online tool that gives you your own personalised guide to caring. As well as covering practical and financial support, it includes information to help with managing the impact of caring on health and relationships:
carersuk.org/upfront

“No-one tells you, you have to ask, and keep asking”

– Andy

“If I had any advice about balancing caring and my own life, it would be: know yourself, find your own way, get help if needed and speak to people who understand”

– Steven

Carers NI Adviceline

You can call Carers Northern Ireland's Adviceline five days a week. We do benefits checks, and advise on financial and practical matters related to caring.

T 028 9043 9843

E advice@carersni.org

Open Monday to Thursday, 9am to 4pm and Friday 9am to 12.30pm.

"At the time we didn't discuss the situation we just got on with it, but looking back we realise it was stressful. We weren't used to asking for or accepting help, our friends offered but we didn't stop to think to say yes. In hindsight it would have made things easier"

– Ann

Carers Support services

There are a range of Carer services across Northern Ireland. If you want information about your local service contact Carers Northern Ireland on 028 9043 9843 or email advice@carersni.org

LGBT services in NI

For a list of LGBT services in Northern Ireland see lgbtni.org/services

Join Carers UK

However caring affects you, your partner or your family, we are here for you. By joining Carers UK, you can be part of a supportive community and a movement for change, working together for a society that respects, values and supports all carers.

Visit carersuk.org/join





There are 220,000 carers in Northern Ireland, supporting a friend, partner or family member who is older, disabled or seriously ill including people with a mental health condition or an addiction.

Carers within the LGBTQ+ community caring for friend, partner or family member may face additional challenges during their caring journey.

However caring affects you, we're here.

Carers Northern Ireland

58 Howard Street, Belfast BT1 6PJ

T 028 943 9843 **E** advice@carersni.org

*Monday to Thursday 9am – 4pm
and Friday 9am – 12.30pm*

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