

19 January 2026

Richard Leonard MSP
Convenor
Public Audit Committee
Scottish Parliament

Dear Mr Leonard

I am writing in advance of your evidence session with the Auditor General, Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission on “Delayed discharges: A symptom of the challenges faced by health and social care/community health and social care” to highlight the views of Carers Scotland.

Carers Scotland recently welcomed their joint report and its recognition of the important role of unpaid carers in planning effectively for hospital discharge.

The report’s finding that unpaid carers are often involved too late in the discharge process. This late involvement is disappointing but, unfortunately, every year our own research with carers finds similar poor experiences of hospital discharge.

The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 gives unpaid carers a right to be involved in discharge and places duties on the NHS to inform and involve them, yet too often not the case.

Carers Scotland's State of Caring report published in November 2025 found that just 34% of unpaid carers said they were involved in decisions about discharge and what care and treatment was needed. Only 13% had been asked about their ability and willingness to provide care, down from 19% in 2024 and just 12% felt they had been provided with sufficient support on discharge to protect their health and wellbeing and that of the person they care for.

Moreover, this lack of involvement in discharge is worse for some groups of unpaid carers. For example, only 29% of disabled carers had been involved in decisions about discharge and, despite managing their own disabilities, they are receiving less support from healthcare professionals, with more than half (55%) saying their main need is more support from the NHS.

This poor involvement and lack of support for unpaid carers risks unplanned readmission of individuals, poorer outcomes and increases the cost of caring to carers’ own health. Carers are already experiencing high levels of poor health, with 30% living with poor physical health and 36% with poor mental health.

A lack of involvement in decisions around care, including hospital discharge and a lack of support has long term consequences. Unpaid carers are all too often forced to prioritise the needs of others over their own and caring without adequate support is leading to growing physical and mental health damage and a subsequent risk of care breaking down, placing further strain and costs onto health and care systems. Carers already

We therefore welcome the report's call for integration authorities with their partner NHS boards and councils to ensure they fully implement their duties and responsibilities for including unpaid carers as set out in the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016.

We urge that this recommendation is vigorously pursued by the Scottish Government, with action taken to ensure that, as set out in the report, Integration Authorities identify the points in the discharge planning process where this is failing and set out the interventions they will take to improve their processes to ensure all unpaid carers are fully involved in discharge planning from the point of admission. This must a requirement of Integration Authorities and outcomes must be monitored by the Scottish Government.

Alongside this it remains crucial to invest in social care. Access to social care is a critical factor in improving and delivering successful discharges, both for individuals and unpaid carers. Earlier this month, Carers Scotland along with many organisations across Scotland called for the Scottish Budget to recognise its integral role and increase investment in social care and in support for unpaid carers, including local carer organisations. To deliver timely and successful discharges, with the right support for individuals and unpaid carers, it is vital such investment is prioritised.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Collie
Head of Public Affairs and Communications