One in four unpaid carers “have not had a day off” in five years

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Carers are reaching ‘breaking point’ as they struggle to take even a day away from care responsibilities for years at a time, research by Carers UK has found. 4 in 10 (40%) of unpaid carers have not had a break in over one year, whilst one in four (25%) had not received a single day away from caring in five years.

The charity’s report, [State of Caring 2017](http://www.carersuk.org/for-professionals/policy/policy-library/state-of-caring-report-2017), found that carers most frequently listed access to breaks as one of three factors which could make a difference in their lives (42%).  Respondents explained their own personal reasons for needing a break, listing diverse benefits ranging from the opportunity to spend time with partners and children to being able to see a doctor for their own health conditions. Yet few are able to take regular breaks, with only 16% of carers currently buying or receiving a break from caring in the form of services such as respite or alternative care provisions.

Carers who had not had a break in a year or more reported a deterioration in their health, both mentally (73%) and physically (65%). Despite the catastrophic impact posed by a lack of personal time, 87% of carers still “struggle” to attain time away from their care duties. Carers named a number of barriers preventing them from taking a break:

* Cost - Paying for or contributing towards the cost of a break (31%)
* Care concerns – Person cared for is unwilling to accept support from others (31%), support not on offer (27%), or low confidence in quality of care (19%)
* Lack of awareness – Carers would not know how to request a break (16%)

The research also charts a growing anxiety around the level of support that will be available against a backdrop of cuts to adult social care services. Almost a third (29%) of carers are worried that practical support for them might be reduced in the future. Already, more than a third (34%) of carers reported a change in the services they or the person they care for receives and, of these, four in ten (39%) experienced a reduction in the amount of support offered by social services.

Two years after the Care Act put in place stronger duties on local authorities to support carers, these new rights are not improving the lives of many carers in England. Carer’s assessments, designed to look at the impact on carers’ health and wellbeing, are too-often failing to put in place vital breaks and support. Two in three (68%) carers believe their need to have regular breaks away from caring was not “thoroughly considered” during their assessment.

Kirsten Alderson, Chief Executive of Suffolk Family Carers, said:

*“More and more of us are providing care and support to loved ones and doing so for more hours every week. Without access to breaks, carers can quickly reach crisis point, unable to look after their own health, nurture relationships with friends and family or have the time they need to themselves. We help family carers of all ages across Suffolk get the support they need to live fuller lives.*

*Given the enormous value of unpaid care provided by the UK’s 6.5 million carers, estimated to be worth £132 billion each year – getting some time away from caring to spend time with a partner, get to a medical appointment or just get a full night’s sleep surely isn’t too much to ask.”*

For support, information and advice contact Suffolk Family Carers information line on 01473 835477 or email [enquiries@suffolkfamilycarers.org](mailto:enquiries@suffolkfamilycarers.org)