



Healthcare
Improvement
Scotland

Unpaid Carers - Short Breaks

Landscape Review

September 2023



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Introduction

We engaged with a range of stakeholder groups across Scotland during 2022/23 to understand the current short breaks planning landscape.

The purpose of the research was to gain an understanding of the current short break strategic planning and commissioning landscape and perceived readiness for the new legal 'right to a break'.

This report is intended to be used as a discussion tool for all stakeholders to identify next steps in improving the planning and delivery of short breaks.

Unpaid Carers

Unpaid carers provide care and support to family members, friends and neighbours. The people they care for may be affected by disability, physical or mental ill health, frailty or substance misuse. A carer does not need to be living with the person they care for. Anybody can become a carer at any time in their life and sometimes for more than one person at a time. Carers can be any age from young children to very elderly people.

What is a Short Break?

A short break is any form of service or assistance, which enables the carer(s) to have sufficient and regular periods away from their caring routines or responsibilities.

Right to a Short Break

The National Care Service (NCS) Bill contains a change to the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 to introduce a right to a break to make sure that getting enough breaks from caring is part of a carer's 'Adult Carer Support Plan' or a young carer's 'Young Carer Statement'

Our Approach

In 2022/23, we actively engaged with various stakeholder groups throughout Scotland to gain insights into the prevailing landscape of short breaks planning.

Participants shared their current experience of how short breaks are planned, including the key challenges and opportunities for improvement.

This information was analysed, from which five key themes regarding planning for short breaks were identified. In this report, we explore the themes highlighting the key learning from the engagement activity, quotes from participants and opportunities for improvement.



Participants who attended the engagement sessions were asked four questions that formed part of a wider discussion about planning for short breaks.

1. What are the current challenges and enablers when planning and commissioning for short breaks?
2. How can strategic planning and commissioning approaches support innovative short break options?
3. What does good strategic planning and commissioning for short breaks look like?
4. What will help improve planning for short breaks?

The analysis and insights within this landscape review are based on the following evidence sources:

- A summary of the literature on respite and breaks from caring with a focus on outcomes for carers and enablers/barriers for service use,
- Engagement sessions held with key stakeholder groups, including, carer leads, planners and commissioners, carer centre managers and providers conducted by Healthcare Improvement Scotland's Strategic Planning Team,
- Analysis of interviews held with unpaid carers.

Literature Findings

The literature summary reviews the research on respite and breaks from caring as a key form support for unpaid carers, and where there is an aim for improved provision in Scotland.

From a database search for systematic and other types of review investigating respite or short breaks, 15 research articles were included as the best available literature for summary published since 2014.

These were systematic or scoping reviews of the benefits of respite or short breaks, or synthesis of qualitative research investigating caregiver needs/and or preferences. A 2019 scoping review on short breaks was also included from the grey literature.

Key Points

Systematic reviews investigating the benefits of respite report this as an important form of support for unpaid carers and where there can be unmet needs but also where there is a lack of evidence for the expected benefits of reduced caregiver burden and continued caring.

A need for targeting unpaid carers different needs and preferences for respite/short breaks is identified as beneficial, including where this could be for in-home respite or short breaks.

Research that summarises qualitative studies shows us that unpaid carers often have varying needs and preferences when it comes to taking short breaks from their caregiving responsibilities and enjoying the benefits of breaks.

This includes where the caring relationship could mean a preference for respite care at home such as for parents caring for children with complex medical needs or for spousal/partner carers in dementia.

Enablers of a successful break from caring can include quality of care and support being available that is perceived by unpaid carers as benefiting the person with care needs and that is supportive of the caring relationship, as well as support with navigation of the services available.

Carers View

Accessing short breaks for carers can be challenging, often pitting individuals against the system. This section explores the experiences and perspectives of carers in relation to accessing short breaks. It highlights the difficulties faced by carers, including feelings of guilt, lack of support, and frustration with complex systems.

Barriers to accessing short breaks

- Carers interviewed expressed difficulties in navigating complex systems that lack coordination and joined up approaches to planning short breaks,
- Feelings of guilt and reluctance to ask for breaks often prevent carers from seeking support,
- When they do ask for help, some carers reported feeling unsupported and unheard by services, leading to feelings of dissatisfaction,
- Inadequate understanding and improper matching of carers' needs with available short breaks were identified as issues.

Impact of the Carers Act

- Carers acknowledged the positive impact of the Carers Act (2016), which aims to provide carers with rights to have a life alongside their caring role,
- However, carers cautioned that current practice does not align with the legislation, particularly concerning accessing replacement care due to a general shortage of staff within social care.

Quality of services and communication

- Carers highlighted the importance of the quality of services and effective communication in ensuring a positive short break experience,
- For carers of individuals with complex needs, communication and quality were particularly crucial.

Planning for the cared for person

- Carers emphasised that proper planning for the cared for person instilled confidence in carers to take meaningful breaks,
- In situations where short breaks could not be immediately funded or accessed, ensuring the continuity of care for the cared for person allowed carers to take occasional breaks.

Carers View

Varied perspectives on short breaks

- Carers demonstrated a range of views on short breaks based on their experiences and knowledge of the short breaks landscape,
- Those who had access to appropriate specialised replacement care expressed greater satisfaction with their ability to take meaningful short breaks,
- Some carers expressed disappointment that traditional building-based short breaks were still being considered as the only option available to them.

Geographical Considerations

- Geography played a significant role in accessing suitable replacement care options,
- Some local areas lacked appropriate facilities, forcing carers to seek replacement care support further afield, making short breaks difficult to access and plan.

Recognition and Understanding of Carers' Role

- Unpaid carers stressed the importance of being recognised and valued by the health and social care system,
- Concerns were raised about a lack of understanding in some parts of the system regarding the crucial role meaningful short breaks play in preventing carers from becoming overwhelmed.



Carers View

Complex system

- **Accessing** short breaks can be difficult. Knowing how to answer assessment and eligibility questions correctly is crucial to receiving the right support. This pits the person against the system,
- Carers consistently spoke of **frustration** at having to navigate very **complex systems** that are not planned in a joined-up manner.

One carer provided an example where a provider arranged a getaway for an unpaid carer, but did not account for the cared for person -

Unpaid Carer

"Nobody had said how to book respite and when I spoke to the provider, they said, oh no, the social worker has to arrange that. At which point I said, well, Mum hasn't got a Social Worker"

Carers View

Carers Act

Communication

- Carers we engaged with celebrated that the latest Carers Act (2016) includes legislation to give carers rights to have a life alongside their caring role. However, they cautioned that current practice is quite different, emphasising issues accessing **replacement care**, in particular a **lack of staff** in agencies to fulfil this need.
- One carer spoke of feeling **unsupported** and **not listened to** by services. An example was shared in which a carer asked for access to counselling as a form of break but was offered a jewellery-making course instead.
- Good short breaks experience for the carers interviewed were linked to the quality of the services, what could be achieved, and the **quality of communication**.

Geography

Recognition

- **Geography** played a key role in terms gaining **access** to the right form of specialised replacement care. Some local areas don't have the facilities to provide the right form of care, therefore requiring carers to search further afield for replacement care before physical short break can take place
- Unpaid Carers interviewed spoke of the importance of being **recognised** and **valued** by the health and social care system for the role they play in delivering care. Some carers raised concerns about the lack of understanding in parts of the system about the key role short breaks play in supporting carers not becoming overwhelmed by the caring role.



Unpaid Carer

"What would be nice would be a clearer understanding of the dangers of caring. where if you don't get the support or respite or break or anything, that it can sneak up on you and you could reach a point, touch wood, so far, I'm not there but I do see it happening where it could just overwhelm somebody"

Challenges and Enablers

This section explores the challenges and enablers associated with planning for short breaks for unpaid carers. Short breaks play a crucial role in providing relief to unpaid carers, but a number of challenges impact effective strategic planning and implementation. This section highlights some of key challenges and identifies potential enablers to improve the planning landscape for short breaks. Particular focus is given to need and system demand, data, funding and communication.

Key Points

Lack of available resources: There is increasing pressure on alternative short breaks filling the gap where more traditional forms of breaks are not available due to lack of available resource.

Unrealistic expectations: Carers are expected to predict short break details during the Adult Carer Support Plan (ACSP) stage, leading to difficulties in medium to long term planning and cost estimation.

Uncertain financial landscape: The current financial landscape lacks flexibility, making it challenging third and independent organisations to effectively plan in the medium to long term.

Resistance to innovation: Organisations, staff and unpaid carers often face resistance from senior team members and parts of the system when attempting innovative approaches to plan and deliver short breaks. Fear of trying something different – if it does not work, can they go back to previous approach?

Focus on carers over cared-for individuals: While breaks for carers are prioritised, there is a risk of neglecting the needs of the cared-for person, potentially undermining the overall outcomes of short breaks.

Workforce limitations: Providers struggle to meet the needs of carers and cared-for individuals due to challenges related to high workforce turnover. This may be related to rates of pay and a lack of understanding about the responsibilities associated with working in the care sector, for example the investment and training required in inducting new employees in to a caregiving role.

Difficulty in implementing new approaches: The introduction of new or alternative approaches to short breaks is impacted by the need to maintain existing provisions, resulting in hesitancy to embrace change.

Lack of capacity: The substantial increase in demand for short breaks outpaces the available capacity, affecting both cared-for individuals and unpaid carers' ability to access respite services, including short breaks.

Challenges and Enablers

Key Points

Building understanding of need and demand: Efforts to comprehend the true demand for short breaks require proactive engagement with stakeholders and removing barriers to collaboration between commissioners and providers.

Short break hubs, bureaus, and brokerage approaches: These models have demonstrated good practice by innovatively building capacity at the local level and facilitating a clearer understanding of need and demand.

Enhancing workforce understanding: Strengthening communication and providing adequate training to the workforce about the role and significance of short breaks in the caring system can improve outcomes.

Ring-fenced funding: Allocating dedicated funding specifically for short breaks provides assurance of adequate financial resources for unpaid carers and cared-for individuals.

Long-term planning: Planning approaches should extend beyond the short to medium term, considering the growing older population and allocating resources accordingly.

Streamlined commissioning and procurement: Addressing sustainability issues related to cost versus quality and establishing clear commissioning processes can support local providers.

Improved communication and clarity: Ensuring effective dissemination of information about short breaks, the legal right to a break, and the role of local areas and workforce can enhance understanding and support planning efforts.

Challenges and Enablers

Carer need and system demand

The current landscape is facing a significant increase in demand for short breaks and replacement care, creating challenges in meeting the needs of both cared-for individuals and unpaid carers. This section provides an overview of some of the issues surrounding the capacity to provide good outcomes for individuals in need of short breaks and the impact on carers. It also explores the barriers to accessing services and alternative options available, such as Self-Directed Support (SDS).

Capacity challenges and impact on carers

Each of the groups interviewed expressed the struggle in meeting the current demand for short breaks and the anticipated difficulties once it becomes a right. There is a substantial gap in capacity to support individuals, which has a knock-on effect on unpaid carers. Unpaid carers find it challenging to access short breaks, despite the availability of SDS support. In addition, eligibility criteria and barriers to choice and control affect the quality of outcomes experienced by carers.

Workforce challenges and alternatives

The system faces ongoing demand for short breaks, but the workforce is struggling to meet this need. While creative use of Self-Directed Support (SDS) provides some alternatives, there remains a significant demand for short breaks, including traditional building-based respite services.

Understanding need and demand

It is crucial to develop a better understanding of the need and demand for respite care services. Sometimes, high demand may not necessarily indicate a corresponding need for a particular service. Instead, it may reflect the lack of accessible and suitable alternative services to meet the individuals' needs. Understanding demand requires active engagement and efforts to explore the current landscape. For instance, some commissioners and finance teams have collaborated to remove barriers and improve responsiveness, fostering a more choice-driven approach for carers.

Challenges and Enablers

Data

This section looks at the role of data in supporting planning for short breaks and the challenges associated with data availability and evidence gathering in this context. The findings highlight the significance of data in understanding the need and demand for short breaks, as well as the outcomes for carers. It also discusses the challenges faced in evidencing positive outcomes and communicating the preventive and supportive nature of short breaks.

Role of data in planning for short breaks

The review emphasises that data plays a crucial role as a key enabler in supporting the planning process for short breaks. It facilitates understanding the need and demand for such breaks, helping planners gain insights into the level of met and unmet needs within local areas. However, challenges arise in ensuring that sufficient data is available at the commissioning level, which can provide planners with an accurate picture of the level of need. This data scarcity impacts decisions related to resource allocation, such as investments in replacement care, both during the day and at night, as well as catering to the specific needs of various carer groups.

Challenges in evidencing positive outcomes for carers

Participants in the review raised concerns regarding the challenges faced in demonstrating positive outcomes for carers. This limitation hampers the ability to instil confidence in funders and Health and Social Care Partnership planning groups when evaluating services and successful approaches. Evidencing positive outcomes requires the skills to engage in meaningful conversations with individuals accessing the services. A notable question raised during the review is, "What does a good outcome/evidence framework look like?" This highlights the need for a comprehensive framework that effectively captures and communicates the positive impact of short breaks on carers.

Communication and understanding of the importance of short breaks

The report also highlights the challenges associated with communicating the significance of short breaks in preventing carers from experiencing crises and supporting the continuity of care. Currently, certain parts of the system fail to grasp the importance of short breaks and the positive effects they can have on carers. This lack of understanding poses a barrier to the effective integration of short breaks within the overall care system.

Challenges and Enablers

Investing in Unpaid Carers

This section looks at some of the challenges and enablers associated with funding in the context of planning for short breaks. The availability and continuation of funding is crucial in supporting local carer organisations to enhance their resources, technology, and systems, thereby improving their capacity to support carers. This section also highlights the importance of ring-fenced funding and long-term planning approaches in ensuring adequate financial resources for carers and addressing the needs of the growing older population. Additionally, it discusses the issues related to commissioning and procuring carer support, as well as the variance in engagement between Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs) and local carer centres across Scotland.

Funding

Funding plays a significant role in supporting local carer organisations. These funds enable the development of resources, technology, and systems that enhance the capacity to support carers. Participants also identified ring-fenced funding as a key approach to planning, offering necessary assurances of adequate financial resources for carers and the cared-for individuals. However, the national landscape regarding this approach varies.

Long-Term Planning and Resource Allocation

Some representatives from Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs) raised concerns about challenges in planning for the long term, particularly in relation to the care needs of the growing older population. Presently, planning approaches in certain areas predominantly focus on short to medium term resource allocation, thereby adversely affecting carers' ability to plan effectively. Failing to effectively long-term plan with older unpaid carers and carers whose circumstances, change can have a negative impact on their ability to continue in a caring role. For example;

- Older carers often have their own age-related health concerns. The added responsibility of caregiving without adequate support can exacerbate their physical and mental health issues, leading to burnout, stress, and a decline in their overall well-being.
- Caregiving can be socially isolating, especially for older individuals who may already have a limited social circle. Without proper long-term planning and support, older carers may become increasingly isolated as they dedicate more time to caregiving responsibilities, reducing their opportunities for social interaction and engagement.
- Without long-term planning, older carers might not have access to essential support services such as short breaks, counselling, or training. This lack of support can hinder their ability to provide effective care and cope with the challenges of caregiving.
- A lack of good planning can exacerbate inequalities experienced those looking to access short breaks. It is important to improve engagement with carers in the most vulnerable group's e.g. older people, those caring for people with addictions, Gypsy communities, and those that do not have English as a first language.

Challenges and Enablers

Investing in Unpaid Carers

Commissioning and Procurement Challenges

The current system exhibits diverse approaches and attitudes towards commissioning and procuring carer support, posing significant challenges for local providers. Providers frequently encounter sustainability issues in balancing cost versus quality. The process of commissioning services, including the determining of hourly rates, was highlighted as an area of concern, with some participants describing it as a "race to the bottom."

Variance in HSCP Engagement with Carer centres

Across Scotland, there exists variability in the level of engagement between Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs) and local carer centres. Some HSCPs do not fully engage with carer centres and do not provide them with the necessary trust and permission to control budgets for carers. This disparity limits the autonomy and effectiveness of local carer centres in catering to the specific needs of carers.

Challenges and Enablers

Communication

The key findings from this section highlight the role that effective communication plays in articulating policy, education, and understanding of short breaks. It explores the challenges faced by various stakeholder groups in terms of communication and emphasises the need for improved clarity and dissemination of information regarding short breaks.

Communication Challenges

The stakeholder groups consistently identified communication as a significant challenge when it comes to short breaks. While policies and approaches to short breaks are well understood at the senior level, there are difficulties in ensuring this information reaches the workforce on the ground.

Lack of Awareness and Training

There is a lack of communication and clarity about what short breaks are and what the right to a short break will entail for local areas and the workforce. Some of the workforce within the short breaks landscape are not adequately informed or trained about the role of short breaks within the caring system.

Limited Understanding of Rights

Some areas highlighted instances where parts of the workforce are unaware or do not understand that carers will have a right to a break. Equally important, most carers themselves are unaware of their entitlement to a short break.

Need for Clarity in Legal Terminology

The use of the term 'sufficient' in the legal right to a short break requires more clarity in real terms, particularly within a planning context. Stakeholders expressed the need for a better understanding of what constitutes a sufficient short break, ensuring that it aligns with the practical needs of carers.

Challenges and Enablers

Opportunities

Across the short breaks landscape there are numerous opportunities to enhance the well-being of unpaid carers and those they care for. These opportunities have the potential to not only improve the lives of unpaid carers but also contribute to the broader health and care system. Below are a number of areas of opportunity that could positively affect the short breaks landscape. From evidencing the positive outcomes for carers to simplifying procurement processes and clarifying legal terminology, each opportunity represents a step towards a supportive and sustainable short breaks system. Together, they form a roadmap for fostering positive change, emphasising the importance of collaboration, research, communication, and awareness in transforming the lives of unpaid carers and those they care for.

1. Evidencing Good Outcomes for Carers

- Develop and share an outcome framework specific to carers, outlining key indicators and measures of success.
- Collaborate with carers, professionals, and relevant stakeholders to ensure the outcome framework reflects the diverse needs and experiences of carers.
- Conduct research and evaluation to generate evidence of the positive outcomes achieved through short breaks and other supportive interventions for carers.

2. Articulating Impact on the Health and Care System

- Expand the focus of impact assessment to include measurable outcomes such as the reduction in emergency admissions and bed days because of effective short break provision.
- Collaborate with health and care providers, data analysts, and researchers to collect and analyse data that demonstrates the positive impact of short breaks on the overall system, including cost savings and improved health outcomes.

3. Preventing Carer Crises and Ensuring Continuation of Care

- Continuously develop and share evidence-based research on how short breaks can effectively prevent carers from reaching crisis points, resulting in improved continuity of care.
- Collaborate with carers and relevant stakeholders to identify and document real-life examples and case studies that illustrate how short breaks have successfully prevented crises and supported ongoing care provision.

4. Simplifying Procurement and Commissioning Processes

- Identify opportunities to simplify procurement procedures, such as exploring block or aligned incentive contracts, to reduce administrative burden and facilitate more efficient service delivery.

- Investigate alternative approaches to competitive procurement that prioritise collaboration and partnership models, ensuring that the focus remains on achieving high-quality outcomes for carers.

5. Sharing Examples of Strategic Planning and Commissioning Practice

- Continuously share examples of successful strategic planning and commissioning practices, highlighting innovative approaches and lessons learned.
- Foster knowledge exchange and collaboration among local authorities, service providers, and commissioners to enhance understanding and implementation of effective planning and commissioning models.

6. Collecting Meaningful Data for Impact Assessment

- Develop approaches to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from diverse sources, including statutory services, community and third-sector organisations, staff, and carers.
- Collaborate with data experts and stakeholders to determine the most relevant and insightful data points, going beyond what is readily available, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of impact, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

7. Enhance Communication Strategies

- Develop comprehensive communication strategies to ensure effective dissemination of policy and information about short breaks. This should involve clear channels of communication between senior levels and the workforce; ensuring information reaches all relevant stakeholders.

8. Training and Awareness Programs

- Implement training and awareness programs to educate the workforce on the role and significance of short breaks within the caring system. This should include information on the rights of carers and the importance of providing sufficient breaks.

9. Public Awareness Campaigns

- Launch public awareness campaigns to inform carers about their right to a short break. Utilise various media platforms and targeted messaging to reach a wide audience and ensure carers are aware of the support available to them.

10. Clarification of Legal Terminology

- Work towards providing clearer definitions and guidelines on what constitutes a 'sufficient' short break in the context of the legal right. Collaborate with relevant stakeholders to establish practical benchmarks that can be used for planning and implementation purposes.

What might good look like?

Short Breaks Planning

This section highlights the importance of meaningful carer involvement in strategic planning and commissioning processes for short breaks. It emphasises the need to place carers at the centre of decision-making and outlines the significance of collaboration and co-production in effectively planning innovative short breaks and replacement care services.

Meaningful Carer Involvement

The success of strategic planning and commissioning approaches relies on incorporating the needs and wants of carers. To achieve this, it is crucial to prioritise carers' views and experiences as fundamental factors in shaping plans. Placing carers as equal partners is considered essential to ensure meaningful carer involvement, necessitating a shift in thinking and culture at all levels of staff engagement.

Challenges in Carer Involvement

While recognising the significance of carer involvement, it is important to acknowledge the existing variances across Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs) in terms of effectively hearing carers' voices during the planning process. There is a need to question the extent to which carer representatives on local Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) planning groups are genuinely listened to and whether their ideas and contributions are valued and acted upon.

Collaboration and Co-production

Stakeholders consistently emphasised collaboration and coproduction as vital elements in planning innovative short breaks and respite services. Taking a collaborative approach involves understanding the current perceptions of respite, assessing the needs and capacity of service providers, and actively involving the wider community in exploring alternative ways to provide short breaks. It also calls for increased collaboration with micro enterprises and a departure from traditional commissioning processes to incorporate a broader market perspective.

Collaborative Planning

Successful planning requires close collaboration with service providers, the community, and carers/cared-for individuals. Working closely with providers is crucial to gaining a comprehensive understanding of their capabilities and assessing their flexibility to adapt within existing structures. Collaborative planning enables the identification of gaps and opportunities for improvement, ultimately enhancing the quality and effectiveness of services.

Engagement

Recognising the critical role that colleagues in healthcare settings play in supporting unpaid carers is vital. This includes providing appropriate support to facilitate smooth transitions from hospital to home and avoiding incomplete or inappropriate care packages that contribute to failed discharges and increased unscheduled care. Building awareness and understanding among healthcare colleagues regarding the importance of considering carers' needs can significantly improve outcomes for both carers and care recipients.

What might good look like?

Short Breaks Planning Opportunities

1. Build Understanding the Short Break Brokerage Model

- Conduct research and analysis to explore the intricacies of the short break brokerage model and its adaptability to diverse local contexts.
- Identify good practices and case studies from different localities to highlight successful implementations of the model.
- Promote knowledge sharing among stakeholders to exchange experiences and lessons learned regarding the short break brokerage model.

2. Development of a Suite and/or Guide of Short Break Options

- Scope out and develop a suite and/or guide of short break options tailored to the needs of individuals in different local contexts.
- Collaborate with stakeholders, including service providers, carers, and local authorities, to ensure the suite and/or guide reflects the diverse requirements and preferences of the target population.
- Continuously update and expand the suite and/or guide based on emerging trends, feedback, and evolving needs within the short breaks landscape.

3. Support for Individuals to meet unmet need

- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of current demand and potential future demand for short breaks among carers.
- Allocate resources and capacity to provide adequate support and services for this specific group, ensuring their needs are met in a timely and efficient manner.
- Collaborate with relevant stakeholders, such as local authorities and care providers, to identify gaps in service provision and develop strategies to bridge them.

What might good look like?

Short Breaks Planning Opportunities

4. Continued involvement of National Carer Organisations

- Foster collaboration and knowledge exchange between National Carer Organisations and service providers to ensure regulatory standards are met while promoting flexibility and innovation within the sector.
- Identify areas where the Care Inspectorate can support providers in meeting the evolving needs of service users, such as through streamlined processes or tailored guidance.

5. Learning and Evaluation Process

- Develop a framework for learning and evaluation to assess the effectiveness and impact of the short break brokerage model and associated services.
- Regularly collect and analyse data on outcomes, user experiences, and challenges encountered during the implementation of the model.
- Utilise the findings from the learning and evaluation process to identify areas of improvement, refine service delivery, and share best practices with stakeholders.

What can help improve short breaks planning?

This section highlights key insights and approaches for improving the strategic planning and delivery of short breaks. The information gathered from various stakeholders provides valuable perspectives on the challenges and opportunities associated with the current system. By addressing these issues, it is possible to enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of short breaks, ultimately benefiting unpaid carers and those they care for.

Development of Carer Strategies

Many participants emphasised the importance of developing and implementing short breaks strategies that are co-produced with stakeholders across the whole system. This approach involves creating short break strategies that are closely aligned with commissioning, local, and national carer strategies.

Simplifying Access to Replacement Care

The current system for accessing replacement care was described as complicated, resulting in some individuals being unable to access the support they need in order to take a meaningful break. Facilitating and improving access to replacement care services requires streamlining the process and reducing complexity, ensuring that financial constraints do not impede access.

Leadership

Stakeholders unanimously agreed that senior decision makers play a crucial role in creating favourable conditions for effective planning and delivery of short breaks. Their involvement and support are necessary to drive improvements in the system.

Building Flexibility into the Planning Process

Flexibility should be integrated into the planning process to ensure that carers can access breaks while meeting the needs and outcomes of the cared-for individuals. This requires preparing the system to adapt and respond to the unique circumstances of each carer and care recipient.

Shifting Workforce Roles

Effective strategic planning necessitates a shift in workforce roles. Finance and performance teams should adopt a relational approach with providers, focusing on improvement support rather than solely performance monitoring. This shift requires a change in cultural values and the acquisition of new skill sets, which should be addressed through appropriate training.

What can help improve short breaks planning?

Coherent Vision and Communication

Locally and nationally, it is essential to develop a coherent and compelling vision of how the short breaks system should operate. Additionally, good, clear, and consistent communication within and across organisations and services is crucial for improving planning and delivery of short breaks.

Utilising Building-Based Respite Creatively

Building-based respite should be utilised in different ways for different audiences. Embracing flexible work arrangements and encouraging creative and innovative ideas is necessary to prevent a decrease in respite opportunities.

Self-Directed Support (SDS) and Commissioning Strategies

Implemented well, SDS can significantly contribute to the development and improvement of commissioning strategies. By offering choice and control, SDS promotes productive conversations between carers and service providers, allowing breaks to be tailored to individual needs.

Balancing Funding and Capacity

Implementing SDS approaches may shift the reliance on commissioned provision towards spot purchasing. This transition poses challenges for providers who may feel vulnerable due to uncertain funding, limiting their ability to plan effectively and guarantee service capacity.

The expansion of self-directed support was restricted by the lack of care service provider choice and capacity in some localities. This meant the ability of carers to select a suitable option was constrained.

Training and Awareness for Staff

Additional training and awareness raising for staff are necessary to ensure they are informed about changes to SDS guidance and understand the implications for short breaks planning and delivery.

What can help improve short breaks planning?

Opportunities

1. Showcasing Practical Planning Steps in Good Practice

- Document and share case studies that highlight the step-by-step planning process involved in successful short break provision.
- Emphasise the importance of collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and iterative whole system planning to achieve effective outcomes for unpaid carers and those they care for.

2. Facilitating Access to Carer Short Breaks

- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the current access barriers faced by individuals seeking carer respite/short breaks.
- Simplify and streamline the access process by implementing user-friendly and easily navigable systems, including clear eligibility criteria and accessible information channels.
- Collaborate with relevant stakeholders, such as local authorities and support organizations, to develop guidance and support services that facilitate access for individuals who may struggle with the complexities of the system.

3. Development of a National Vision and Mission

- Engage key stakeholders, including carers, service providers, and policymakers, to develop a shared vision for short breaks and articulate strategic goals.
- Develop a comprehensive strategic plan that outlines objectives, actions, and performance indicators, with a focus on person-centred approaches, equitable access, and quality improvement.
- Regularly review and update the national vision and strategic plan to align with evolving needs, priorities, and good practices.

What can help improve short breaks planning?

Opportunities

4. Supportive Structures and Staff Development

- Allocate dedicated time and resources for staff to engage in ongoing professional development and training related to short break provision.
- Establish supportive structures, such as supervision and mentoring programs, to provide guidance, feedback, and opportunities for skill enhancement.
- Foster a culture of learning and innovation within organizations involved in short break delivery, encouraging staff to share best practices and participate in continuous improvement processes.

5. Increase Understanding of Short Break Providers

- Conduct research and mapping exercises to identify and document the various types of short break providers and their roles in supporting unpaid carers access short breaks.
- Develop communication channels and platforms to facilitate knowledge sharing and networking among short break providers.
- Promote collaboration between different providers to create a holistic and integrated short break landscape that addresses the diverse needs of individuals with lower level requirements

Conclusion

Call to Action

This project saw a concerted effort to engage with various stakeholder groups across Scotland to gain invaluable insights into the current landscape of short breaks planning. The primary objective of this research was to build understanding of the existing strategic planning and commissioning landscape for short breaks, while assessing the preparedness for the impending legal "right to a break".

Through a range of engagement sessions with a diverse range of participants, we delved into the nuances of how short breaks are currently planned, surfacing both challenges and opportunities for improvement. This landscape review synthesizes the collective views shared during these sessions, with a clear intention to serve as a resource for further discussions among stakeholders.

With the insights and information presented in this report, there is an opportunity for stakeholders to convert knowledge into action. We stand at a crucial juncture where we can proactively shape the future of short breaks planning and delivery to better support unpaid carers and the individuals they care for.

The key themes identified in this report provide a clear roadmap for improvement. We must collectively work towards addressing the challenges and seizing the opportunities presented.

- **Enhancing Access** - We must strive to make short breaks more accessible to carers by streamlining the planning and commissioning process, reducing barriers, and ensuring that the "right to a break" is not just a legal provision but also a practical reality.
- **Quality of Care** - Quality should be at the heart of short breaks. We should continually assess and improve the quality of services to ensure that carers and those they care for receive the best possible support.
- **Communication and Collaboration** - Effective communication and collaboration among stakeholders are imperative. We should foster partnerships between carers, health and social care partnerships, national carer organisations, carer leads, planners, commissioners, carer centre managers, and service providers to align strategies and resources effectively.
- **Research and Innovation** - Embrace innovative solutions and leverage research findings to drive positive change in short breaks planning. This includes using evidence-based practices and staying attuned to the evolving needs of carers through engagement and good data collection.

Let us commit ourselves to making the "right to a break" a reality for carers, fostering a more caring and compassionate society in Scotland. Through collective action, we can improve the lives of carers and, by extension, those they care for.

Appendices

- A. [Literature review: respite and breaks from unpaid caring](#)
- B. [Qualitative Data from engagement sessions](#)
- C. [Data from interviews held with unpaid carers](#)



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