

# Friends, Family and Carers Strategy

Recognising, involving, and supporting carers as partners in care.

2025 - 2030

## Foreword:

Our Friends, Family and Carer strategy aims to ensure that the crucial role of carers is acknowledged and respected - and that people's needs as carers are recognised. Our strategy has been designed, developed and informed by carers and staff.

Our organisation's mission is to maximise independence and quality of life and our strategy of working in partnership with friends, family and carers helps ensure we are championing recovery, valuing diversity and involving communities to help shape our services. Through coproduction pathways, we are committed to involving carers in our work, alongside the people who use our services and others with lived experience in our communities, including our staff.

The term carer does not resonate with everyone and people feel they are providing support as an extension of a family relationship. Sometimes people use the term "hidden carers" to describe carers not currently recognised as such by themselves or professionals. We don't want to label people and we'll engage with you whether you identify as a carer, friend, family member, support network or trusted person. However, it's important to acknowledge the term carer as unpaid carers have rights under the Care Act and other legislation. In the Care Act 2014, the description applies whether the carer or cared for live together or apart. Both the cared for and their carer(s) are entitled to an assessment of their needs. Carers for the purpose of this strategy do not include someone who is paid to provide care or who is provided by a carer organisation as a volunteer.

Sometimes we call people accessing our services patients or service users, often on the journey to recovery or a better quality of life. Language is important so it's important you tell us which terms you prefer. By listening carefully to our carers, we can start to build up a picture of what you want and need to ensure we are meeting the current and future needs of carers supporting patients accessing our services.

Most people are likely to be affected by or have caring responsibilities at some stage in their lives. Caring can come about unexpectedly or can develop gradually over time. Caring can be rewarding but without the right help and support it can be challenging. Carers often put their own lives on hold to provide care and support to someone close to them. Carers can quickly become isolated, with their physical and emotional health, work and finances all affected.

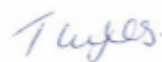
We're proud to be part of the Triangle of Care and maintain our two star accreditation status. Our strategy and charter align to the Triangle of Care principles and help us develop a carer friendly culture whereby we develop a therapeutic alliance between the professional, carer and service user which has a positive impact on recovery, improved wellbeing of the carer and provides significant benefits in improving the quality of care.

Whilst our strategy is aimed at friends, families and carers supporting patients and services users accessing any of our services, we work in collaboration with Integrated Care System partners and anticipate our strategy compliments other carer strategies locally.

Our strategy and action plan outlines our priorities and commitment to improving our support to families and carers over the next five years. However, we know each carer has their own unique needs so our priorities will need to flex to meet the diversity of our services users and carers. We look forward to working in partnership with you to improve our services and carer experiences.



**Debbie Fulton**  
Director Nursing & Therapies



**Theresa Wyles**  
Chief Operating Officer


## Who is a carer? – Definition:

We've adopted the NHS England definition of a carer – "A carer is anyone, including children and adults who looks after a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of their illness, frailty, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction and cannot cope without their support. The care they give is unpaid."<sup>1</sup>

Carers are sometimes referred to as 'unpaid carers' because they are not paid for their caring role. People who receive Carers Allowance are still unpaid carers. You are not classed as a carer if you have a paid job like a care worker or a support worker, or you work as a volunteer in a caring role

## Examples of Carers:

We know that caring looks different from carer to carer. We don't want to label our carers but we hope these examples will help people understand what caring might look like in different circumstances.




**Young Carers**  
My name is Abdul. I am 9 years old and live with my Mum who has recently been told she has Multiple Sclerosis. There have been some big changes in a short space of time. We might be moving house to get Mum the support she needs.

**Parent Carers**  
My name is Amanda.  
I am a parent carer for my 7 year old son who is Autistic. I have 3 other children and work part-time. I recently joined a parent carer forum and I'm finding the peer support really reassuring and helpful.




**Sandwich Carers**  
My name is Rochelle.  
I care for my 25 year old son who has a learning disability. He lives with me but I also care for my Mum who is 80 and lives in her own home.

**Sibling Carers**  
My name is Amy.  
I am 11 and live with my brother who has anxiety and ADHD. This means my life is quite different to my friends.



**Adult Carers**  
My name is Rachel. I care for my husband who recently had a stroke. He's learning to walk and talk again but gets frustrated easily. I'm worried he's getting depressed. I'm linking in with services to learn how I can support his needs and understand what services are available to us. Accessing the right information can be challenging.

**Carers over 75**  
My name is Barbara. I am 86 and care for my husband who is 88. I have cared for him for the past 9 years. He has sight loss and dementia. Sometimes he is calm and I cope very well but sometimes his dementia makes him verbally aggressive to me. I find this really difficult as he is a different person than he was before having dementia. Our family help and I try to seek help and support locally from services.



**Young Adult Carers**  
My name is Josh and I'm 17. I care for my mum who has stage 4 cancer. I am struggling emotionally to process this as well as having to assist her with things around the house such as cleaning and tidying. I am trying to keep studying as I know that's what mum wants but it's hard to concentrate.

**Working Carers**  
My name is Joseph. I'm 52 years old. I work full time but I'm considering giving up work as the demands of my caring role are increasing. I care for my father who is 88 and has dementia. I support him with daily living skills. We've arranged his Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA) - one for Health & Welfare and one for Property and Financial Affairs so I can take on additional responsibilities when the time comes.



**Life after caring**  
My name is Patricia. I cared for my sister Kate for many years. Kate has now moved to a care home. I visit her regularly and take her out and help her with her paperwork and finances. I also cared for our mother but she died last year. It's hard coming to terms with changes to my caring role.

**Transition Carers**  
(Moving to adulthood - 14+ to 24 years)  
My name is Sophie. I'm 17 and care for my Dad who has mental health issues linked to substance abuse. I am hoping to go to university.

## Background: Carer Facts & Figures

To help contextualise the importance of the role of carers to health systems, it is necessary to consider both national and regional statistics. We must also acknowledge there are many different estimates as to the number of unpaid carers due to variations in reporting.

Based on the 2021 Census there are 4.7 million unpaid carers in England and 5.8 million providing care across the UK. Local authority and health records vary regarding carer numbers so the Census is deemed the most reliable set of data. However, carer organisations such as Carers UK regularly survey carers for additional insights. Figure 1 below summarises carer facts published by Carers UK in February 2025.

<sup>1</sup> [NHS commissioning » Who is considered a carer?](#)



<sup>2</sup> Figure 1 - Illustration summarising Carers UK Carer Facts

Figure 2 sets out the 2021 Census national figures and includes the breakdown for Berkshire.

Geographical Area	Hours of unpaid care per week			
	Provides no unpaid care	Provides 19 or less hours	Provides 20 to 49 hours	Provides 50 or more hours
National	90.9	4.4	1.9	2.8
Bracknell Forest	92.3	4.2	1.3	2.2
West Berkshire	92.2	4.4	1.3	2.1
Reading	92.5	3.7	1.6	2.2
Slough	92.2	3.3	1.9	2.5
Windsor & Maidenhead	92.6	4.2	1.3	1.9
Wokingham	92.5	4.4	1.2	1.9

Figure 2 2021 Census Data for Berkshire

The Berkshire Data Observatory<sup>3</sup> has also produced carer figures for Berkshire East (Figure 3.) and Berkshire West (Figure 4).

<sup>2</sup> Carers UK – Facts about carers – February 2025

<sup>3</sup> <https://berkshireobservatory.co.uk/>

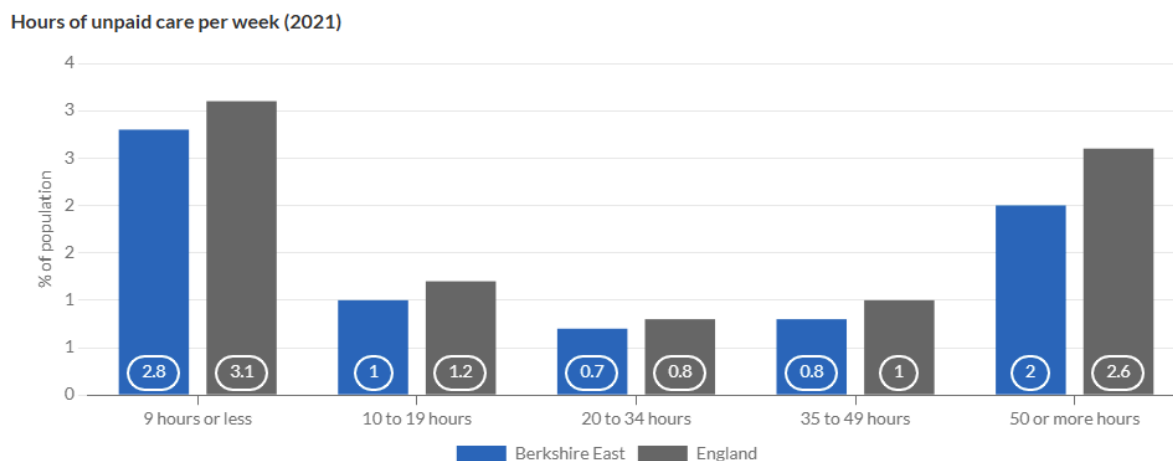


Figure 3 – Hours of Unpaid care per week (2021) N.B. Berkshire East – Total resident population 444,303 (2023)

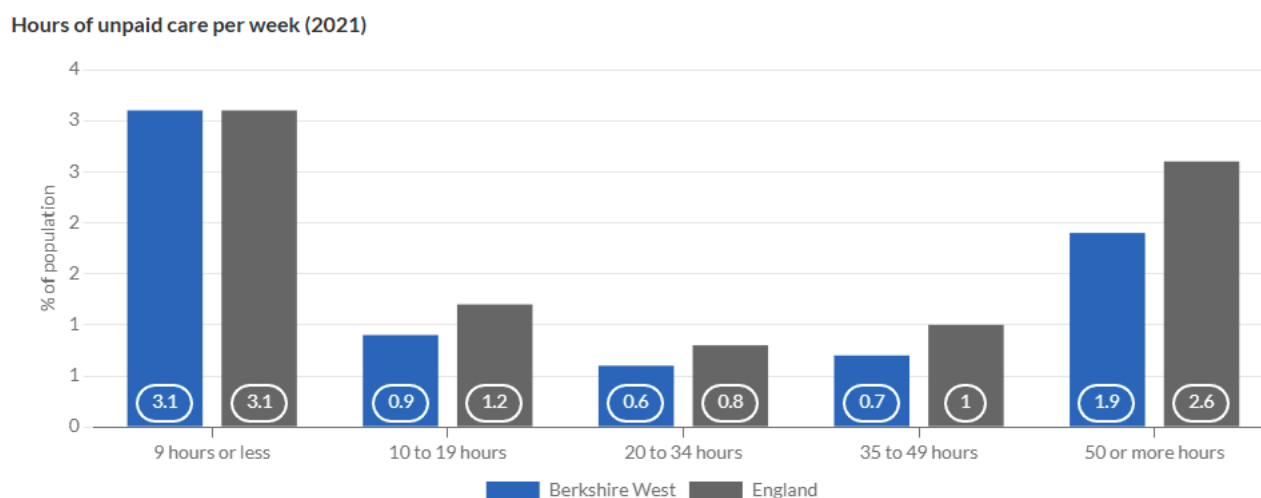


Figure 4 – Hours of Unpaid care per week (2021) N.B. Berkshire West – Total resident population – 525,433 (2023)

Research<sup>4</sup> by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates that if the number of carers rise only in line with population growth, by 2035 there will be an 11.3% increase in the number of unpaid carers providing more than 10 hours of care per week. Data also suggests that the mental and physical health of carers is disproportionately high. Consequently, it's likely our services will have increasing involvement with carers as those supporting people accessing our services but also as patients who are carers.

### Carer insights which support promoting a Friends, Family & Carers Strategy:

We introduced our first Friends, Family & Carers strategy in 2021. The rationale for supporting carers continues to gain momentum and the following highlights the benefits of adopting a Carer Strategy.



















1. **Legal responsibilities:** We have an obligation to adhere to a number of statutory and policy frameworks to support unpaid carers. For example, Care Act, Health & Care Act, NICE Guidelines Supporting Adult Carers, Long Term Plan.

<sup>4</sup> [The future of care needs: a whole systems approach | Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)

2. **Better health outcomes:** Involving and supporting carers leads to better health outcomes. Evidence suggests supporting carers can reduce readmissions or emergency admissions to hospital.
3. **Cost savings to the NHS:** The value of care provided by unpaid carers is estimated to be £154 billion – the same value as the NHS.
4. **Unpaid workforce:** Carers outnumber health and social care workers. Their knowledge and skills as expert partners in care should be harnessed, valued and recognised as part of the team.
5. **Carer wellbeing:** Supporting the 4.7 million unpaid carers in England will reduce carer burden and psychological distress ensuring carers are able to continue with their caring roles.
6. **Health inequalities:** Being an unpaid carer is a social determinant of health. Evidence suggests caring has a negative impact on physical health and wellbeing and should be recognised and addressed through health inequalities workstreams.
7. **Paid workforce:** One in three NHS staff is an unpaid carer. 600 people a day give up work to care. Policies and procedures to support working carers will help recruitment and retention.
8. **Equality and inclusion:** Supporting carers helps deliver person-centred care and promotes equality and inclusion for everyone.
9. **Employment opportunities:** Anyone can become a carer at any time. 12,000 people become carers every day. Being a carer can have an impact on ability to work, relationships and finances. Getting it right can mean helping individuals to stay in paid employment, maintaining important relationships, and keeping your finances positive.
10. **Reduction in complaints and incidents:** Evidence suggests that there is a positive correlation between communication, engagement and involvement of carers and perceived levels of high quality care.

## Progress on our Carers Strategy 2021 – 2024

Since 2023 we have introduced a Self Assessment process to chart progress and improvements. Overall, we've seen improvements across the Trust linked to all six standards.

	Carers Strategy Self Assessment 2024			Carers Strategy Self Assessment 2023		
	Green	Amber	Red	Green	Amber	Red
Standard 1	41.9% 	31.9% 	19.0% 	36.6%	35.3%	28.1%
Standard 2	61.6% 	22.6% 	15.5% 	43.5%	29.0%	27.5%
Standard 3	66.3% 	23.1% 	10.6% 	55.6%	26.8%	17.6%
Standard 4	39.4% 	27.3% 	33.3% 	31.5%	14.3%	54.2%
Standard 5	62.2% 	27.4% 	10.4% 	56.0%	27.4%	16.7%
Standard 6	46.7% 	30.7% 	22.6% 	40.6%	28.1%	31.3%

We've also broken down this data into directorates. Figure 5 sets out this information. Our mental health services have been actively engaged with carer support for a number of years and their figures are significantly higher than other directorates. However, the data suggests an element of levelling off. With the introduction of the Culture of Care and other quality improvement initiatives we are confident the 2025 data will demonstrate continued improvement. The data also confirms our Physical Health and Children and All Age services are making incremental improvements to

develop a culture of working in partnership with carers. We commend all our services for their activities and we will continue to embed our carer strategy principles and culture within services.

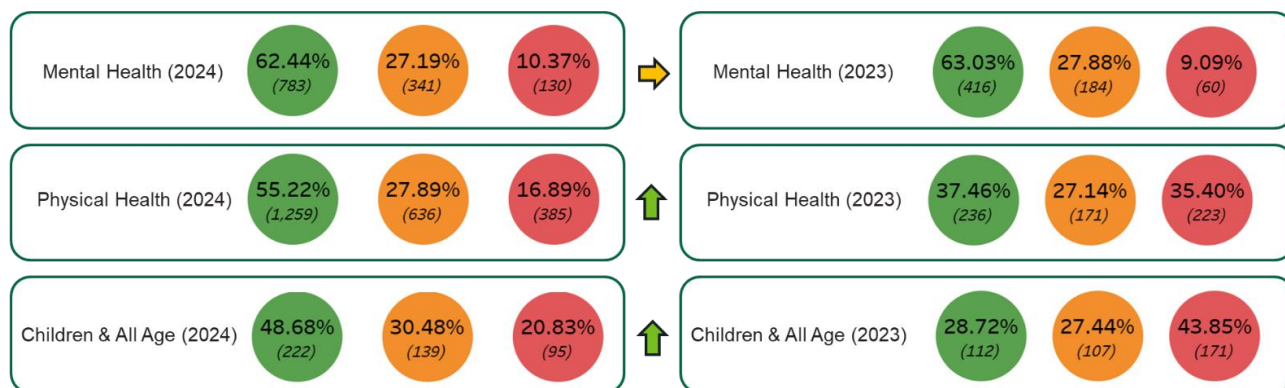


Figure 5 – Carers Strategy Self Assessment Review Data by Directorate

We've summarised our key achievements within the table below:

You Said:	We Did:
The Trust needs a dedicated role to drive forward and implement our carer strategy and activities.	We introduced a new role of Strategic Carers Lead in June 2021.
You should develop a Friends, Family & Carers group responsible for identifying priorities, delivering actions and recommendations.  Determine the reporting structure for the group to ensure the organisation has oversight of the plans and outputs of the group.	We created our Friends, Family & Carers Steering group which consists of representatives from all divisions, governor and carer representatives. The group is co-chaired by Carers.  The Strategic Carers Lead reports twice yearly to the Quality and Performance Executive Group (QPEG). Updates to QPEG set out progress against improvement priorities.
You need to train staff about carer awareness and ensure the training is accessible by all staff.	We created our Friends, Family & Carer Awareness e-learning training which all staff can access. New starters are encouraged to complete this training as part of their local induction. We're also embedding Friends, Family & Carer sections within other skills training such as clinical risk, care certificate, preceptee and healthcare support worker programmes.
You need more training and guidance for staff who have been identified as a Carer Lead /Champion for their service.  Think about having an internal promotional campaign to raise awareness about carers and give staff resources to help them engage with carers.	We created a Carers Hub – Staff Forum (on Teams) to support staff who are engaging and involving carers. The channel has 344 members. The Carers Hub is a platform for staff to access resources and a space where they can post questions or queries and share good practice. We're continuing to identify how we can support Carer Champions.

You Said:	We Did:
<p>It would be helpful to have more information or resources to help staff and patients/carers understand confidentiality and information sharing.</p>	<p>We included information about setting expectations regarding confidentiality and information sharing within our Friends, Family &amp; Carers Handbook.</p> <p>We published two information sheets (one for carers and one for staff) to help explain confidentiality, consent and information sharing.</p>
<p>You should update your website pages to include contact details and referral forms or links to the six local authorities and carers support organisations on your website and intranet.</p>	<p>We updated our website and have two pages dedicated to Friends, Family and Carers. Our webpages include helpful resources if you're accessing Berkshire Healthcare services. For example, our Carers Handbook and our Carers Charter which sets out how we aim to work in partnership with carers.</p> <p>We've also made a video to help people identify as carers. Our Carer information page includes links to local carer support offered by local authority and/or voluntary sector partners. We will continue to develop resources and relationships with ICB partners.</p>
<p>Establish a methodology for collecting, monitoring and recording how services are achieving the carers strategy.</p>	<p>We've created a digital process to collect self assessment data. Our services complete a Microsoft form annually and we've developed a Carers Strategy dashboard for teams to review their responses.</p>
<p>Review the current processes for recording carers on electronic patient records (specifically RiO) to make improvements to ensure the process is clear, user friendly, highly visible and easy to report on.</p>	<p>We're currently reviewing how carers are recorded on our systems and working with the digital transformation teams to make changes to improve recording. We will be updating our user guides to document these changes.</p>
<p>Ask carers for regular feedback to demonstrate what Berkshire Healthcare is doing to make a difference to them.</p> <p>Collaborate with local authorities about their carer activities.</p>	<p>Our Carers Lead regularly engages with our six local authority partners and attends a variety of Carer Steering Groups across Berkshire.</p> <p>We've been involved in updating carer strategies for local authorities across Berkshire to ensure our aims for carers are aligned.</p> <p>We'll continue to work collaboratively with our ICS partners to hear the carer voice and include carer feedback within our service improvements.</p>

## What is our Carers Strategy 2025 – 2030



Figure 6 – Graphic illustrating national & local documents which inform the strategy

Our refreshed Carers Strategy has been informed and shaped by national and local documents including our previous strategy.

Our strategy will continue to consist of six standards. We've re-ordered and strengthened these standards and aligned them to our Carers Charter. We've identified four key priorities:

- Identify and recognise carers
- Inform and involve carers
- Guide and support carers
- Staff training and development

We're committed to our services continuing to work towards our refreshed six standards. We've summarised the standards, charter and priorities in the infographic below.

Finally, we've developed an action plan to help us implement our ambitions across different teams and services. (Appendix 1)

### Opportunities within the 2025 – 2030 strategy:

Our refreshed strategy provides the following opportunities:

- Further development of support available for carers.
- Increased carer involvement, engagement, co-design and co-production.
- Increase access to support so carers feel safe in their caring role
- Improve support available for young carers especially during the transition into adulthood.
- Recognise how we can connect carers to support when their caring role ends.
- Consider carers as part of health inequalities activities.
- Increasing visibility and clarity of data.
- Measurable outcomes with responsibility and accountability for the delivery of the strategy.

### How will we know if we're improving?

We will measure our achievements against the following outcome measures:

- Reporting via our Carers Strategy Self Assessment process (including peer review)
- Increased carer involvement, engagement and co-production
- Increase in referrals and connections to local support
- Increased carer insights using carer feedback forms.
- Performance against our Carers Strategy Action Plan.

**Friends, Family & Carer Strategy Standards:**

**Friends, Family & Carer Charter Priorities:**

**Identify and recognise carers:**

**Standard 1:**  
Staff will identify and recognise carers and involve them as expert partners in the planning of care

Ask the people who use our services if they have a carer and how they want you to be involved

Listen to and respect you. Help friends and family identify themselves as carers

Acknowledge your expertise and ask your opinions. Ensure you are visible throughout the patient's journey

**Inform and involve carers:**

**Standard 2:**  
Services will provide an introduction to the service and relevant information across the care pathway

Provide clear, accurate and understandable information

Keep you informed by sharing relevant and meaningful information

Involve you in the planning and delivery of our services

Explain why, if for legal reasons, we cannot inform or involve you

**Standard 3:**  
Services will provide a range of carer support and obtain carers' feedback

Ask you for your feedback on our services

Ask you to participate in co-production activities to reflect the lived experience carer voice

Embrace the diversity of carers and value difference through inclusion of all

**Guide and support carers:**

**Standard 4:**  
Staff will refer, connect and signpost carers to relevant support

Recognise the wellbeing needs of carers

Help carers to understand their rights and support carers to feel safe in their caring role

Connect you to local support across health and social care services and voluntary sector partners

**Staff training and development:**

**Standard 5:**  
Staff will be "carer aware" and receive training to improve communication and engagement with friends, family and carers

**Standard 6:**  
Services will have allocated staff responsible for carers (either paid or volunteer champion roles)

By 2030, our friends, families and carers should:









- Have timely access to person-centred, user-friendly, accessible information and advice to support them and their cared for person
- Understand their rights, options and how to access a Carers Assessment
- With the consent of the service user, have a voice in the care, support and treatment of the cared for person.
- Have information and support to help look after their own health and wellbeing and achieve outcomes that matter to them
- Have a consistent carer experience across our services












**Action Plan:**

Some actions will happen across specific Directorates/services, whereas others will happen in partnership with different Directorates/services, across a bigger area. This key is included to understand which actions will happen where.

**Key:**

Strategic Carers Lead (supported by identified stakeholders)	Mental Health	Physical Health	Children & All Age
			

Identify and recognise:	
Identify carers and the essential role they play at first contact or as soon as possible thereafter	
Collaborate with services to design standardised documentation to include questions to identify support networks, friends, family and carers and streamline processes to ensure carers do not have to keep telling their story	
Consider including in all initial appointment letter advising the service user that it would be beneficial for a carer/family member/friend to accompany them to their first appointment	
Continue to develop MarComms resources to support carers to identify themselves, their role and to seek support as earlier in their caring journey.	
Continue to liaise with our digital transformation teams to ensure our electronic patient record systems effectively record and identify carers	
Clear process in place that identifies carers and provides an outline of carer support offered Clear routes of contacts and support are in place for carers, particularly in times of crisis	
Identify young carers and ensure that children and young people do not have to take on inappropriate levels of caring	
Support children and adults to recognise when they are in a caring role and where to seek help.	

<b>Identify and recognise:</b>	
Scope out and coproduce an information pack for young carers and young adult carers based on their specific needs.	
Raising the profiles of patient and carer experience whenever we can	
<b>Inform and involve carers:</b>	
Ensure information, resources and advice is clear, comprehensive, free from jargon, easy to read and understand and accessible to all at multiple points of contact	
Involve, listen and respect carers in planning the carer and support which the cared for person receives – enabling safe, effective and personalised care	
Provide and/or signpost people to understand where and how to get a carers assessment and how to access the full range of benefits (including financial benefits) and support available to them across the health system.	
Improve communication between teams/services regarding carer involvement. Encourage staff to use existing holistic skills and apply these to supporting and involving carers.	
Ensure staff have a conversation with carers about their role and how their needs can best be supported – whether that is providing information or being referred on to specialist support or having a carers assessment etc	
Ensure services provide clear messaging around confidentiality and on-going communication with carers families and friends	
Create mechanisms to improve links and/or new ways of working to connect to carer services offered by ICB partners (local authority, charities, third sector etc)	
Where possible, sites have carer information boards with up to date and accurate information. Set minimum standard of expectations for the content of carer information boards across inpatient and community services.	
Create bespoke carer information packs. Information provided by professionals must be honest and transparent. Resources should include an introductory letter/information sheet for the relevant team/ward – explaining the nature of the service provided and who to contact including out of hours.	

**Inform and involve carers:**

Improve how and what feedback we collect from carers Trust-wide. Actively listening to carer feedback so we can learn, act and improve

- Consider introducing an annual carers survey to provide feedback on experiences and work with local organisations to ensure carers from a range of backgrounds are heard.
- Adopt a more inclusive approach to ensure carer voice from marginalised groups is heard.
- Increase the participation levels of carers giving service feedback across the Trust and support services to act upon the feedback.



Clear policies, protocols and procedures for carers to enable them to be proactively involved in the care planning and treatment process across the care pathway and resources to outline how and when carers can be involved in planning care



Improve mechanisms for involving carers in discharge planning and aftercare support



Ensure carers views and knowledge are sought, shared and used and regularly updated as overall care plans and strategies to support treatment and recovery and be mindful of carers own needs



Explore how we can capture & maximise the carer voice (experience and knowledge) through co-production activities to ensure carers feel heard and included in service design and improvements.



Ensure patients, service users and carers are at the centre of all our quality improvement and transformation work



Recovery will have a different emphasis depending on the services. However, in all situations it is important to us that the carer is involved in how we are delivering recover orientated care. Consider ways we can engage and involve carers to support recovery.



**Guide and support carers:**

Improve processes to refer, connect and signpost to local carer support and information carers of all ages



Proactively provide support and guidance in advance of carers reaching crisis
















Provide or signpost carers to information and support to feel safe in their caring role



Support people and signpost them to where and how they can develop an emergency/contingency plan and where to access it if they are unable to provide care.



<b>Guide and support carers:</b>	
Provide knowledge and information on the range of community support services available and information on how to improve life outside of caring	
Support carers to know how to access the full range of benefits available to them and are aware of their entitlement to support	
Investigate opportunities for carers to learn about managing their own wellbeing including the provision of targeted wellbeing service options for carers	
Investigate how carers can access to educational workshops or similar to improve understanding of health conditions, behaviours, medication and aspects to support them with their caring role.	
Consider how digital technology may be used to support carers	
Improve accessible resources to outlining pathways and offers available.	
Review complaints and incidents to identify any themes involving carers and consider quality improvement activities to address any issues raised.	
Embed Patient Carer Race Equality Framework (PCREF) within practice.	
<b>Staff training and development:</b>	
Increase staff confidence to ask carers about their needs	
Increase the number of Carer Champions across services	
Upskill staff to feel empowered to have conversations with patients/service users to identify who supports them. Support staff to deliver better conversations with carers. E.g. Making every contact count – carer lens	
Develop and embed friends, family and carer training across clinical, leadership and specialist training e.g. Beyond the Cubicle.	
Develop processes to ensure staff working in short-term settings or situations understand our carers strategy and how we engage and involve friends, family & carers across the care pathway.	

**Staff training and development:**

Services to develop and maintain an agreed action plan to evidence how they are working towards implementing the standards and priorities set out within the Carers Strategy



Develop resources and training for staff to help identify carer and support staff to use existing holistic skills and apply these to supporting and involving carers



Expand our staff knowledge and understanding of carer experience and how it influences practice  
Clinicians are supported and able to apply new learning into their practice to deliver improvements to care and carers are involved in sharing lived experiences to support staff learning



Continue to collaborate and work in partnership with other organisations to benefit our patients, service users and carers, sharing learning and best practice.



Continuing to engage with carer champions across the organisation to make real change happen



Host an annual carer experience event to share achievements and future aspirations.



Staff will wear a carer recognition tool (card worn on their lanyard) to help support carer conversations.



Staff will be provided with access to the Carers Hub – and additional resources & information.



Staff will have access to guidelines on confidentiality and information sharing.  
Ensure staff are aware of confidentiality guidelines – confident on the real boundaries of information sharing rather than perceived ones. Understand they can always listen to carers



Continue to support our staff who are working carers through our Working Carers Network and other activities



Review complaints and incident data where carer and family needs fell short of expected standards and learn from these experiences to improve services

