

# Care workers worse off than two years ago, new paper shows

August 19 2024

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Already having a high rate of in-work poverty, care workers are now worse off in real terms than they were two years ago and should be given pay parity with equivalent NHS roles, according to new research.

The new report comes in the wake of the government's proposed Fair Pay Agreement for social care, recently announced in the King's Speech. The agreement proposes "fair pay and conditions, including staff benefits, terms and training, underpinned by rights for trade unions to access workplaces."

This [paper](#) shows that care worker pay has declined relative to other low-paid occupations over the last 15 years, including positions in retail jobs, which offers higher pay for less responsibility.

These shocking findings come only a few short years since the care sector was thanked and praised by the Government for working with bravery and dignity through the COVID pandemic.

The paper shows that the median care worker's pay has risen by less than £4 an hour in the last 15 years, while the median supermarket sales assistant has seen their pay rise by £4.52 an hour—further eroding the gap between [care workers](#) and other potential job roles.

The paper is authored by the expert group ReWAGE and the University of Warwick's Institute for Employment Research.

Beate Baldauf, co-author of the paper, commented: "Nobody goes into the care sector to become a high earner—but equally nobody should have to experience hardship or poverty if they wish to work in care."

The research also found that increases in the National Minimum Wage (NMW) and the National Living Wage (NLW) eroded the difference in pay between care workers and senior care workers, reducing incentives for staff to seek promotion or stay in the sector.

This means that pay must be increased across junior and more senior care roles to incentivize promotion and ensure staff recruitment and

retention.

The paper recommends increased pay and better working conditions for care sector staff, arguing for at least the Real Living Wage where it has not already been achieved and pay parity with equivalent NHS roles in the longer term to ensure staff are valued and incentivized to stay in the care sector.

The paper also calls on the government to improve statutory sick pay arrangements for care workers, which is currently not enough for a decent standard of living.

Many care workers also cannot claim sick pay until a certain amount of time is passed in their roles, leaving them with the choice of working when they are unable to or the serious risk of destitution.

The report makes a set of recommendations to the new government to deliver Good Work for care workers, including pay, conditions, training and job security. Many care workers face precarious working conditions, underpinned by zero-hour contracts.

Beate Baldauf continued, "A pay increase is key to improving the competitiveness of the care sector but on its own it will be insufficient to address the longstanding crisis in recruitment and retention. We also need action to improve the working conditions of care staff to help improve morale."

Unpaid care workers must also receive further support, according to the new paper. Unpaid care workers do the majority of care in the U.K. and require further practical and [financial support](#) to reduce the financial penalty of not working in order to care for loved ones.

Professor Chris Warhurst, Co-Chair of ReWAGE adds, "This new

report hopes to feed into the debate surrounding Labor's recently announced Fair Pay Agreement for the social care sector. The evidence suggests that good quality jobs in social care are vital to the delivery of good quality social care."

Mubin Haq, Chief Executive of the abrdn Financial Fairness Trust said, "With a workforce already larger than the NHS, social care has a fraction of the resources health has in relation to pay, conditions, training and development. As our population ages, these disparities are likely to become more acute unless there is a significant injection of public funding. This investment is essential if the government is to deliver on its health targets, with [social care](#) key to freeing up capacity in the NHS."

**More information:** Paper: [Work, Wages and Employment in the Adult Social Care Sector](#)

Provided by University of Warwick

Citation: Care workers worse off than two years ago, new paper shows (2024, August 19) retrieved 21 August 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-08-workers-worse-years-paper.html>

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