

The Referendum: What does it mean for carers?

A briefing paper for carers, June 2014

On the 18th of September 2014 Scotland will go to the polls to decide whether it wants independence or to continue to remain part of the United Kingdom.

Many people are still weighing up the arguments and deciding where to place their vote – and there is a lot to consider. Much of the media coverage has focused on the economy, currency, employment, pensions, childcare and defence. Of course all these issues are just as important to carers as the rest of the population.

However, carers also want to know how their vote will make a difference in relation to their caring role and to the person they care for. How will their decision affect the health and social care services they rely on? Which scenario will lead to them being financially better off? When we shine a light on what each campaign is pledging to improve carers' lives – who comes out on top?

The National Carer Organisations recently held two meetings looking at the Referendum and what it means for carers, hosted by the Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and leader of the Scottish Labour Party Johann Lamont. For those carers who were not able to attend we have developed this briefing paper.

Here in their own words is the case for voting YES – set out by the *Yes Scotland* Campaign and the case for voting NO – set out by Johann Lamont from the *Better Together* Campaign.



The Case for a No Vote

by Johann Lamont, Scottish Labour Leader



A stronger Scotland, a United Kingdom

Like everyone who gets to see first hand the work that carers do, I am in awe at the sacrifices they make for the people they love.

We owe them a tremendous gratitude for the care they provide because as a country we would never be able to replicate it. But I know that carers are tired of hearing politicians saying how great they are and are rightly more interested in hearing when they will get the support and respite they and their families need.

In that context, carers' group are right to use the referendum to ask both sides of the campaign what difference this vote could make to their lives.

The truth is, carers have a tough job to do and on September 19th, whether Scotland has voted Yes or No, it will still be a tough job. Everyone knows that and anyone who tries to suggest any different will not be taken seriously.

Scotland's carers are some of the most practical, realistic in society and they won't be falling for any false promises. That is because the changes that carers need to support the job they do won't happen just because we have one constitution or another. It will happen when politicians are brave enough to make the hard choices which will mean more money to be spent on carers.

With respite provision being cut and charges increasing, there is nothing in this SNP Government's record to suggest that decisions made in Scotland will be any fairer to carers.

We do know that if Scotland votes Yes, there will be less money to spend on public services and welfare. All of the independent analysis shows that there will be less money and we will be reliant on the volatility of oil for public spending.

Just last week, the IFS estimated there would be a £8 billion gap in our finances, and that's before you get to some of the other spending promises Alex Salmond and the Yes campaign have made.

To me, this sounds like there would be less money for carers in an independent Scotland. It makes sense to me that sharing our resources across 60 million people rather than five gives vulnerable people more certainty and security.

Voting no won't automatically mean carers get a better deal but there will be more money to spend on public

services and social security. The real hard work comes in convincing political parties and more importantly governments to give carers their fair share.

We have made progress in providing the support that carers need and I am proud of Labour's record on delivering for vulnerable people. But I am in no doubt we still have a long way to go.

To help Labour understand the challenges faced by carers, one of my first tasks as Leader was to appoint Clare Lally as our Carers Champion. Her story of caring for a young child who has serious health difficulties while juggling all the pressures of family life is so inspiring. Even more so, the great attitude and love of life she has despite these challenges are just as moving.

Clare participates in our cabinet meetings and is helping to inform our future policies so that carers can recognise Labour as the party which will stand up for them. I have found that her input has been invaluable in representing the views of carers and providing a real life perspective on people's everyday lives.

We have a job to do in opposition, holding both the UK and Scottish governments to account when they get it wrong, like the bedroom tax or the increase in care charges.

Labour takes this job very seriously and we will not allow either Alex Salmond or David Cameron to ignore the demands of carers who are being left without the support they need to look after loved ones.

We have been hard at work campaigning and raising issues such the postcode lottery in respite care, calling for the Scottish Government to address the need for short breaks and calling them out on the deep cuts to local government which are passed on to carers.

But we have to do more than just be a good opposition. We have to show that we are a better alternative to some of the wrong-headed policies we get from this government.

We want to work with carers to understand their lives, the pressures on them, and devise policies with their input that can give them the help they need. Too often, politics and election are reduced to offers and sound-bites that bear no resemblance to what is delivered on the ground.

I want to change that. I want to marry politics with the real world.

Everyone agrees that the work of carers is too important to be left unsupported. We all know that any one of us may have to take on caring duties, possibly at great personal and financial cost

Almost 500 people take on caring responsibilities every day. But we must do more than just recognise and praise carers.

Joe Biden, the Vice President of the United States, once said: "Don't tell me what you value, show me your budget, and I'll tell you what you value."

It reminds us that warm words and vague promises are not enough. Carers need action.

In Scotland, we are not seeing action. We are seeing empty pledges to suit another agenda. Others would rather use the plight of carers to make an argument about the constitution, one they believe in anyway, rather than take action with the power they have.

I hope that carers will see Labour as the party which best stands up for them when they get the chance to pick their next government.

Find out more:

Web: www.bettertogether.net

Twitter: [@uk_together](https://twitter.com/uk_together)

Facebook: [/bettertogetheruk](https://facebook.com/bettertogetheruk)

The Case for a Yes Vote

As the Financial Times has highlighted, Scotland is one of the world's top 20 wealthy countries – wealthier per head than the UK, Japan or France. We have economic strengths across a range of industries, from renewables to food and drink, tourism to manufacturing, life sciences to engineering – all strong foundations that ensure that Scotland will flourish with independence.

Even the No campaign agrees that Scotland's got what it takes to be a successful independent country. David Cameron has said that "supporters of independence will always cite examples of small, independent and thriving economies, such as Switzerland and Norway. It would be wrong to suggest that Scotland could not be another such successful, independent country"

Other wealthy countries - like Norway and Switzerland, for example - have used their wealth to deliver well-paid jobs, world-class public services, sturdy social protection systems and support for those who need it, and the highest standards of living for their people. Scotland should be able to do the same.

With a Yes vote we have an unrivalled opportunity to put our wealth to much better use, so that we all feel the benefit in our day-to-day lives. We can enrich and improve our society and secure a fairer deal for people than at present. This, in a nutshell, is why Scotland should be independent.

Yes gains for people across Scotland

After a Yes vote in September, Scotland becomes independent in March 2016. And, in May we choose our first independent government. We'll be able to

make sure Scotland's great wealth delivers more for people living here in Scotland.

We can:

- protect and enhance our cherished public services, including improving our schools and our publicly owned NHS and halting the worst of Westminster's welfare changes. After all one of the world's wealthiest countries should expect world-class public services
- use our wealth and control over our tax system to attract more businesses and employers to invest in Scotland, creating more and better local jobs. This, in turn, will generate additional wealth for the future which we can choose to share more fairly across society.
- ease the pressure on household budgets with new powers to take forward policies like annual cost of living increases in the minimum wage, the tax free allowance, tax credits and welfare benefits to ease some of the pressure on household budgets;

Building for the future

As well as using our wealth to build for the future through attracting new businesses and work opportunities across Scotland, control of our wealth will put us in a far better position to protect our society from the impact of any future global economic boom and bust, for example, by saving just some of our energy wealth in a rainy day fund to give us an effective safety net for the future.



Building on devolution

With devolution, the Scottish Parliament is already responsible for some of the policy areas that are important in providing support for carers. However, much of the relevant legislative competencies are still reserved to the UK Government – notably policy around welfare provision for carers and cared for people.

Already, the Scottish Government has made some important advances in supporting carers. Caring Together and Getting it Right for Young Carers together comprise the National Strategy for Carers and Young Carers (2010-2015), which have brought forward a number of measures to provide greater support for carers.

Work is already being undertaken to build on this strategy and advance carers' rights in the current Parliament, with a consultation on new carers legislation being held between January and April 2014. The consultation has attracted over 130 responses from organisations involved in representing and supporting carers. This would continue after a Yes vote, with the enhanced powers delivered with independence, giving future Scottish Governments the ability to address carers concerns as a whole.

Between 2008 and 2015, the Scottish Government is investing over £98million in supporting carers and young carers, from Scotland's devolved budget. Particular emphasis has been placed on identifying carers so as to give them support and guidance, and providing information and advice. Providing respite care and short breaks in particular is crucial for carers, to give them time off from their stressful day-to-day life. Following recent Scottish Government investment, the national carers' short breaks fund now totals £2.25million.

With Scotland's block grant being determined by Westminster, the amount of money the Scottish Government has to spend on public services – and crucial services for carers – has been cut in recent years. A Yes vote in September means we'll set out our own budget with our own priorities. We can make

sure our great wealth and resources deliver more for people living in Scotland, rather than seeing it wasted on things like nuclear weapons or the £50 million cost of sending politicians to Westminster.

Using the new powers of independence

The Social Security system is currently reserved and it is administered by Westminster's Department for Work and Pensions. As the recent Scottish Welfare Commission report set out, independence offers an opportunity to craft a fairer welfare system, moving away from Westminster's harmful approach which has seen swingeing cuts to household incomes and rising child poverty. Among other proposals it recommends that Carer's Allowance be raised to the level of Jobseekers Allowance.

Carer's Allowance is currently the lowest income replacement benefit at £61.35 per week, and an increase to the level of JSA would provide recipients with an extra £575 a year. This recommendation was immediately accepted by the Scottish Government, who have pledged to implement such a change if in power after independence.

Carer and Commission member, Lynn Williams of SCVO, has spoken about the report, saying that she was "pleased that our work has placed strong value on the significant contribution of unpaid carers."

Speaking about the Commission's work, she added "I am delighted that we have outlined the opportunities to tackle carer poverty through increased carer benefits and flexible employment practices, should there be a 'yes' vote in September. Joined up thinking and policies must be our starting point, to tackle the bureaucracies and service challenges faced by unpaid carers and their families. Everyone deserves to live life to achieve their full potential. A social security system in an independent Scotland would have a pivotal role in this regard."

Find out more:

Web: www.yesscotland.net

Twitter: [@YesScotland](https://twitter.com/YesScotland)

Facebook: [/YesScotland](https://www.facebook.com/YesScotland)

The National Carer Organisations are:

Carers Scotland, The Coalition of Carers in Scotland, Minority Ethnic Carers of Older People Project (MECOPP), Crossroads Caring Scotland, Shared Care Scotland, the Scottish Young Carers Services Alliance and Carers Trust Scotland.

Contact details:

Claire Cairns, Coalition of Carers in Scotland - coalition@carersnet.org

Fiona Collie, Carers Scotland - fiona.collie@carerscotland.org

Suzanne Munday, MECOPP - suzanne@mecopp.org.uk

Heather Noller, Carers Trust Scotland - hnoller@carers.org