

Meet your MP: a guide for carers

Meeting with your MP is a unique opportunity. It's a chance for you to share your own lived experience as a carer and to have your say about the change you want to see.

Meeting with your MP can help to ensure that carers for people living with mental illness are seen and valued in the national conversation about unpaid carers.

We have created this guide because we know that many of you face numerous challenges when caring for your loved one, but often feel like “the invisible mental health service.”

In 2024, the Rethink Mental Illness Carers Advisory Board (made up of people who are carers of those living with mental illness) developed the [Mental Health Unpaid Carers Charter](#).

The charter outlines the need for a carers' framework and standards that call on all providers of mental health care to better involve carers. The Charter belongs to carers. It is your story to tell.

Why meet your MP now?

The 2024 General Election has seen over 300 new MPs joining Parliament. These new MPs are still deciding what their priorities are, so this is an opportune time to bring your lived experience and the Carers Charter to their attention to ensure that the needs of carers are championed in Parliament and beyond.

This guide will help you to prepare for a meeting with your MP. It gives tips on how to organise your meeting and have a discussion about the issues that matter to you.

Setting up a meeting with your MP

Take it step by step.

1. **Find out who your MP is [here](#) by searching for your postcode.** Please remember that MPs often have very busy schedules, so try to remain flexible when arranging a date to meet. MPs are usually at their constituency office on Fridays.
2. **Email your MP briefly explaining why you would like to meet them.** [On page 4 of this guide, you will find a template you can use.](#) You could tell your MP that you would be happy to set up an appointment at one of their local constituency surgeries, or you could request to meet on a specific date instead.
3. **Follow up with your MP if you don't hear back from them.** Try calling their Parliament and constituency office and flagging your email with them. You can find your MP's contact details [here](#) by typing your MP's name, or your postcode if you're unsure who your MP is. When you click on your MP, you will be taken to a page which displays the contact number and email address for your MP.
4. **Tell us that your meeting has been booked** by emailing campaigns@rethink.org and read on for how to have an effective meeting with your MP.
5. **Send us your feedback and a photo!** Let us know how your meeting went and don't forget to send us a photo of you with your MP if you took one. If you're happy for us to share your photo and experience on social media please email us, and we will send you a consent form to confirm this. Sharing your experience can spread the word and encourage more people to meet with their MP!

Tips for an effective meeting

Once you have set up a meeting with your MP, here are a few tips to make sure your meeting goes well.

1. **Be well prepared** - you don't have to be an expert but it's good to read the points below to help you feel prepared. It's also useful to make notes of the key things you want to say to ensure you cover everything during the meeting.
2. **Make it personal by sharing your own story** – you may want to think about which elements of your own experience you want to share ahead of time. Talking about your own experience helps to bring the issue to life and helps your MP to understand how their policies directly impact people's lives.
3. **Keep the meeting on track** - confirm how much time your MP has before you meet with them. You may also find it helpful to take notes during your meeting.
4. **Aim for a friendly discussion** - it will help you to have a productive conversation and get your points across. Your MP won't be able to instantly provide all of the answers you might be hoping for or make promises around what they can deliver. But they should listen to what you're saying and hopefully become an ally when it comes to supporting carers in the future.
5. **Arrange a way of following up with your MP after the meeting**. Two weeks after your meeting, send your MP a photo from your meeting via email and thank them for meeting with you. Remind them of any actions you agreed on during the meeting. Let your MP know that you'd be happy to speak to them again if they would like to take any of your discussion points further.

Key talking points for your meeting

There might be a long list of things you want to cover in your meeting, but often time is short, so it is helpful to focus the discussion on the key points you wish to cover. To help with this, we have shared the **six key calls** in the [Carers' Charter](#) and encourage you to raise these issues with your MP.

1. **Mental health carers must be involved, listened to and treated respectfully by services.** Carer's knowledge of their loved one's condition is often undervalued and not considered when making decisions about their care.
2. **Mental health carers must be treated as partners in care by health and care professionals, who have received appropriate training to support this approach.** Carers' experiences suggest that health and care professionals do not receive enough training on how to involve, support and communicate with carers.
3. **Mental health carers must be offered full access to specialist carer's support, including help to understand their rights.** Local authorities favour generic carers support amid financial pressures. Specialist mental health carers support should be expanded to ensure carers understand their loved one's condition and feel able to navigate treatment and support.
4. **Mental health carers must be supported to avoid financial hardship.** Social security options for carers, such as Carers Allowance, must be reformed to tackle financial hardship and account for the reality of caring across their life span.
5. **Mental health carers must be understood and assisted according to their individual needs and backgrounds.** Certain groups such as older carers, young carers, LGBTQ+ carers and carers from racially minoritised communities face additional challenges when trying to access support. Carers must be offered individualised support and targeted interventions to meet their needs.

6. **Mental health carers must be assisted to plan for when they die, and for the future of the person they care for.** Many older unpaid carers worry how the person they are caring for will be supported and housed after they die, or if they become unwell. Planning for the future should also be core to assessment of care and support needs for those living with mental illness and their carers.
7. **If your MP asks what they can do to support carers?** Ask your MP to the join the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Mental Health. This is a group of MPs and Peers from all political parties who are interested in mental health. They have reformed following the last general election and will be setting their areas of focus in the coming months.

Key caring statistics

- Around 1.5 million people care for someone with mental ill health in the UK
- We estimate that the monetary value of the support provided by these unpaid carers is over £15.1bn – although for those they care for, it is invaluable.
- Nearly 80% of all carers feel stressed and anxious, and for many carers of people affected by mental illness, caring can be very distressing.

Email template to send to your MP

Here is an example of an email that you could send to your MP.

Subject line: Meeting to discuss how carers can be better supported.

Dear **[MP name]**,

My name is **[add your name]** and I live in **[town]**. As your constituent, I would like to meet with you to discuss my experience of caring for someone living with mental illness and how carers could be better supported.

Improving support for carers is extremely important to me because **[this is the time to briefly share your caring experience. You can expand on this experience if you meet with your MP]**.

Although we talk about mental health now more than ever, the experiences of people who care someone living with mental illness are often excluded and overlooked. Despite this, around 1.5 million people care for someone with mental illness in the UK, and the support provided by these carers is valued at over £15.1bn. This effectively makes mental health carers an invisible mental health service that is undervalued and unsupported by professionals and decision makers.

I would like to meet with you to discuss this in person or **online [delete if you have a preference]**. Would you be available on **[insert date/s that you are free]**? If you receive similar requests from other constituents, I would be happy to join them in the same meeting if that is more convenient for you.

I appreciate how busy you are, so even 20 minutes of your time would be hugely appreciated. Please let me know what date is convenient for you.

Best wishes,
[Name and postcode]

End of email

We hope you find this guide helpful. If you have any questions or need further information, please do not hesitate to contact the Campaigns Team by emailing Carla and Davinder at campaigns@rethink.org - we're happy to help!