

# Carer Research and Knowledge Exchange Network (CAREN)



The Open University



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“ Long-term care for people with chronic illnesses and disabilities presents an urgent challenge around the world. The burden placed on unpaid family carers is immense and has a direct impact on their physical health, mental and emotional wellbeing and economic security. ”

(Carers Worldwide, 2017)



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Caring is a global issue which none of us can afford to ignore. Changing demographics and an ageing population mean that the number of family carers (carers) is increasing nationally and internationally. Without the contribution of carers, support of vulnerable and disabled children and adults in societies across the world would be unsustainable. Continuing pressure on health and care services mean the demands on family carers are increasing. Of particular concern for policy makers is the predicted shortfall between the 'demand' for and 'supply' of carers. Carers are economically valuable too; their value in the UK is estimated to be £132 billion per annum, equivalent to total spend on the NHS.

Despite policy initiatives, many carers, wherever they live, continue to be profoundly disadvantaged by caring, particularly in relation to their finances and physical and psychological health. Therefore globally, it is socially and economically imperative that better and cost-effective ways of sustaining the existing and future supply of carers are identified.

The overarching aim of this innovative and timely project is to improve outcomes for carers across the world.

It is now well-recognised that not only are information and evidence central to the development of good quality care and evidence-based practice but so too is knowledge exchange between research, practice and policy stakeholders. This project will develop a freely accessible and navigable knowledge exchange digital resource – to be known as the Carer Research and Knowledge Exchange Network (CAREN) – based on an Open University

website. It will both provide coherently organised information and evidence about carers and meet the urgent need for multidisciplinary knowledge exchange nationally and internationally around carer research evidence, practice and innovation for ALL national and international stakeholders who require any form of carer-related knowledge. These stakeholders include governments, carers, employers, policy makers, practitioners, researchers, third sector organisations and research funders around the world.

Much needed knowledge exchange between these stakeholders will be facilitated via webinars, an online forum, Facebook, Twitter, blogs and podcasts. Examples of knowledge exchange areas are decision-making (e.g. between service commissioners), service development and innovative practice (e.g. between social care workers, social workers, social work students, admiral nurses, commissioners and policy makers), existing and future research(ers) (e.g. between carers, researchers, PhD students and research funders), translating research into policy and practice (e.g. between researchers, policymakers and practitioners) and consultations (e.g. between carers, government departments and third sector organisations).

Such knowledge exchange can improve carers' lives by contributing to the development of evidence-based, cost-effective and high quality services and support for them. The information and evidence base within CAREN will be regularly updated and further interactive features developed to enhance its knowledge exchange potential.

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