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Summary

This report presents findings from qualitative research into the experiences of people claiming or with an underlying entitlement to Carer's Allowance (CA). The findings are based on in-depth interviews with 44 people who claimed CA or had an underlying entitlement to it, in three areas of the UK in summer 2013.

The aim of the research was to better understand the following research questions:

- How is CA viewed in terms of the household budget, and does this vary by type of household?
- How do recipients use CA and what would be the impact of non-receipt?
- How does the use of CA vary depending on who is being cared for and where?
- What led to the decision to claim CA?
- Has receipt of CA had different impacts at different times of the caring career?
- What impact has caring had on labour market participation?

Main findings

For some carers, CA is a vitally important part of household income and supports both everyday expenditure and the additional costs incurred. The majority of carers do not see CA as separate from any other source of household income.

Without CA, some respondents said that they would have to cut back on food, fuel or transport costs. Some carers also suggested that without CA they would have to cut back on their caring responsibilities or give up caring altogether to seek paid work.

CA has a high symbolic value. It gives people status as a carer and reduces the stigma in terms of people who had to rely on social security benefits.

The relationship between caring and the labour market is varied and often complex. A small number of carers who had seen a reduction in their caring responsibilities were relatively close to the labour market. Many carers, however, were unable to contemplate paid work without significant packages of substitute care being put in place. Some, who were involved in high levels of caring activity, had no intention of seeking paid work while the person they were supporting was alive.

There was a large group of carers who would like to have paid work again, but could not see how that would be possible in the near future. Finding paid work that fits around caring responsibilities, and that can be flexible when unanticipated needs present themselves is essential, particularly for carers of disabled children.

The research explored a number of potential options for change in relation to CA. These included provision of a lump sum payment or providing further services for the person supported (or CA recipient). Carers were also asked how they would redesign the system.

There was no common message from carers on rolling up CA into another source of income and a one-off lump-sum payment gained very little support. Slightly more popular was the idea of a lump-sum followed by smaller, regular payments.

A quarter of carers were largely happy with the system and could not think of any ways to change it.