

# Dorchester Carer's Nook Patient Survey Results

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## Summary

In response to the significant and often unmet needs of unpaid carers in Mid Dorset, Mid Dorset Primary Care Network (PCN), in collaboration with Dorset Council, Age UK, Carer Support Dorset, and Dorchester Connect Hub, is developing a dedicated Carer Support Hub, launching in summer 2025. To ensure the service is shaped by those it is intended to support, a carer survey was conducted between 24th March and 11th April 2025. A total of 163 responses were received, representing a 9.3% response rate from registered carers.

The majority of respondents (50%) had been providing care for over five years, and 6% were caring for more than one person.

When asked about what support would be most helpful, 64% of carers selected two or more options, showing a clear need for a multi-faceted support approach. 34% requested practical advice and information, while 21% wanted emotional and peer support. Additionally, 19% expressed a need for access to community and voluntary services, and 21% were interested in safe activities for the people they care for.

Regarding attendance, 28% said they would attend sessions, 59% were unsure, and 13% said they would not. 49% preferred afternoon sessions, while 44% preferred mornings, indicating the complexities and barriers this cohort face.

When asked if they would use the care services during sessions, 23% said yes, while 33% were unsure and 45% said no, with barriers including concern about leaving the person they care for and their own health issues.

Barriers to accessing the hub included unsuitable session timings (34%), concerns about the care offered for their loved ones (19%), and transportation issues (5%). 42% of respondents identified other personal challenges, such as full-time work, caring pressures, and limited free time.

Free-text responses reinforced the need for:

- Carer health and wellbeing support
- Financial and benefits advice
- Access to clinical services
- Peer groups and condition-specific support
- Online/virtual alternatives
- Evening and weekend options for working carers

This report highlights the diverse and complex needs of carers in Mid Dorset. Their feedback will directly shape the development of the Carer Support Hub, ensuring it is flexible, inclusive, and genuinely valuable to the community it is designed to support.

## Introduction

At Mid Dorset Primary Care Network (PCN), we recognise the vital role carers play in our communities. Caring for a loved one is both meaningful and demanding, often leading to isolation and impacting well-being.

To better support carers, we are working with Dorset Council, Dorchester Connect Hub, Age UK, and Carer Support Dorset to develop a dedicated peer support and information hub, launching in central Dorchester in summer 2025. The hub will offer a welcoming space for carers to connect, share experiences, access support services, and benefit from safe, supervised activities for the people they care for—providing much-needed respite.

To ensure this service reflects carers' real needs, we conducted a community survey. This report summarises the findings, which will directly shape the design of the hub. We are grateful to everyone who contributed—your feedback is essential in creating a support network that truly works for carers in Mid Dorset.

## Background

Dorset has a notably high proportion of unpaid carers, with 10% of residents identifying in this role—higher than the national average of 9% (Dorset Council, 2023). In total, an estimated 35,500 people in Dorset are providing unpaid care. This is particularly significant within Mid Dorset, where 56% of the population are reported to have at least one long-term condition. Currently, Mid Dorset Primary Care Network (PCN) has identified 1,753 unpaid carers. However, based on the prevalence of long-term conditions in the region, it is likely that the true number of carers is substantially higher.

The impact of caring responsibilities on individual well-being is considerable. Within Mid Dorset's known carer population, 78% report living with at least one long-term condition themselves. The most common condition is depression, affecting 30% of carers, highlighting the emotional and psychological toll caregiving can take.

National data further underscores these challenges. According to the Carer's Trust Survey (2023), 68% of unpaid carers are unable to take a break from their caring responsibilities when needed. Furthermore, 36% do not feel that the NHS adequately understands or supports their role, and only 43% have received an assessment or review of their needs as a carer.

Feedback from local carers, patients, and community stakeholders has identified a significant gap in provision for inclusive and accessible carer support in the Dorchester area. There is a particular need for peer-led support, opportunities for meaningful respite, and access to practical advice and guidance. Additionally, carers have expressed the importance of safe, engaging spaces where the individuals they care for can be supported while they take time to connect with others and recharge.

This project aims to directly address these unmet needs by developing a dedicated Carer Support Hub in central Dorchester—one that offers inclusive, flexible, and compassionate support for the unpaid carers who play such a vital role in our community.

## Survey Methodology

To ensure that the voices of unpaid carers across Mid Dorset were central to the development of the proposed Carer Support Hub, a targeted engagement survey was carried out between 24th March and 11th April 2025. The aim was to gather insight into the needs, preferences, and experiences of local carers to help shape a service that is both relevant and responsive.

The survey was distributed using a multi-channel approach to maximise reach and inclusivity:

- A Microsoft Forms online survey was emailed directly to all carers registered on SystemOne across Mid Dorset PCN practices.
- To ensure the inclusion of digitally excluded individuals, hard copy surveys were distributed and completed with the support of The Nook project partners, including Age UK, Carer Support Dorset, and Dorchester Connect Hub.
- GP practices within the PCN displayed posters and made printed copies of the survey available for collection and return.
- A social media and website campaign was launched during the survey period to raise awareness and encourage participation from a broader audience.

The survey included nine questions, covering a small number of demographic details on the nature of the caring responsibilities. The remaining questions focused more specifically on the proposed service, including:

- Barriers to attending support sessions
- The type of information and support carers would find most valuable
- Preferences for how the hub should be shaped and delivered

All responses were collected anonymously, allowing participants to provide honest and open feedback. The average time taken to complete the survey was 5 minutes and 41 seconds.

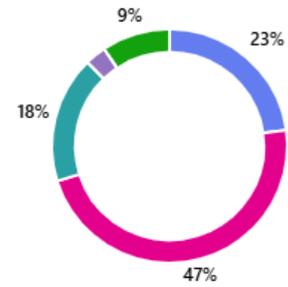
In total, 163 responses were received, representing a 9.30% response rate from the current list of registered carers. This level of engagement provides a meaningful snapshot of carer experiences in the Mid Dorset area and offers valuable guidance for the planning and implementation of the new service.

## Results

*Question one - Which of the following best describes your caring role? (Select all that apply)*

Just under half of responders cared for a partner or spouse, with around 20% caring for a parent or child. Those that responded other cared for adult children or other family members. 6% of responders cared for more than one person.

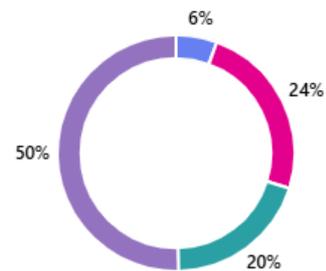
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| ● Caring for a parent              | 39 |
| ● Caring for a partner/spouse      | 81 |
| ● Caring for a child               | 30 |
| ● Caring for a friend or neighbour | 5  |
| ● Other                            | 16 |



### Question two - How long have you been caring?

50% of responders have been caring for more than 5 years, 20% caring for 3-5 years, 24% have cared for 1-3 years and 6% for less than a year.

|                     |    |
|---------------------|----|
| ● Less than a year  | 9  |
| ● 1-3 years         | 39 |
| ● 3-5 years         | 32 |
| ● More than 5 years | 81 |

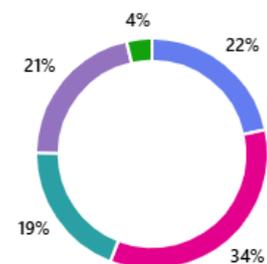


### Question three - What types of support would be most helpful to you? (select all that apply)

Participants were asked to choose from a list of support, or the option to free write anything not covered. 64% of responders chose two or more options, with 15% selecting 4 options, meaning responders are keen for a resource with multiple types of support.

Results showed; 21% selected emotional support and peer connections, 34% selected practical advice and information, 19% selected access to community and voluntary sector services, 21% are interested in activities for the person they care for and 4% volunteered other options which included suggestions that fitted into the above options such as health literacy, financial advice and specific condition support.

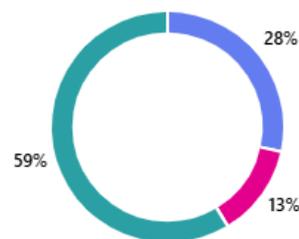
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|---|-----|
| ● Emotional support and peer connections            | 74  |
| ● Practical advice and information                  | 117 |
| ● Access to community and voluntary sector services | 66  |
| ● Activities for the person you care for            | 73  |
| ● Other   | 12  |



### Question four - Would you be interested in attending the sessions?

28% of partakers answered yes, 13% answered no with 59% answering maybe.

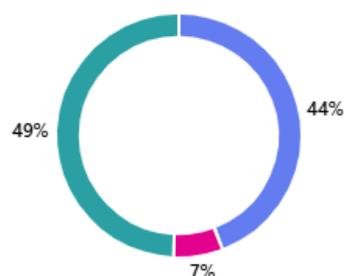
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| ● Yes   | 46 |
| ● No    | 21 |
| ● Maybe | 95 |



*Question 5 - What times would be most convenient for you to attend the hub?*

Responses are a pretty even split between morning and afternoons, with 44% responding mornings as most suitable and 49% selecting afternoons, just 9% selected lunchtime as the most convenient time.

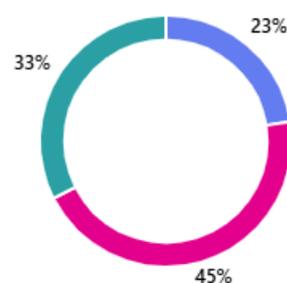
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| ● Mornings   | 61 |
| ● Lunchtime  | 9  |
| ● Afternoons | 68 |



*Question six - Would you use the option to book your loved one into a safe, organised activity or social session while you participate in the hub's activities?*

45% of participants of patients wouldn't use the care service, 33% selected maybe and 23% would use the service.

|         |    |
|---------|----|
| ● Yes   | 36 |
| ● No    | 72 |
| ● Maybe | 52 |

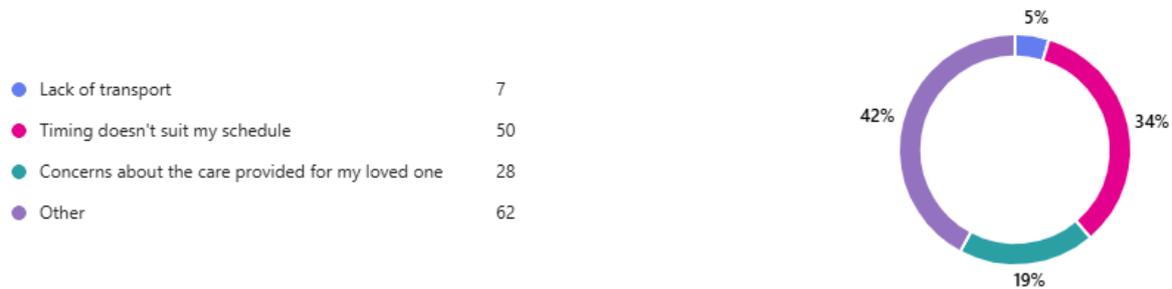


*Question seven - What challenges might prevent you from accessing this service? (Select all that apply)*

Participants were asked to choose from a list of support, or the option to free write anything not covered.

5% stated that transport may be an issue, 34% selected that timings won't meet their schedules, 19% were concerned about the care provided for their loved one and 42% selected other. Common themes free written in the other option included; carers own health concerns, difficulty in getting loved one to the service and concerns of leaving them, carers working full time and not

being able to attend, location of the service, and caring pressures and lack of time available to attend.



### Question eight -

*What other activities or services would you like to see included in this carers support hub?*

82 of the participants completed this free text question, common themes included;

- Health, social and wellbeing support for the carer themselves, such as information on fitness when can't access gyms/pools/classes.
- Financial advice including help with what benefits are available and completing forms.
- Online support, including educational courses and virtual support groups
- Support in unofficial best interest discussions on behalf of young persons
- Peer support, including social groups, ie hobby clubs or walking group and condition specific peer support
- Better access and support to clinical services, ie preferential GP appointments and access to district nurses.
- Evening or weekend support/ sessions for those working full time and unable to attend
- Respite opportunities
- Condition specific support
- Companionship for cared for
- Practical advice and education on caring

13 respondents (16%) answered support for this question.



### Question nine - *Do you have any other comments or suggestions to help us shape this new service?*

65 of the respondents completed this free text question, common responses include:

- Longevity – concerned about various support changing and stopping
- Clearer signposting for support, feelings of being pushed from pillar to post

- Virtual service to co-exist with hub, for those unable to attend
- Own health concerns, annual health checks
- Young carer support
- Further understanding of the vital role carers have, feelings of being looked over in clinical settings
- Recognition
- Coping strategies for carer

17 respondents (26%) answered carers for this question.



For the full data response please click [here](#).

## Conclusion

The findings from this survey clearly highlight both the complexity of carers' lives and the breadth of support they need. Unpaid carers in Mid Dorset are providing essential care—often over many years—while managing their own health, responsibilities, and emotional well-being. The responses reflect a strong desire for accessible, flexible, and inclusive support that goes beyond basic signposting and truly recognises the challenges of caregiving.

Key themes that emerged include the importance of emotional and peer support, practical advice, condition-specific guidance, and access to respite. Carers expressed interest in a wide range of services, from wellbeing and financial advice to social and educational opportunities. Many also emphasised the need for flexible session times, virtual options, and ongoing support that fits around busy and unpredictable caring schedules.

Crucially, carers want a service that understands and values their role—offering not only resources, but also recognition. They are looking for a hub that provides reassurance, community, and real-world help that can ease some of the pressures they face daily.

The insight gathered through this survey will directly inform the development of the Dorchester Carers Nook.

We are grateful to everyone who took the time to share their experiences and ideas.