

# Working and Managing Care: Exploring the Experiences of Working Carers Managing Direct Payments on Behalf of an Older Person

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Direct payments the term used to describe funds allocated in lieu of community-based social services are at the centre of the social care policy debate. Their implications for unpaid carers has been widely discussed, often focused on potential negative consequences for unpaid carers due to the private and independent nature in which care arranged through direct payments is handled. The added task of managing care may seem particularly inappropriate for working carers but a major study of direct payments to older people found that many of the unpaid carers involved were working. Overstretched and overburdened, these carers still found multiple benefits from direct payments, not least the ability to coordinate care with their employment, ensuring the quality of services and with it their peace of mind.

The research illustrates how working carers found themselves obliged to micro-manage local authority commissioned care prior to receiving direct payments, striving to keep things in order in their absence, challenging the notion that direct payments increase managerial care. These previous efforts were frustrated by inflexibility, poor quality and inadequate communication systems over which they had little or no control. Direct payments by and large converted futile efforts to productive experiences, with carers requiring only minimal administrative support. Where means of control and flexibility are poor, direct payments can offer a solution representing alternative rather than additional burden.