Improving support for informal carers as a priority for managing osteoporosis and fragility fractures

People with a fragility fracture often require daily support from informal carers to avoid transition into residential care. Informal carers are the backbone of long-term care provision but are too often under-recognised and unsupported by health and social care systems.

Informal carers play an essential role in providing long-term care (LTC) for people who have had a fragility fracture.[1,2] They provide many hours of care to support (mostly older) fragility fracture patients in their daily routine and in preventing falls, one of the main causes for subsequent fractures and increasing dependence.[1] Furthermore, informal carers are the preferred option of care: the majority of people receiving and providing informal care have a strong preference for remaining in family homes or the community.[2]

As Europe's population ages, the rise of chronic conditions such as osteoporosis will increase demand for formal and informal LTC. Across Europe, an estimated 80% of LTC is provided by informal carers, most of whom are women.[2,3] As they carry the largest burden of LTC, their work is and will continue to be paramount to the sustainability of the health and social care systems.[4]

Despite the growing recognition of informal carers at a policy level,[4] implementation has often been fragmented, limiting their ability to access support.[2] While caring can be a source of personal satisfaction, it is often unpaid and can lead to loss of income and pension rights in addition to possible social exclusion.[2] Programmes that support carers' leave, renumeration, training, counselling or access to self-help groups are often insufficient or difficult to access, leaving people unsupported to manage the emotional and financial burden of being an informal carer.[2,5]

Policymakers must recognise the critical role informal carers play in supporting people who have experienced a fragility fracture, and ensure the support that informal carers need is available and accessible. This includes strengthening carers' legal entitlements, social security and pension rights; supporting access to paid carers' leave; providing access to respite care, training and community support networks; and ensuring informal carers are involved as equal partners in care decisions.[6]

> **Fragility fractures are often just as life-changing for the close family member or friend who must become a carer – they often feel unprepared for the role and may struggle to access support.**

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