



May 8, 2017

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne
Premier of Ontario
Main Legislative Building, Rm. 281
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Wynne:

On behalf of the members of the Ontario Caregiver Coalition (OCC), I would like to commend your government for its' pre-budget announcement on April 25, 2017 (Providing a Helping Hand to Those Caring For Loved Ones: *Ontario Boosting Respite Support and Training for Family Caregivers*) and the recommendations that followed in the full release of the 2017 Ontario Budget on April 27, 2017, *A Stronger, Healthier Ontario*. OCC is deeply appreciative of the government's commitment to prioritizing caregiver needs.

We agree that the four areas of new support being proposed are a critical step forward in helping strengthen the capacity of unpaid caregivers in Ontario to continue to sustain their often under-valued role in supporting the health care system. We wish to comment briefly on these below and will be submitting a more in-depth response in the coming weeks.

Respite—\$20 million each year for 3 years

- More respite for family caregivers is very much needed and so this is a welcomed additional investment
- Simply “more” will not have the desired outcome in terms of reducing caregiver distress which has continually increased over the past 5 years despite consistent investments toward home and community care and respite

- New funding dollars must be implemented in a way that gives caregivers more *flexibility and control* over when, where and how they use services. Funding for services must be used and arranged in a way that is defined by, and suits the needs of the caregiver if such respite is to truly provide a sense of relief and a true break from the stresses of caring
- If eligibility for respite is to be determined through the current CCAC (soon to be sub-LHIN) model, such eligibility criteria must be reviewed and reflect an understanding that the earlier respite is offered, the less likely it will be that caregiver stress will become difficult to alleviate. Too stringent eligibility criteria can be counter-productive in achieving long-term desired objectives.
- We acknowledge that government will never be able to completely fill the ever-growing need for respite services; however, we encourage the MOHLTC to continue looking for *new, innovative and cost-effective solutions* to address this need.

Ontario Caregiver Tax Credit—non-refundable credit to replace current caregiver and infirm dependent tax credit

- Extended support and a more streamlined process for accessing tax benefits for those who are eligible is an appreciated benefit
- We must not overlook, however, the fact that tax credits do not benefit everyone equally and often it is those who are most in need who do not qualify for these credits. Many caregivers have had to cut back work hours significantly or leave the labour force altogether in order to provide care—these are the caregivers most at risk of financial hardship
- Those who provide care that are employed part time, precariously employed, unemployed or perform informal work are less likely to have the disposable income to pay for needed supplementary support and thus, may pay friends or family members a modest cash compensation to look after the care recipient so they are able to attend to other things. Without formal receipts, these care partners will not qualify for tax credits and are thus, subjected to further financial hardship when providing care
- It is important to ensure that our most marginalized and disadvantaged caregivers are receiving supports and benefits as well to ensure equitability in provision of new benefits.

A New Provincial Caregiver Organization—to coordinate supports and resources such as training, local resources and peer support

- Ensuring care partners have an easy, clear and straightforward point of contact for support and resources is important; however, there is a need to be cognizant of the resources and supports already in place across the province so that efforts

are not duplicated and so unintended additional confusion does not result from a system with multiple and competing organizations performing the same, or similar work. We are confident the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has recognized this and are working to mitigate this risk.

- The scope of this proposed organization must be clearly defined so that caregivers have a clear understanding of the extent to which it can assist them with problem-solving.

More Education and Training Programs for Unpaid Caregivers

- In addition to learning skills to help them provide care to their family members, in a variety of ways that work for them, caregivers need to learn how to better care for themselves and their own physical and mental health.
- Social isolation is often a consequence of demanding caregiver duties and anything that can promote face-to-face interaction in these programs would be helpful.

Once again, we greatly appreciate you and your government for the clear commitment made to improve the health of all Ontarians. OCC looks forward to continuing to work together with you on policies that will ultimately improve health outcomes for caregivers and care recipients.

The Ontario Caregiver Coalition (OCC) was established in 2009 as a provincial advocacy body that supports unpaid caregivers in Ontario. Our current membership includes over 140 organizations and individuals who actively work together to increase awareness of the important role unpaid caregivers play in the long-term sustainability of Ontario's health care system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cheryl Perera', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Cheryl Perera
Chair, Ontario Caregiver Coalition

Cc: Hon. Eric Hoskins
Hon. Charles Sousa
OCC Research & Advocacy Committee

