

## **Ontario Caregiver Coalition (OCC) Position Paper**

### **Caring About Caregivers**

Everybody knows a caregiver. One of us at one time or another may have provided care to our loved ones, or we may have been a recipient of care. Families and friends who provide voluntary care to their loved one who is living with a disability and/or is chronically ill, provide support out of necessity, but primarily out of love. Caregivers are the invisible champions of our society who support their family member or friend while contributing their own personal income, foregoing time-off work and potentially sacrificing their own health to tend to someone else's.

Caregivers cut across all age groups, gender, and abilities, and care for those who represent a range of illnesses and conditions – neurological, physical, psychological and degenerative. According to Statistics Canada, one in eight Canadians over the age of 15 is a caregiver.<sup>i</sup> Provincially, it is estimated that one in five Ontarians is a family caregiver, contributing to more than 70% of the total caregiving needs.<sup>ii</sup> A look into the economic value of caregivers suggests that caregivers who care for seniors save Canada's health care system between \$24 to 31 billion annually, and these figures do not include the contributions of those who care for children or adults under the age of 65.<sup>iii</sup>

Caring for people in the community (particularly in their homes) is more efficient and economically feasible rather than caring for them in formal health care settings.<sup>iv</sup> In addition, the majority of Ontarians who depend on care as well as those who provide them care prefer home care over institutional care. A 2005 study showed that 88% of Ontarians surveyed preferred home care, and 84% preferred home care for their loved ones.<sup>v</sup> In a study from 2009, it was estimated that the province would save \$150 million per year by investing in home and community care.<sup>vi</sup>

### **Challenges for Informal Caregivers**

The daily challenge of providing care causes stress and can lead to depression and burnout for caregivers, resulting in institutionalization and/or hospitalization for the client and in some cases for the caregivers themselves.<sup>vii</sup> By providing easily accessible and adequate community care, including options such as respite, personal support, homemaking, professional services, and community support services; caregivers can continue on in their important role, and their loved ones can remain at home.

### **Preparing for Long-Term Economic and Social Impact**

In the long-range scenario planning report *Caring about Caregivers: Caregiving for the future of Ontario*, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care examines future risks, challenges, uncertainties and opportunities. The changing nature of (nuclear) families; community networks; ambiguities of the economy; the aging population; altering workplace benefits with coverage and flexibility are ever-changing. In the years ahead these shifting economic and demographic factors will have negative impact if current supports continue to be ignored.

There is great need to take action now and time is of the essence in order to manage this impending challenge. There are low to no cost options that can quickly be implemented by all sectors in society to prepare for the pressure that will be ahead. We can take steps now to provide social supports to ensure that caregivers remain present in the workforce, rather than leaving their work or taking long-absences from their job to provide support on their own. These supports could also ease the burden on employers and empower caregivers.

### **Advancing Solutions**

Supporting caregivers goes beyond the scope of government: it requires leadership, commitment, and vision from employers, large and small, community agencies, and other key stakeholders. While the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has taken a leadership role in examining caregiver supports, the supports that caregivers require need to be acted on. Low to no cost social solutions exist and if implemented can have tremendous impact. The Ontario Caregiver Coalition calls for greater support for community care by encouraging the provincial government to:

1. Take the lead on **convening a task force** of employer, government, insurance and caregiver representatives to develop and test workplace policies and income supports to benefit caregivers. This task force should be non-partisan and its focus should go beyond the healthcare sector including unions and members from the private sector/business community.
2. Develop an **integrated action plan** which is informed by the “Caring about Caregivers” long-range scenario planning, developed by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. This would include options on how to increase access to community services, models of effective system navigation, enhancing income supports, and increasing funding to various models of respite.

3. **Continue investing in (and do not diminish funding for) local caregiver support programs** through the Local Integration Health Networks (LHINs) and Community Care Access Centres (CCACs). Some successful programs provide training and resources, help to reduce isolation, and offer respite services. Furthermore, by maintaining adequate levels of funding across the province, supports will help to save money and improve efficiency in other areas, such as reduced alternate level of care (ALC) wait times.
4. **Incorporate caregiving as a cross-cutting issue within all government health projects and programs**. This will streamline and improve coordination of existing government-led health care programs.
5. **Incorporate the views of caregivers in the current social assistance review** carried out by the provincial government.

In terms of long-term support, the government of Ontario can:

6. Introduce a **refundable caregiver tax credit**. Change is taking place across Canada where a number of provinces have recognized the importance in the role that spousal caregivers provide. For example, in 2009 the province of Manitoba introduced a refundable caregiver tax credit (worth up to \$1,020) that spouses and others can claim annually.<sup>viii</sup> Nova Scotia has also initiated a caregiver allowance program for spouses.<sup>ix</sup>

These measures would have a long lasting impact on Ontario's health care system, ensuring that people receive the care they need when they need it. Smart investments now would reduce the need for increased service costs in the future, and would take significant pressure off formalized health care institutions.

*The Ontario Caregiver Coalition's (OCC) focus is to advance the interests of caregivers in the province. It is a group of diverse organizations that work to raise the profile of caregivers and to promote public policy to support caregivers. Membership includes those from health charities, unions, academia, home health and community support agencies, and informal caregivers.*

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<sup>i</sup> Victorian Order of Nurses, "Doing the Right Thing for Caregivers," 2003, 8 Mar. 2011,  
< <http://www.von.ca/carer renewal/eng/pdfs/ACallforActionRecommendations.pdf> >

<sup>ii</sup> Stobert, S. And K. Cranswick, "Looking After Seniors: Who Does What for Whom", Canadian Social Trends, Autumn 2004.

<sup>iii</sup> Hollander, M.J., Lui, G., Chappell, N.L., "Who Cares and How Much? The Imputed Economic Contribution to the Canadian Health care System of Middle-Aged and Older Unpaid Caregivers Providing Care to the Elderly," Healthcare Quarterly. 12(2): 42-49. 18 March. 2011,  
< <http://www.longwoods.com/product.php?productid=20660> >

<sup>iv</sup> The Special Senate Committee on Aging, "Canada's Aging Population: Seizing the Opportunity," 2009.

<sup>v</sup> Pollara, "SSCA Procurement Review Quantitative Survey Results," 2005, pg. 28.

<sup>vi</sup> Ontario's home and community care sector, and The Change Foundation, "Valuing Home and Community Care," 2010, 21 Feb. 2011,  
< <http://www.ccac-ont.ca/Upload/on/General/VHCC/VHCC%20Executive%20Summary.pdf> >

<sup>vii</sup> Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), "Caregivers Backgrounder," 2006, 21 Feb. 2011,  
< <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/cs/comm/sd/caregivers.shtml> >

<sup>viii</sup> The Government of Manitoba. Manitoba Finance 2010, 08 Mar. 2011,  
< <http://www.gov.mb.ca/finance/tao/caregiver.html> >

<sup>ix</sup> The Government of Nova Scotia. Department of Health, 08 Mar. 2011,  
< [http://www.gov.ns.ca/health/ccs/caregiver\\_benefit.asp](http://www.gov.ns.ca/health/ccs/caregiver_benefit.asp) >