



The Ontario Caregiver Coalition (OCC) is the voice of caregivers in Ontario. We advocate for recognition and support for the family, friends, and neighbours whose unpaid care is the hidden backbone of Ontario's health system. Our members include both caregivers from across Ontario and organizations that support them. For more information about the OCC and our work, please see our website at www.ontariocaregivercoalition.ca, or follow us on social media.

February 2026 Newsletter

At the OCC

General Members Meeting and In-Person Social

We are excited to announce that, for the first time since 2019, we are able to offer our members the opportunity to meet in person. Many of our members have said how much they miss getting to know each other and sharing experiences in this way.

Our upcoming General Members Meeting, scheduled for **Thursday, March 26th, from 2:00–4:00 p.m.**, will be hybrid, allowing those who wish to join to meet in person, while still offering the convenience and accessibility of an online meeting to those for whom that is the best option.

We would like to extend our thanks to the Alzheimer Society of Ontario, who will be hosting this meeting at their offices at 20 Eglinton Avenue West, 16th Floor, in the John Mann Room. These offices are located near Yonge and Eglinton in midtown Toronto, conveniently located near transit, and with paid parking available under the nearby Yonge Eglinton Centre.

As well, just before our General Members Meeting, from **1:00-2:00 p.m.**, we will host an **In-Person Social**, also at the Alzheimer Society offices in the Gordie Howe Room. This will allow long-time members to get re-acquainted, and newer members to be personally welcomed. This event will launch our 2026 Caregiver Day campaign, centred on the theme—*Care About Change*. We will offer light refreshments and a fun activity to launch our campaign and help us get to know each other.

We are looking forward to a great afternoon and hope that you can join us, whether in-person or virtually.

Calling OCC Members to Support Our Caregiver Day Campaign: Care About Change

Caregiver Day falls on April 7th, 2026. Every year, the OCC hosts our annual Caregiver Day Campaign to bring awareness to caregiver issues and advocate for change.

This year, our theme is Care About Change. What makes the OCC unique is that it's a coalition — a community of people who are motivated and excited about the possibility of change. After a year of fear and uncertainty, we want to focus our Caregiver Day efforts on hope, within and outside of our coalition, paying attention to the work being done to support caregivers.

Are you a caregiver? Are you someone who wants to make a change? We want to hear from you!

Participate in our Caregiver Day campaign by filling out our [Care About Change survey](#). **What part of your life drives you to make change?**

OCC's 2026 Pre-Budget Submission Highlights Financial Burden and Respite Needs

The OCC has now released its 2026 pre-budget submission to the Ontario Provincial Government. You can find it [here](#).

Our submission highlighted two ongoing OCC priorities: the financial impact of caregiving and the lack of respite for caregivers. Caregivers often incur high costs for medical supplies, home modifications, travel, and private services not covered by public funding. When combined with reduced income from decreased workforce participation, this often leads to significant financial distress. Additionally, respite care is crucial for caregivers to maintain their well-being and continue providing high-quality care. It offers temporary relief from caregiving responsibilities, allowing caregivers to rest, recharge, and attend to their own health and personal needs.

Drawing on our five Policy [Briefs](#), our submission focused on five recommendations to address caregiver financial distress and lack of respite supports:

- 1. Introduce an Ontario Caregiver Support Benefit:** The OCC continues to advocate for a direct monthly financial allowance to caregivers that is inclusive, accessible and meaningful. Enhancing financial support for caregivers is essential to improving their quality of life and the care they provide. The OCC proposes introducing [an Ontario Caregiver Support Benefit](#), a monthly direct financial support that will alleviate financial hardships, reduce strain on the healthcare system, and help ensure caregivers can continue their vital roles in supporting Ontario's health and long-term care systems.
- 2. Support Caregivers in the Workplace:** Caregivers need the flexibility to take job-protected time away from work when needed, and supportive workplaces that

recognize and respond to their unique needs as caregivers. The OCC recommends the Government of Ontario harmonize existing caregiving-related leaves under the ESA into a single, simplified Caregiver Leave that is flexible and inclusive, expand Family Responsibility Leave from 3 days to 10 days annually to support caregivers in meeting short-term caregiving demands, and amend the OHSA to require workplaces to develop safety plans and programs that address the needs of working caregivers.

- 3. Develop a Provincial Respite Strategy:** Many caregivers struggle to access adequate respite services due to limited availability, high costs, and complex application processes. The OCC recommends that the Ontario Government develop a comprehensive, coordinated respite system for Ontario in collaboration with caregivers, communities, and all relevant Ministries, and allocate additional dedicated funding for respite services to support caregivers in need.
- 4. Increase Funding for Mental Health Services Tailored to the Specific Needs of Caregivers:** Caregivers often experience high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression due to the demanding nature of their roles. The OCC strongly encourages the Government of Ontario to allocate additional funding to expand access to mental health services for caregivers, such as those offered through the Ontario Caregiver Organization or the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre's Caregiver Clinic. Increased funding for counselling, support groups, and stress management programs specifically designed for caregivers, offered through various channels such as in-person, online, and telephone, is urgently needed.
- 5. Continue Improving Access to Essential Home and Community Care for All Ontarians:** The OCC welcomes the commitments in the Ministry of Health's Annual Plan to reduce wait times for home and community care and the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services to improve access to developmental services. But given the current and future demands on home and community services, the OCC echoes the recommendations in Care Watch Ontario's [2025 Pre-Budget Submission](#), particularly to ensure that the Government of Ontario's investments are based on clear selection criteria and that providers are transparent and publicly accountable.

OCC Coordinator Transition

We are happy to welcome our new Coordinator, Samantha Pantos, who joined us on February 2nd. Samantha is very excited to be joining the OCC team as the Membership and Communications Coordinator. She is very experienced in written and verbal communication, and prides herself on her friendly and warm demeanour. She studied English in post-secondary school and went on to pursue a certificate in publishing. Through her education and prior roles she has acquired a background in social media management, editorial work, and administration. Advocacy for caregivers is a cause close to her heart and her home. She currently assists her

mother with providing daily care for her elderly grandmother, whom she cherishes greatly. With a passion for storytelling, she is looking forward to helping caregivers share their experiences and ensure this often overlooked community has their voices heard.

We look forward to having Samantha on our team and benefiting from her skills.

Please continue to contact us with your ideas, questions and needs through our email, ontariocaregivercoalitionocc@gmail.com, or through our social media channels.

Member Initiatives

The Ontario Association of Social Workers Gears Up for Social Work Week

From March 2-8, you're invited to celebrate Social Work Week and Month alongside the Ontario Association of Social Workers (OASW).

This year, the Social Work Week theme is "Care. Insight. Together", celebrating the way social workers combine expertise with compassion and culturally sensitive supports. Learn more about this year's theme and read a special note from OASW's CEO [here](#).

Share your social work pride on social media using the #socialworkweek hashtag. And throughout social work month, join OASW for its "[Together in Practice: Building Hope Through Connection](#)" series, free for members, featuring sessions on navigating AI, coping with burnout, honouring grief, and creating psychologically safe workplaces.

This March, let's celebrate the impact Ontario's social workers have in our communities! Social workers play a vital role in supporting caregivers. Let's take a moment to recognize the incredible ways in which social workers advocate for caregivers by helping our communities navigate Ontario's complex social and health care systems. When care and insight come together, change happens.

Of Interest

Resources for Employers: Creating a Carer-Inclusive Workplace

One-third of Canada's workforce are Carer-employees (CEs), most work full-time hours, and generally fall between 45 and 65 years old, making them the most experienced and well-trained segment of the workforce. Because caregiving is seen as a private issue contained to the home front, there can be stigma around the role. But there's an inevitable crossover to a CE's professional life — it's a workplace's ethical imperative to support this growing employee group. Along with collecting and spreading evidence-based information, the basis of [Dr. Allison Williams' research program](#) at McMaster University is to put in place a standard for Carer-inclusive workplaces (CIWPs). McMaster University partnered with the Canadian Standards Association to build the [CSA B701-17 \(R2021\)](#), Carer-inclusive and accommodating

organizations, which serves as a recipe for how any workplace, irrespective of size or sector, can create a CIWP.

If a workplace is interested in building its EDI, mental health, work-life balance, and health and wellness capacity, it may take it on. While it's currently voluntary, the vision of Dr. Williams' research program is to have the standard evolve into a required standard that would bring Canada more in line with other countries in the global north, particularly fellow G7 countries, many of which do a better job of supporting CEs.

[A handbook](#) that provides real-life case studies, as well as advice on how employers can help CEs was also created to accompany the standard. The standard provided the basis for a [free online course via McMaster Continuing Education](#) that serves as a user-friendly product to employers and HR professionals. The complimentary offering, which takes 10 hours and results in a microcredential, provides practical tools and guidelines for implementing a CIWP.

Creating inclusive workplaces for carer-employees is a demographic, ethical, and employee profile issue. The standard, guide, and course provide an opportunity for Canadian employers to be proactive in a changing economic landscape.



If you have items that you would like to see included in future issues of this newsletter, please let us know. Sharing the accomplishments and activities of our members is part of our mandate. If you have received this newsletter in error, or no longer wish to receive it, please reply to this email to let us know, and we will remove you from our mailing list.