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.

October 2026 Newsletter

MPP Wayne Gates' Motion to Adopt the Ontario Caregiver Support Benefit

For several years, one of the key policy priorities we have advocated for to address the financial hardship experienced by caregivers has been our proposal for an Ontario Caregiver Support Benefit (OCSB), a monthly allowance of $1000.00, to recognize the essential nature of caregiver work and to bring some relief for the costs of caregiving. We worked closely with researchers, thought leaders and caregivers themselves to design this policy proposal, and we are grateful MPP Wayne Gates, the NDP MPP for Niagara Falls, has championed this in the legislature. We participated in a press conference last year when MPP Wayne Gates introduced the motion, alongside Independent MPP Bobbi Ann Brady (Haldimand-Norfolk) and several organizational members.

On **Tuesday, November 3**, the Motion is going to be debated in the Ontario Legislature. Even if this motion does not pass, this is an important opportunity for us to raise caregiver financial distress as an issue in the legislature and to highlight meaningful solutions to address this challenge.

How you can help:

- MPP Wayne Gates has a petition on his website that you can sign (and that you can send to all your friends and family to sign!)
- If you have a story to share about the financial impact of caregiving that you would like us to share, please feel free to send it by replying to this email
- If you would like to attend the debate at the Ontario Legislature on the afternoon of **Tuesday, November 3**, please send us your name, phone number, and email. Any member of the public can attend, but if you give us your name it will help with the security process.
- If you would like to speak at or attend the press conference on either **Monday, November 2 or Tuesday, 3 (still confirming details), please let us know or contact daniel.nowoselski@gmail.com as soon as possible.**

In our advocacy, we have found that what most effectively changes the minds of policy-makers—more than statistics, or policy reports or media coverage—is the stories of caregivers themselves. That's what takes something from an issue to a priority. We want to make sure that all MPPs know that this impacts caregivers from all walks of life and all parts of this province when making their decision on how to vote.

At the OCC

The OCC Launches our Final Policy Brief: Making Caregivers Matter in the Community Systems They Navigate

The OCC has now launched our sixth and final Policy Brief, *Building a Better Ontario by Making Caregivers Matter in the Community Systems They Navigate,* in the series arising from our 2024 Caregiver Survey!

Caregivers play an essential role in supporting those they care for to remain where they want to be — in the community – not only by providing hands-on care and assistance, but also by organizing an often complex mix of community supports around their person or persons. In an environment where community services are limited, complex and fragmented, this is one of the most challenging and time-consuming roles that caregivers play. Caregivers may find themselves acting as unpaid and untrained care coordinators and system navigators, roles that they find exhausting and frustrating. And yet this important work is often unrecognized.

It is therefore not surprising that, in the OCC's 2024 Caregiver Survey, system navigation and access to supports in the community were among the most frequently identified priorities for reform. This Brief reviews barriers to accessing supports in the community and identifies six goals for reform:

1. Ensuring caregiver needs are systematically identified, assessed and addressed as part of assessing the needs of care recipients;
2. Including caregivers in the design of the systems that they must use and navigate;
3. Providing good conditions of work for paid care providers, as a precondition to ensuring quality and consistency of care;
4. Investing in transition supports to avoid crisis approaches and enable future-planning;
5. Moving towards system integration and coordination, together with professional case management;
6. Strengthening investment in services in the community, including home care, community services, developmental services, and mental health and addictions supports.

We will be integrating the findings of this Brief into our ongoing advocacy work. We encourage you to share this Brief widely with your networks, and to make use of it in your own efforts to make change.

OCC Annual General Meeting on October 1st, 2026

On October 1st, the OCC hosted our Annual General Meeting, where we gathered our membership to discuss our activities and status, reflect on the previous year, and look at our plans for the upcoming year.

OCC member Nabina Sharma delivered the caregiver keynote, discussing her caregiving journey and the added challenges she faces as a long-distance caregiver, an often overlooked form of caregiving. Nabina shared there are many people like her and her husband, immigrants far away from aging parents in their home country, starting careers and raising kids here in Canada, but long-distance caregiving is caregiving too. Nabina's keynote was a highlight of the meeting, reminding us that for many caregivers, building a life in Canada doesn't mean they stop being sons and daughters to the parents who raised them back home. We are grateful to Nabina for sharing her story and providing a thoughtful Caregiver Keynote.

The OCC also shared our Annual Report for the 2025-2026 year. Motivated by a year of caring about change, our work this year focused on communicating with our membership, building our brand and raising awareness about the needs and experiences of caregivers, undertaking research to develop the evidence for policy change, building collaborative relationships that can strengthen our voice for change, and growing our capacity to advance the OCC's mission through effective governance and resource development. Key achievements included completing our Policy Brief series, developing a Caregiver Policy Framework, and forming research partnerships with Dr. Matthias Hoben on adult day programs and Dr. Allison Williams on working caregivers. We also had great success with our Caregiver Day campaign, *Care About Change*, which included participation from our attendees at our first in-person gathering since 2019 in March, and our Volunteer Week campaign in which we shared baby pictures of our volunteers. In addition to the Annual Report, the OCC shared our Strategic Plan for 2026-2031 and our first Resource Development Strategy. You can read more about them below!

The AGM concluded with a presentation on our upcoming Committee plans for the 2026-2027 year to continue to build on our successes, and a thought-provoking conversation on the future of caregiving, led by the OCC's Vice-Chair, Daniel Nowoselski. This insightful discussion was another highlight of our meeting, opening the floor for members to share emerging opportunities for the OCC to address in our advocacy going forward to meet caregivers' needs as they arise. Issues discussed included the labour force, rising costs of medical supplies, the

changing landscape of immigration policy and its impact on long-distance caregivers, and transitions. Whether it's transitions from hospital to home or developmental services, such as children with developmental disabilities transitioning into adulthood, it was evident that transitions are a thread that ties into many caregiver experiences and that there is a distinct lack of support for caregivers handling them. This was a wonderful way to conclude our Annual General Meeting, hearing new perspectives on the issues affecting the caregivers who make up the OCC's membership.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to organizing, hosting, and presenting at this successful AGM. OCC members will receive copies of presentations and formal meeting notes in the coming weeks.

Please Welcome Our New Board Members

At our October 1st Annual General Meeting, the OCC welcomed a new slate of Board Directors for the upcoming year.

Some directors returned for another year of service, including **Lauren Bates**, **Rose-Marie Fraser-Haswell**, **Daniel Nowoselski**, and **Chrissy Sadowski**.

We are very pleased to announce the following new Board Members:

Camryn Berry is a Project Manager at Hospice Palliative Care Ontario, where she works at the intersection of health systems, hospice palliative care, and caregiver support. Her professional work has focused on strengthening health and social systems, and ensuring that the experiences and needs of people with lived experience, their families, and caregivers inform programs, policy, and practice. Camryn also brings lived experience as a young caregiver, having supported her father, who lives with an acquired brain injury, since she was 12. She has helped him navigate transitions from home to hospital, assisted living, and now long-term care, gaining firsthand insights from a young age. She is also a member of the Young Caregivers Collective of Canada, where she serves as the Knowledge Translation and Outreach Lead. Camryn is passionate about advancing evidence-informed policy, cross-sector collaboration, and greater recognition of the diverse experiences of caregivers.

Shannon Bury, **CHRL,** is Head of People & Culture at WISE Trust Pension Plan. Shannon has championed initiatives that strengthen employee experience and wellbeing, modernize people practices, and foster cultures of accountability, innovation, and continuous improvement. Shannon also serves as a Council Member in the Ontario Region for the Canadian Pension & Benefits Institute (CPBI). She joins the Ontario Caregiver Coalition Board with a strong

commitment to advocacy, community impact, and supporting caregivers through sustainable policies and people-centred leadership. She is committed to leveraging her leadership and human capital expertise to help advance the Coalition's mission of recognizing, supporting, and empowering caregivers and their families.

Mary Vourakes brings more than 15 years of professional experience in partnership development, community engagement, and program management across the aging, healthcare, and community sectors, together with over three years of lived experience as the primary caregiver for her father, who lived with both dementia and Parkinson's disease. That experience gave her a firsthand understanding of the emotional, physical, and systemic challenges caregivers face, and it continues to shape her commitment to ensuring caregivers across Ontario feel seen, supported, and empowered. Professionally, Mary has worked with the National Institute on Ageing, the National Institute for Care and the Elderly, and Toronto Metropolitan University, where she designed and led community workshops and programs on elder abuse prevention, financial planning, and caregiving supports, and secured and managed federal grant funding on behalf of older adults and their families. Mary is honoured to join the OCC Board, bringing both her professional expertise and her lived experience as a caregiver to advance the Coalition's mission of recognizing, valuing, and supporting caregivers across Ontario.

We also said goodbye to Board Members **Debbi Leith**, **Liana Sikharulidze**, **Adriana Shnall**, and Treasurer **Keena Naik**.

Debbi Leith has been on the Board since 2024, and we have really benefited from Debbi's deep skill set in volunteer management, as she led the development of our Member Engagement Strategy, as well as sitting on our Membership and Governance Committee.

Liana Sikharulidze has been on the Board since 2022, and has played a key role in stabilizing the OCC and putting us on the right path. Most importantly, she led the creation of our 2023 Strategic Plan, which helped to bring us to where we are today, and then over the past year led the development of our new Strategic Plan.

Adriana Shnall has chaired our Partnership Committee. She was a big champion of returning to in-person connection and led the development of our first hybrid meeting in March.

Keena Naik has been our Treasurer, has co-chaired the Membership and Governance Committee, and has co-led our annual recruitment for each of the past three years.

All of them have generously shared their time, their professional experience, their own experiences as caregivers, as well as their good judgment, compassion, and passion for change with the OCC. We have been privileged to have them on our Board, and while they are no

longer on the Board, they have all indicated that they intend to continue contributing to the OCC in other roles. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with them in the years ahead.

The OCC's New Five-Year Strategic Plan 2026-2031

At our Annual General Meeting on October 1st, the OCC shared our Strategic Plan for 2026-2031. Our new Strategic Plan will build on the successes of our 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, reflect the changing context of caregiving policy in Ontario, and of the OCC, set goals for the OCC for the next five years that move us forward but are realistic given our resources, and enable us to keep on track and measure our successes.

The OCC is prioritizing growing our resources and capacity, creating a strong and diverse community, building effective policy and advocacy, and seeking out more opportunities to partner and collaborate. To help us meet these priorities, we have outlined the strategic goals below:

- Have sufficient stable, diverse funding to stabilize a paid leadership position
- Be recognized as a positive place to volunteer and be a part of change
- Be a thought leader in the field of caregiver supports, recognized by government, stakeholders and media
- Be a go-to partner for development of evidence, innovative policy ideas, and effective advocacy on behalf of caregivers

In addition to our ongoing work of raising awareness, building the coalition for change, developing the evidence base, and connecting with decision-makers, the OCC will work towards these goals over the next five years. To achieve these goals, the Board, as well as each of the OCC's Committees, has committed to specific initiatives to be undertaken over the next five years with identified performance indicators that we will regularly track and report on to our General Membership at each Annual General Meeting.

We look forward to the next five years of growth and are excited to share our progress at the next Annual General Meeting in 2027.

The OCC's First Resource Development Strategy

The OCC has established its first Resource Development Strategy. The OCC has built a stronger organization, with better governance, growing membership, stronger advocacy, and deeper community connections. However, limited funding, volunteer capacity, and experience with fundraising continue to create challenges. The Resource Development Strategy will address these challenges through realistic, measurable steps that align with OCC's values and priorities.

Over the next five years, the OCC will focus on building the skills, systems, and resources needed for long-term financial stability. This includes governance, membership growth, grants, and reaching charitable status. The OCC's overall goal is to secure $50,000 per year in reliable funding to hire a part-time staff member and become a more professionally supported organization while remaining grassroots and caregiver-driven. We will increase revenue

throughs various streams such as member fees, grant funding, research partnerships, donations, and other opportunities. The OCC will regularly review and adjust the strategy as needed. The goal is to build an organization that can better represent caregivers and advocate for meaningful change.

OCC to Launch Caregiver Policy Framework

The OCC will soon launch our Caregiver Policy Framework. This product builds on years of research and advocacy by the OCC and its partners, and is intended to be a toolkit that advocates, researchers, institutions, and frontline caregivers can use to make positive change.

The Caregiver Policy Framework outlines the challenges caregivers face, practical and meaningful policy changes available to address them, and the concepts, principles, and levers available to ensure that change is meaningful. The framework shows how good caregiver policy is not only essential for caregivers and their loved ones, but also a valuable tool that government and advocates can use to address other major issues including economic participation, health system strain, aging, gender equality, and the future of work.

Going forward, the Framework will be used to introduce researchers, decision-makers, and partners to the caregiver perspective on policy change. Following its launch, we encourage you to share it widely, engage on social media, and put it to use in your own efforts to make change.

Member Initiatives

Research Participation Opportunity: Building and Evaluating a Social Prescribing Program for Carer-Employees in Canada

Are you a caregiver living in Hamilton, Ontario? You're invited to participate in a new study!

The team at McMaster University's Caregiver-Friendly Workplaces program is recruiting caregivers to participate in a study testing a social prescribing program designed to support the health and well-being of people balancing caregiving responsibilities with paid employment.

You may be eligible if you:

- Are currently working, or have worked within the last 12 months, in paid employment (full- or part-time)
- Provide unpaid care to an adult aged 18+ or a child with disabilities
- Live in Hamilton, Ontario

Participants will take part in a social prescribing program over 6 weeks and complete two surveys—one before and one after the program. Participants will receive a $30 CAD e-gift card of their choice and will also be entered into a draw for a chance to win an iPad.

Social prescribing connects people with non-medical community services, programs, and resources that can support health and well-being. Through this study, they hope to learn directly from caregivers about what works and how these supports can be improved to better meet their needs.

Interested in participating? Contact Reemal Shahbaz at reemal.shahbaz@mail.utoronto.ca or call (416) 219-3312.

Of Interest

Peel Council on Aging 2026 Summit on Aging Being Held November 25th

The Peel Council on Aging will host their 2026 Summit on Aging on November 25th. The Summit will feature a presentation from OCC Chair Lauren Bates and will focus on one of the most pressing issues facing older adults today: Housing

Housing is a critical determinant of health, independence, and quality of life. As Peel Region continues to experience rapid population growth and changing housing needs, many older adults face challenges related to affordability, accessibility, aging in place, supportive housing, and community connections. The Summit will explore practical, innovative, and collaborative approaches to creating housing solutions that enable older adults to remain safe, connected, and independent within their communities.

The Peel Council on Aging is a collaborative initiative focused on driving collective impact and promoting healthy aging in Peel Region. The Summit on Aging is the Peel Council on Aging's annual flagship event, bringing together older adults, caregivers, community organizations, healthcare professionals, municipal leaders, researchers, service providers, and policymakers to address issues affecting older adults in Peel Region. The Summit serves as a platform for education, collaboration, and community engagement while fostering innovative solutions that support healthy and inclusive aging.

The Summit will feature a full day of learning, discussion, and networking, including:

- Opening remarks from community and municipal leaders.
- A keynote presentation on the future of housing and aging.

- Expert panel discussions exploring housing innovations, community support, and age-friendly communities.
- Presentations from leaders in housing, health care, community services, municipal planning, and advocacy.
- Opportunities for audience engagement through moderated discussions and question-and-answer sessions.
- A Community Resource Fair showcasing organizations and services available to older adults and caregivers.
- Networking opportunities designed to strengthen partnerships across sectors.

To register or learn more, please visit the Summit's event page here.

Dementia Justice Canada Hosting Two-Day Forum on Older Persons, Rights and Law Reform from November 4th to 5th

Join Dementia Justice Canada for a two-part forum examining current legal and policy questions affecting older persons, from international human rights conventions to Canadian law reform. This event is intended for anyone interested in the rights of older persons. Established in 2017, Dementia Justice Canada is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the rights and dignity of people with dementia. A particular focus is criminal justice reform.

Day one of the forum will feature presentations on international rights and older persons, while day two will cover Canadian law reform, with a focus on autonomy, protection and coercion.

Topics and speakers include:

- **From New York to Geneva: The Evolving New Human Rights Convention for Older Persons** by **Professor Israel (Issi) Doron**, University of Haifa; Visiting Professor, Department of Gerontology, UMass Boston,
- **Lessons from the Disability Rights Convention: Implementing International Rights in Canada** by **Professor Tess Sheldon**, Faculty of Law, University of Windsor -
- **Coercive Control and Vulnerable Adults: The England and Wales Experience** by **Oliver Lewis**, PhD, Barrister at Doughty Street Chambers, England; Author of Coercive Control and Vulnerable Adults
- **Case Update: Deemed Consent and the Right to Make Treatment Decisions** by **Kevin Love**, Lawyer, Community Law Program, Community Legal Assistance Society
- **Deinstitutionalizing Dementia Care,** a conversation with **Dr. Patricia Spindel**, Chair, Seniors for Social Action Ontario, facilitated by OCC Chair, **Lauren Bates** which will cover a longtime disability and elder rights advocate's critical look at ending the reliance on

institutions, including locked wards for behavioural support, and what community-based alternatives can offer.

And more. To register or learn more, please visit the Forum's event page here.

New Research Reveals The Financial Impact on Caregiving for Canadians

Edward Jones Canada has released new research examining the financial and personal impacts of caregiving on Canadian families. Conducted in partnership with Age Wave and The Harris Poll, ***The Financial Impact of Caregiving*** explores how caregiving responsibilities are affecting Canadians' financial security, health and overall well-being.

The findings reveal that **more than 3.6 million Canadian adults currently provide financial care for someone aged 65 or older, often without planning for the role**. They manage their loved one's everyday finances and often legacy affairs, make financial contributions, and often sacrifice their own financial security — all while balancing complex emotions and family dynamics. In aggregate, their contributions amount to $20 billion annually. As Canada's population ages, the research highlights the significant challenges caregivers face while supporting loved ones.

Notable findings include:

- **Nearly three-quarters (73%) of caregivers say they would sacrifice their own financial security to support a loved one**, while 44% have reduced or stopped saving and 25% have reduced retirement contributions.
- **Nearly half (49%) of caregivers report that caregiving has negatively affected their health**, while 83% say it has had a significant impact on their lifestyle.
- Seven in ten (71%) caregivers entered the caregiving role with little or no planning, despite **spending an average of $7,025 annually out of pocket and providing 89 hours of care each month.**
- **More than three-quarters (76%) say their caregiving experience has changed how they prepare for their own future.**

Click here to read the full report, or you can find a summary of the report here.

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.