

Caring in Canada

Survey insights from caregivers and
care providers across Canada

Executive Summary



Canadian Centre for
Caregiving Excellence

Executive summary

Canada is facing a caregiving crisis that will only get worse without real action. A perfect storm is brewing: demand for care is growing, caregivers are aging, the number of available caregivers is shrinking, and care needs are becoming more complex due to our aging population and rising rates of disability and mental health conditions.

There is an urgent need to make sure that caregivers and care providers have the resources and services to support their caregiving responsibilities.

Better data is needed to further understand the challenges that caregivers and care providers face and the supports they need. That's why we carried out the **National Caregiving Survey, completed by more than 3,000 caregivers and care providers**. This survey fills a significant evidence gap as it is the first time that many of these indicators have been measured in Canada.



Caregivers and care providers: What do these terms mean?

Caregivers

Caregivers are unpaid family members, friends, or other support for someone who needs care due to physical, intellectual, or developmental disabilities; medical conditions; mental illness; or needs related to aging. Caregivers provide care because of a relationship, not as a job or a career. (This definition does not include parents or guardians caring for a child without a disability, medical condition or illness.)

Care providers

Care providers are people who are trained and paid to provide care to people who need it, due to physical, intellectual, or developmental disabilities; medical conditions; mental health conditions; or needs related to aging. This includes such professionals as Direct Support Professionals, Personal Support Workers, attendants for people with disabilities, and respite workers.

Both caregivers and care providers play crucial roles in Canada's care economy, and both need more support. These roles are not mutually exclusive: many care providers are simultaneously unpaid caregivers.

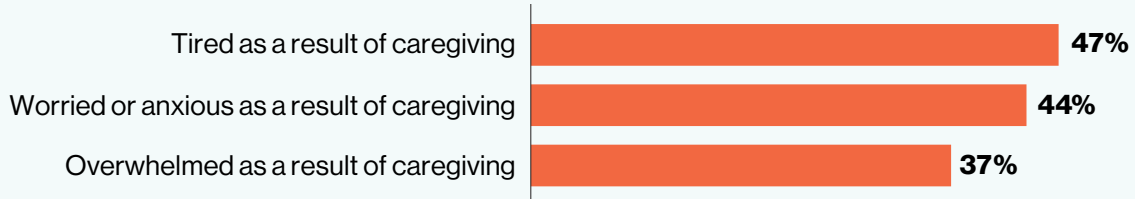
The survey shows that the average caregiver in Canada provides **5.1 hours** of care each day and has been providing this care for **4.6 years**. Caregivers are typically **middle-aged** and caring for a **parent who is facing challenges due to aging**.

The data shows us six key stories about the experience of caregiving in Canada and sets the stage for important policy solutions.

1. Caregiving takes a toll on caregivers' wellbeing

One in four caregivers report fair or poor mental health. The more time spent caregiving, the more tired, overwhelmed, and depressed caregivers become.

FIGURE 1 | Caregiving impacts on wellbeing



Policy implications:

Poor caregiver wellbeing requires more accessible mental health supports and stronger pathways into caregivers finding support, like the healthcare system.

2. Caregivers are working an extra shift

Nearly two thirds of caregivers work, in addition to caring for someone. It is not easy for them.

Caregiving and working mean long hours. Caregivers working full-time provide **4.5 hours of care per day, on average. In a given week, this could add up to over 30 hours of caregiving**, nearly the equivalent of another full-time job.

Working caregivers need help. They are more interested than their non-working peers in supports like monthly allowances, free counselling, and respite services. One of the preferred supports among working caregivers was supportive workplace policies like days off for caregiving or flexible working arrangements.

Policy implications:

The demand on working caregivers stresses the need for caregiver-friendly workplace policies and employment protections, like caregiver-specific leaves and benefits.

3. Caregivers are getting older – and this comes with unique support needs

Nearly 1 in 5 caregivers are over 65, most commonly caring for a partner facing challenges related to aging.

Senior caregivers need more support but are receiving less of it. Caregivers aged 65 and older were the only age group that was significantly more likely to have not accessed any services or supports in the past year.

Among senior caregivers attempting to access information and services:

- 70% said it was difficult to hire care providers or paid care. Senior caregivers said improved access to home care was the most important support
- 59% said it was difficult to find information about support
- 55% said it was difficult to get affordable local services

Policy implications:

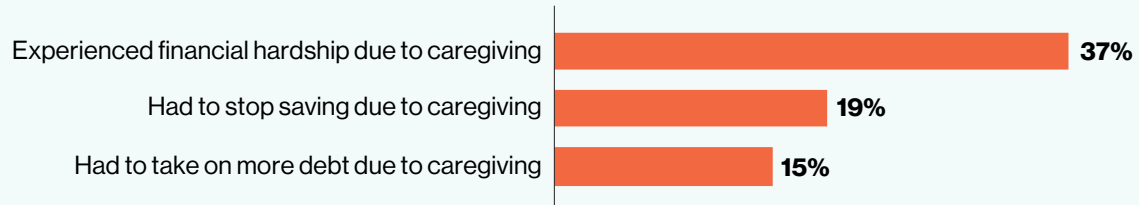
A clear priority for improving service access among senior caregivers is making home care services more accessible. This points to a need for increased funding for home and community care and better integrated systems of care.

4. Caregiving creates financial stress

Caregivers experienced financial hardship at the rate of:

- 56% for caregivers providing five or more hours of care per day
- 55% for caregivers with poor or fair mental health
- 48% for caregivers with household incomes under \$60,000
- 46% for racialized caregivers
- 22% of caregivers spend at least \$1000/month on out-of-pocket caregiving expenses

FIGURE 2 | Financial stress related to caregiving



Despite the challenges that caregivers face, more than half were not familiar with tax credits related to care. At the same time, many felt that an income tax credit (87%) or a monthly care allowance (86%) would be helpful. Their access to supports is not good enough.

Policy implications:

Caregivers voiced that financial supports are the most important policy solution – across all supports domains – for meeting their needs. Action is needed on implementing direct compensation for caregivers and improved awareness and broader eligibility for tax credits and benefits.

5. Paid care is not working well for care providers, caregivers, or care recipients

Care providers do not stay in the profession for long:

- About one third of care providers had been working in the profession for less than a year
- About half of care providers feel that they are not being paid fairly
- Almost half said that their shifts are inadequately staffed
- A quarter have experienced discrimination at work or felt unsafe at work
- Four in five have considered changing careers

The care provider system is broken. As a result, almost two thirds of caregivers found it difficult to access or hire quality care providers or services. Care providers are most interested in higher pay, flexible scheduling, reasonable working hours, and paid sick leave.

Policy implications:

Care providers urgently need increased compensation and increased support and safety at work. Clear interest from care providers in better working conditions, unionization, training, and access to supports map onto action on the professionalization of care providers.

6. Caregiving looks different across identities and communities

The caregiver experience varies across identities and communities. Differences can play out in the day-to-day experience of caregiving, heightened caregiver impacts, and distinct support needs. For example:

- **Racialized caregivers and young caregivers** (aged 18-24) are significantly more likely to be caring for a family member that is not a partner, parent, child, or sibling, compared to non-racialized caregivers and other age groups
- **75% of Indigenous caregivers** said it is important that caregiving and supports be delivered in a culturally sensitive manner
- **LGBTQ2S+ caregivers** are significantly more likely than heterosexual caregivers to be caring for someone with a mental health condition, while sibling caregivers most commonly care for someone with an intellectual or developmental disability
- **40% of LGBTQ2S+ caregivers** had fair or poor mental health, compared to 22% of heterosexual caregivers

Policy implications:

Including the voices of diverse caregivers in policy and program discussions is critical to designing effective solutions. Despite a wide range of experiences and impacts, caregivers are united in the supports they are looking for: better financial and mental health supports, where there is even greater interest from caregivers facing heightened impacts of caregiving.

The conversation cannot end with data. Insights from this survey will help set the direction for the future of caregiving policy in Canada. CCCE is excited to take this new evidence, along with caregivers, care providers, stakeholder voices, and put it toward strategic action to strengthen Canada's caregiving landscape.

Read the full report:

*Caring in Canada: Survey insights from
caregivers and care providers across Canada*



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