



Canadian Centre for
Caregiving Excellence

Centre canadien d'excellence
pour les aidants

Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence

Working Caregivers Project: Phase One

March to December 2023



What is a Working Caregiver?

- Employees of all ages who are caring for a family member or friend who has a short- or long-term health condition, physical or mental disability, or aging-related need.
- Caregiving can take on many forms and levels of commitment, i.e., providing regular or sporadic care to a family member or friend that may live with you, nearby, or far away.
- This type of unpaid care is not the same as parenting and regular childcare, but it does include caring for children with serious illnesses or disabilities.
- Assisting a spouse to carry out activities of daily living at home, helping a neighbour get their groceries, or supporting a family member living in another city with medication management are just some examples of caregiving.

Definition Source: [Balancing work and caregiving responsibilities, Government of Canada](#)



Working Caregivers in Canada

- 1 in 4 Canadians is a caregiver today – eventually this will become **1 in 2**
- Over 6 million Canadians are balancing work and care responsibilities
 - 15% reduce their workhours
 - 10% turn down new opportunities
 - 26% take a leave of absence
- Economic impact
 - \$1.3B in lost productivity (equivalent to 500K employees dropping out of the work force per year)
 - 45% of the Canadian workforce report feeling strain on their pay cheques (\$336M in lost wages)



Direct Impacts on Workplaces

- Majority of caregivers aged 45-65 are employed
- 44% miss an average of 8-9 days of work each year because of caregiving responsibilities
- Productivity loss is multifaceted including:
 - absenteeism
 - presenteeism
 - turnover (often without explanation) and
 - impact on colleagues



Phase One Project Components

Baseline understanding (March 2023)

- Environmental scan of workplace standards & government benefits
- Literature review
- International examples

Lived experience data collection (May-September 2023)

- Surveys
- Focus groups
- 1:1 interviews

Governance & Reporting

- Project Steering Committee
- Formal reports
- National Caregiving Summit (Nov 2023)



Phase 1: Towards a National Caregiving Strategy

62%

of HR Leaders interviewed did not know how many caregivers were in their organization.

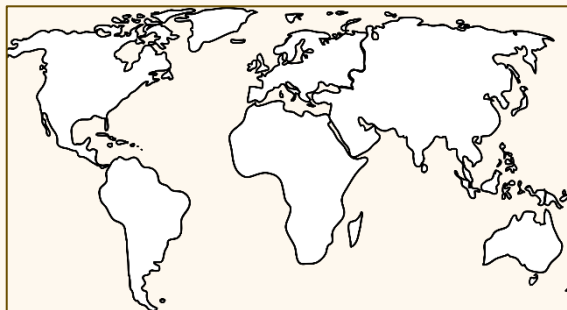


National
Caregiving
Strategy

42

lived experience discussion meetings in Phase 1

- ✓ HR staff
- ✓ Early & late career caregivers
- ✓ Senior leaders



Environmental scan work included a review of 50+ articles, tools & resources as well as best practice examples from six countries around the world.

Caregiver friendly organizations reported:

- ✓ **23%** Happier employees
- ✓ **16%** higher productivity
- ✓ **10%** higher job retention
- ✓ **6%** Improved teamwork
- ✓ **6%** fewer days missed

450+

Summit attendees



<https://canadiancaregivingsummit.ca>

“Be patient and be forgiving. You won’t get it right the first time. Sit in that uncomfortable feeling to move things forward. Talk to people. Pick up the phone. Ask employees who have been/are caregivers, what would have been helpful.” –HR Leader

Environmental Scan: Identified Gaps

Knowledge/Data

- Data only goes so far and often omits those working outside of traditional employment (e.g., contract, gig economy, self-employment), parents of medically complex children, and early career caregivers

Public Policy

- Big policy response (e.g. duty to accommodate based on family status) is limited to traditional workplaces/employment.
- Government benefits are only accessible through traditional employment and have stringent eligibility criteria.

Implementation/Leading and Emerging Practice

- ‘Standards and workplace supports aren’t top of mind
- *“Bright do lights exist...but they are hard to find!”*



Working Caregiver Employment Categories

Unemployed

- Unable to find work
- Choosing not to, or unable to, work
- On leave

Self-Employed

- Gig economy
- Contractor
- Consultant
- Business Owner/ Entrepreneur

Employed Part-time

- Regular hours
- Shift work
 - Autonomy
 - No autonomy

Employed Full-time

- Large employer
 - unionized
 - non-unionized
- Small/Medium employer

Supports are not consistently available to working caregivers across these categories.



Findings: How Caregiving Impacts Workers

Themes	What We Heard/Key Insights
Career Trajectories	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Working caregivers struggle with role conflict (being a caregiver vs an employee). They may feel invisible in the workplace and often face workplace discrimination.89% of early career caregivers feel that their caregiving responsibilities will continue to have significant impacts on their careers with 43% opting not to apply for promotions/career-growth opportunities.<i>“I sought out a career where I didn’t have to be as emotionally available to people all the time because thinking about my brother takes up constant real estate in my mind.”</i>
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Early career caregivers face unemployment and/or underemployment leading to financial instability and insecurity. 29% reported that they had to reduce their working hours/sought part time employment to accommodate caregiving needs. Late career caregivers may face early detachment or may extend retirement due to financial pressures. These barriers can be compounded with ageism.38% of those interviewed indicated that they have not been able to make long-term financial plans like retirement or estate planning.
Skills Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Working caregivers feel there is little to no recognition for the unique skills gained while caregiving including creativity/out of the box thinking, project management, handling uncertainty and problem solving.
Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">When working caregivers face intense role conflict between working and caregiving, and they don’t have the right support, it takes a toll on their mental, physical, emotional and social health.<i>“Early career years are fraught with chronic stress, burn out, missing out on building solid relationships with the people that mattered most.”</i>

Working Caregivers: Barriers to Accessing Supports

Themes	What We Heard/Key Insights
Stigma & Discrimination	<p>A common theme identified is the issue of ‘hidden’ caregivers – people who undertake caring roles and responsibilities, yet do not identify themselves as caregivers. 62% of respondents did not self-identify as a caregiver and 38% indicated that they had feelings of fears of bias and discrimination related to caregiving.</p> <p><i>“Employees find the process of asking for family status accommodation stressful and it is rarely approved with little empathy for personal situations.” –HR Leader</i></p> <p><i>“I did not feel comfortable asking for accommodations out of fear of discrimination. I was laid off in my first job due to my caregiving needs.” –Early Career Caregiver</i></p> <p><i>“I think stigma and misunderstanding exists around the term ‘caregiver’ among HR professionals and management.” –HR Leader</i></p>
Lack of Knowledge: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Government/policy level supports• Organizational level supports	<p>Many working caregivers don’t realize there are (possible) workplace supports available and governmental supports. They may leave their jobs before exploring options.</p>
Missing data across employment categories	<p>Little is known around existing supports for self employed, gig economy and contract workers. There is also missing data related to parents of medically complex children and workers that are unemployed due to not being able to access proper supports.</p>



Organizational Perspectives

Themes	What We Heard/Key Insights
<p>Lack of knowledge among HR staff & Senior Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of working caregivers• Strategic benefits• Existing supports• Workplace standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HR leaders reported little to no tracking of the number of caregivers in their organizations. There is also an assumption about the age of caregivers leading young caregivers in the workplace to be overlooked. Employers may be inadvertently be creating a work environment in which caregivers feel a complete lack of support.• HR professionals reported limited knowledge of existing organizational/government benefits for working caregivers as well as workplace standards that impact caregivers.• Caregiver support is rarely seen as a strategic advantage among senior leaders. It's considered a 'one and done' HR exercise -an issue arises, and then a one-time solution is put into place.
<p>Staffing Model Limitations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some staffing models are more challenging to find solutions to support working caregivers.• <i>“Employers are facing staffing shortages and are becoming stricter in how often they approve flexibility as they do not have staff to cover positions.”</i>• <i>It is so tough in a unionized environment because it is so structured. We have an excellent relationship with our union. They love the flexible work arrangements, but they want to be sure it's consistent.” –HR Leader</i>



Organizational Perspectives (continued)

Themes	What We Heard/Key Insights
Support lives at the individual champion level vs at the institutional level	<p>Organizational champions can keep this work front and center, but when they leave so does the focus on working caregivers.</p> <p><i>“[Providing supports and accommodations] is just the right thing to do.” Unfortunately, this is not a widely held view.” -Senior leader/champion</i></p> <p><i>“Support people when they have family caregiving responsibilities - it takes so much stress off. The employee will be even more dedicated to the workplace as a result. It’s a notable contributor to retention.” ~C-Suite leader</i></p> <p><i>“Life takes place outside of work. Our approach is to be decent humans. Our approach to HR lives in the grey, because we know everyone’s situation and needs are different.” ~HR Leader</i></p>



Findings: Working Caregiver Supports

Category	Common supports offered by employers	Beneficial supports identified by working caregivers
Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flexible workday hours• Remote work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flexible work arrangements• Flexible work location
Leaves	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paid personal days• Top up of government benefits• Paid leave• Unpaid leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paid leaves• Job security when taking leaves• Flexibility to take unplanned leaves
Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employee and family assistance programs (navigation, referral and mental health supports)• Employee resource groups (ERGs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Awareness of government-administered benefit programs• Employee resource groups (ERGs)



Findings: Working Caregivers Require Different Levels of Support

Occasional or episodic caregiving

- Flex time, information, system navigation, concierge services

Prolonged duration caregiving

- Alternate career paths (e.g., individual contributor)

Intense and progressive caregiving

- Reduced workload, reduced hours

Palliative / End-of-life caregiving





- Time off or career break

Life after loss (bereavement)

- Ongoing supports for grieving & impact on employee



Opportunities to Explore in Phase 2

-  **Inspire** corporate leadership to learn about the strategic advantages and financial benefits of supporting caregivers.
-  **Empower** working caregivers to advocate for themselves.
-  **Facilitate** public dialogue about working caregivers.
-  **Promote** awareness of working caregiver supports among HR professionals.





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Thank you

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