

National Caregiver Day: Sharing Experiences in Caregiving and the impact of COVID-19

Mississauga - APRIL 6, 2021 - Today, on National Caregiver Day, Carers Canada has partnered with the Petro-Canada CareMakers Foundation to recognize the 8.1 million caregivers across Canada. The national campaign, "Experiences in Caregiving", is showcasing the diversity of Canadians' caregiving stories and the organizations who support them.

The global pandemic has created unprecedented and uncertain times; and actions taken by our governments to manage the pandemic have unintended consequences on caregivers' well-being. According to the Carers Well-Being Index, a global survey of the impact of COVID-19 on caregivers:

- 51% of caregivers in Canada say the pandemic has worsened their physical health, compared with an average of 46% in 12 other countries.
- 70% of caregivers in Canada say the pandemic has worsened their emotional/mental health, compared with an average of 61% in 12 other countries.

Becoming a new caregiver and taking on increased responsibilities for caring are two trends that were clearly seen during the pandemic. Twelve percent of Canadian caregivers began caring duties for the first time. The amount of time caregivers spent providing care increased by 28% to 26.6 hours per week.

"We know that caregivers often experience burnout from the stress of managing their personal and caring responsibilities without access to supports to give them a break," said Nadine Henningsen, CEO Canadian Home Care Association / Carers Canada. "In fact, 29% of caregivers in Canada say the biggest challenge they've faced during the pandemic is the inability to take a break and 71% say they feel more burnt out than ever before."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, caregivers in Canada have taken on greater responsibilities in providing and managing health care for their loved-ones with minimal supports from their health care teams.

- 41% of caregivers report increased homecare responsibilities due to the pandemic.
- 64% of caregivers report increased time spent managing doctor appointments.

"The pandemic has illuminated the massive and essential role that caregivers play in our health and social care systems -- yet their contributions are still socially and financially under-valued," stated Shirlee Sharkey, CEO, SE Health. "If we want to support people living at home for as long as possible, we need to fundamentally rethink how we support caregivers."

"Our experiences from COVID-19 have shown that governments must invest in our health and social care systems, so patients and their caregivers can thrive where they most want to be – at home," said Jo-Anne Poirier, President and CEO, VON Canada. "Expanding home care capacity and access to primary health care are two urgent priorities."

COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns have impacted caregivers. According to the global study, 44% of caregivers in Canada say that physical distancing and sequestering orders have made them feel isolated and alone, compared with 34% of the 12-country average. "Our *Keeping Connected* program provided virtual companionship and supported many vulnerable seniors and their caregivers that would otherwise have been socially isolated during COVID-19," said Leighton McDonald, President & Chief Executive Officer, Closing the Gap Healthcare.

Technology is an integral part of our lives and has a significant impact on what caregivers know (accessing information and supports), feel (networking and social connections) and do (connecting with health and social care providers). During the pandemic, 52% of caregivers in Canada report having an increased responsibility in managing technology. “Our digital patient and family care hub enhances the caregiver experience by providing real time updates on care visits, access to self-scheduling for virtual visits with nurses, and leading-edge communication tools that help reduce the stress and burden of managing healthcare in the home,” stated Maureen Charlebois, Chief Nursing and Clinical Officer, Bayshore HealthCare.

“We believe that every family caregiver should feel cared for. The space of caregiving is complex and in need of support and transformation. Through the Petro-Canada CareMakers Foundation, we have an opportunity to tangibly benefit charitable organizations throughout Canada who are working actively to support family caregivers,” Leila Fenc, executive director, Petro-Canada CareMakers Foundation.

Providing the right supports for caregivers to alleviate the physical, emotional and financial strain is imperative. Whether through the commitment of the federal government, or the many organizations who work with and support caregivers, our goal is to increase awareness of the resources to help caregivers manage the challenges they experience every day in what they think, feel and do during COVID-19 and beyond. To this end, we call upon governments, employers, health and social care providers and all Canadians to take time today to recognize and support caregivers as essential partners in care.

Read caregiving stories and join the national conversation around “Experiences in Caregiving” at <https://www.carerscanada.ca/national-caregiver-day-campaigns/>

About Carers Canada

Carers Canada is a national coalition dedicated to increasing recognition and support for caregivers. Through collaborative engagement, members work to build awareness and recognition of the role of caregivers and the challenges they face. Carers Canada is a priority program of the Canadian Home Care Association. www.carerscanada.ca.

About the Carers Well-Being Index

The global study was done as part of EMD Serono’s global Embracing Carers initiative in collaboration with international partners, including Carers Canada. The survey included 9,044 caregivers across 12 countries, with 755 unpaid carers from Canada. The countries participating in the survey were: United States, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Australia, Brazil, Taiwan, India and China. The study was conducted between September 3 and October 27, 2020, using online and phone methodologies. The Canada caregiver sample has a margin of error of +/-3.6 percentage points.

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