

# Fostering a Carer friendly Workplace



# Carer-Friendly Workplace Campaign

- Based on Canadian Standards Associations guidelines
- Part of McMaster University's Caregiver Research program
  - First study of its kind



# Goals

- Become aware of carers/caregivers
  - Prevalence in the workforce
  - Challenges
- Learn supportive behaviours and attitudes
- Learn about resources at [workplace]



**Carer-employees (CEs)**  
workers balancing  
employment with the  
unpaid care of their  
family or friends for  
health, disability or  
age-related reasons

50% of carers  
are in their  
peak earning  
years

6.1 million  
carer-  
employees  
in Canada

Women on  
average  
provide 9.5  
hours of  
care weekly

Men provide an  
average of 6.9  
hours of weekly  
care

# Why is caregiving important to [Workplace]?

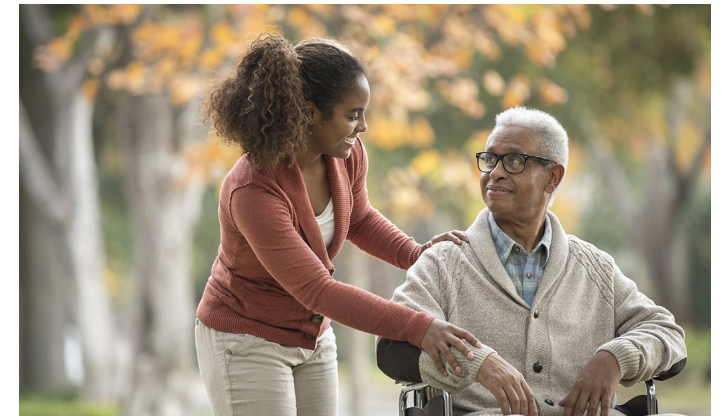
35% of the total Canadian workforce is involved in caregiving

Unsupported carers are more likely to leave the workforce

Economic benefits to workplaces



It's the right thing to do



# What does a carer-employee look like?

Sarah is a 43 year old woman who cares for her mother with Alzheimer's.

Sarah drives and accompanies her mother to all medical appointments, takes her shopping and handles household chores.

Lately, she's having trouble focusing on work, and doesn't feel comfortable telling her colleagues about her situation in fear that she will be seen as less capable.

Being a carer is tough! And it doesn't come with a training manual.

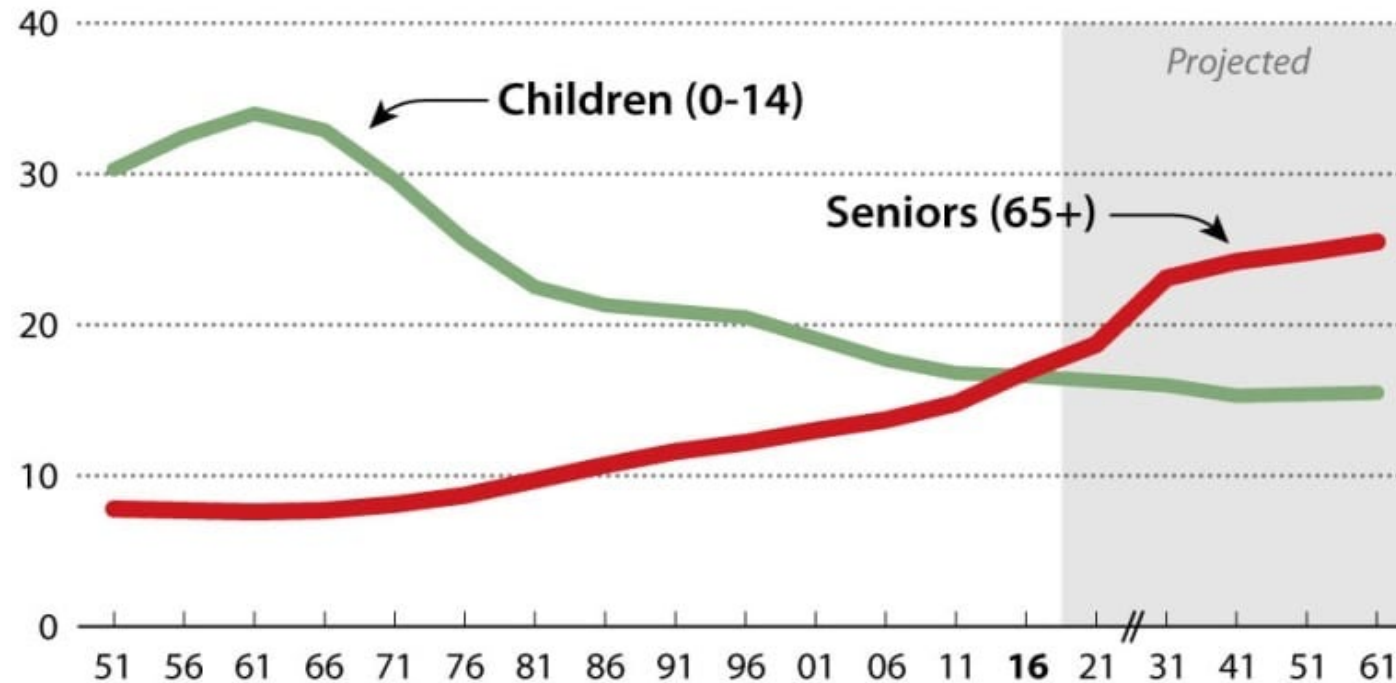
But Sarah loves her mother, and *wants* to take care of her, just like she did for Sarah all those years ago.

# Caregiving issues will worsen within the next decade unless changes are made now

## MORE SENIORS THAN CHILDREN

In 2016, for the first time, the share of seniors (16.9%) exceeded the share of children (16.6%).

### PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL POPULATION



SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA

THE CANADIAN PRESS

# Carers do not *choose* to become carers

Jeff is a 36 year old employee, who is on track to become a manager.

This past summer, his 8 year old daughter was in a car accident which left her disabled.

Jeff's downtime is now filled with medical appointments, physiotherapists, phone calls, and navigating his new dynamic with his daughter.

Jeff is managing work for now, but is starting to feel burnout, and his supervisor is unsupportive about personal life matters.

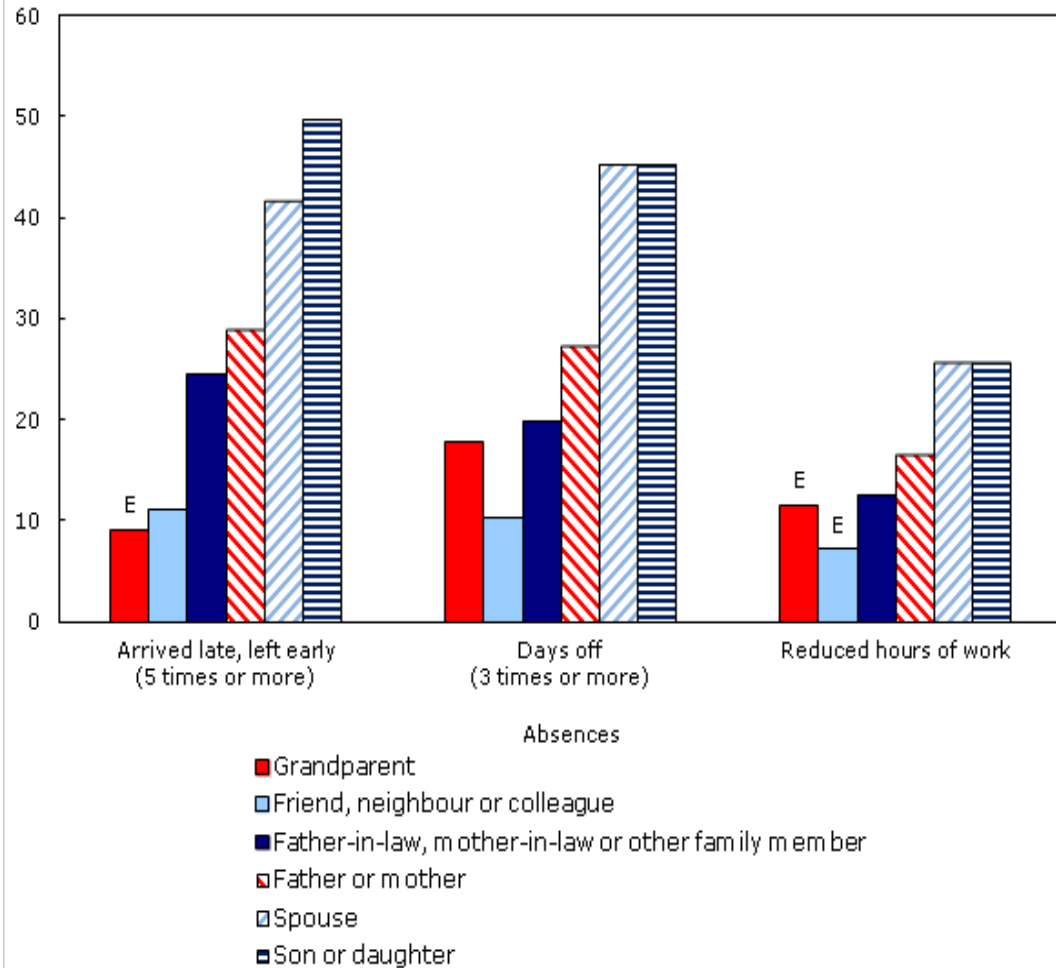
Jeff has worked hard for his career, and doesn't want to give it up, but his daughter's needs come before anything else



Chart 4

Among employed family caregivers of a spouse or child, 1 in 4 had reduced hours of work due to caregiving responsibilities

percentage



E use with caution

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2012.

## Carer-employees are vulnerable to:

- Increased absenteeism and presenteeism
- Delayed career advancement
- Turnover
- Greater difficulty performing work
- Increased risk of mental health issues
- Poor physical health
- Poor morale
- Social isolation

# On average, in 1 year...

**43%** of Canadian carers will miss workdays due to caregiving

**1.6 million carers** will take a leave from work due to caregiving

**600,000** will reduce work hours

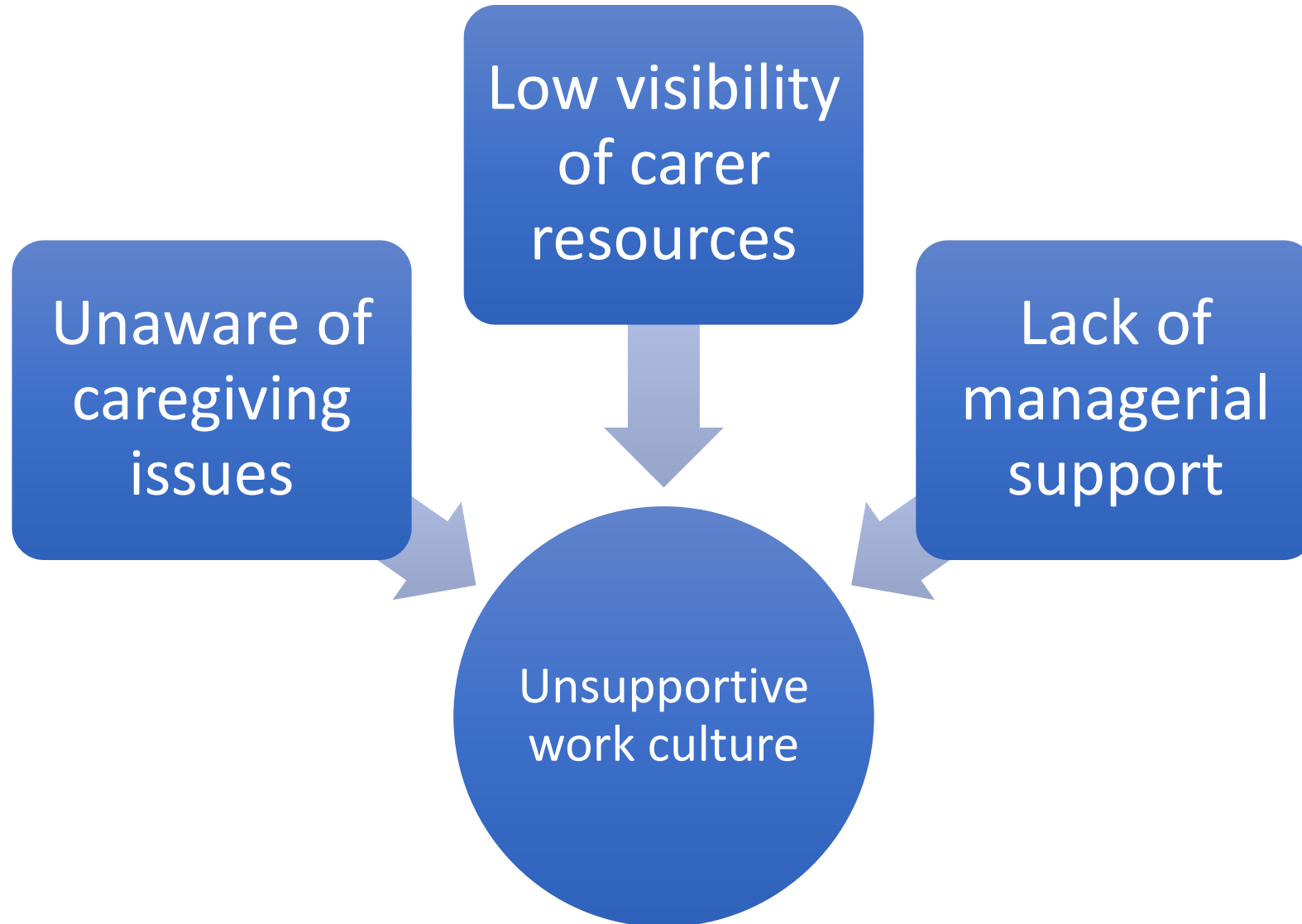
**390,000** will leave the workforce altogether to provide care

**2.2 million hours** of work lost per week in total

Equivalent of **157,000** lost full-time employees

**\$1.3 billion** worth of work days lost due to caregiving

Employers can expect to lose between approximately **\$3,045-\$8,674**/carer-employee/year due to an unsupportive work culture



# Legal obligations to Carers

- Cannot legally discriminate based on family status
- Beyond legal obligations, it is a matter of good working relations and respect towards human rights

# Employee

Establish a negative impact or disadvantage to the care recipient or care relationship if not accommodated

# Employer

Must prove that no other supports were available without “undue hardship”

Cannot refuse an accommodation request on the basis that an employee can self-accommodate

Misetich Test  
for Family  
Status  
Discrimination

# Employers can legally...

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Request information about accommodation needs

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Ask for proof of physical/mental/emotional care needs

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The accommodation process is a shared responsibility between employers and employees to find a reasonable accommodation

# Benefits to a supportive workplace

Reduced turnover

Attractive workplace

Increased productivity

Decreased presenteeism

Enhanced employee health, satisfaction, and wellbeing

# Recognizing carer burden

- Burnout mitigation measures should be proactive

Physical/emotional exhaustion

Financial difficulties

Difficulty in performing regular tasks

Lack of time for oneself

Guilt

Stress



# Signs of burnout



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Lack of energy and motivation, feeling of irritability and cynicism

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Changes in sleep quality, appetite

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Chronic feelings of self-doubt

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Frequent illnesses such as colds, migraines, headaches and muscle pains

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Loss of satisfaction from things that were previously enjoyable

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Disengaging from work, family or personal responsibilities

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Putting off things to do

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Feelings of isolation and dread

# How to help

## Research

Know where to direct employees in terms of employee assistance programs (EAPs), work accommodations

## Communicate

Pass along information from HR to employees personally

## Check in

Check in with your employees

- Incorporate this at the beginning of meetings, townhalls, or virtually

# How to help (2)

Establish forgiving workplace culture in uncertain times

Most important thing: foster an environment where employees feel comfortable talking to you if/when they need to

- Have/allow conversations about family at work where appropriate
- Can be one-on-one conversations or group conversations (if comfortable)

Be aware of leave policies (paid or unpaid)

# Case Example

Joe is a carer to his wife Valentine who has recently been diagnosed with Stage 3 cancer

- She needs assistance with medical appointments, chemo, and social activities
- Her condition is likely to deteriorate over time and require hands-on care

His direct supervisor doesn't talk anything non-work related

- Joe is unsure how his supervisor would respond if he told his supervisor about his situation
- Joe is starting to become very distracted at work as he worries about his wife
- He doesn't know if his co-workers have gone through something similar before

# Case Example Solutions

## Proactive

- Before the event
- Establish routine of communication, support, empathy

## Safe things to say

- “Thank you for sharing your concerns, I understand and appreciate the difficult burden you are managing”
- “I’m sorry that you are experiencing this. Do you need a listening ear at the moment?”
- “You are doing a great job in a difficult situation. How can I alleviate burden? Would it be helpful if we did X, Y, or Z at work?”

## Possible Solutions

- Arrange meeting with Joe with supervisors and/or HR, with follow-ups/check-ins
- Offer flextime or compressed work weeks, followed by part time work, or reduced work load
- Allow him to have his cell phone on hand at work so Valentine and care providers can reach him
- Offer EAP counselling services to help with stress and decision-making
- Communicate regularly in case Joe’s situation changes (ex. leave of absence, bereavement)



# Recognize Unconscious Bias

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- Distance bias
- Accommodation bias
- Gender Bias
- Racial Bias
- Practice empathy – understand that others' situation is different from your own

# Main takeaways

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Caregiving is a growing issue for workplaces, employers and managers

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Need for a fundamental shift in workplace culture to be supportive of carers

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This change needs to come top-down, especially from managers

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# Action Items

01

Complete post-workshop form to complete the session

02

03

Practice what you learned!





Questions?

PSA: National  
Caregivers day is April  
6<sup>th</sup> 2021!