



# THE HILL TIMES

Thursday, November 23, 2023

Canada's Politics and Government News Source Since 1989

[Latest Paper](#)

**TRENDING:** [Defence policy](#) | [Interpretation](#) | [Sudan](#) | [Decorum](#) | [Les Whittington](#) | [Gerry Nicholls](#) | [de Adder's take](#)

## The cost of not caring

One in four Canadians of employment age combine paid work with caregiving for a loved one, but the majority of employers do not offer accommodations for carers.



You most likely know someone who is a carer-employee and realize how emotionally, physically, and financially taxing this liminal situation is, writes Dr. Allison Williams. *Photograph courtesy of Pixabay*

**OPINION** | BY ALLISON WILLIAMS | November 23, 2023



By Dr. Allison M. Williams, [@cfwpmcmaster](#)

Professor & Science Research Chair, McMaster University, [awill@mcmaster.ca](mailto:awill@mcmaster.ca),

Member of Sub-Committee for the Care Economy Private Members Bill (Bonita Zarillo, MP)

Unpaid carers of all ages – youth, seniors and those in the prime of their careers – impact our country's overall health, labour markets, and economic development. Supporting carer-employees makes good business sense and acknowledges the humanity of our workforce.

In 2018, 5.2 million (or 1 in 4) Canadians of employment age (19 to 70), most of whom work full-time hours, combined paid work and caregiving. One job is to pay the bills, and the other is caring for a loved one who is sick, disabled or dying.

These are carer-employees (or working caregiver-employees). They are part of a substantial cohort of individuals providing caregiving for a family member or a friend while juggling this with their paid employment - often for the worse. They represent 35% of our workforce, and as our population ages, this percentage is increasing.

You most likely know someone who is a carer-employee and realize how emotionally, physically, and financially taxing this liminal situation is.

The fact is the majority of employers across Canada do not accommodate carers in the workplace.

There is a roadmap to accommodate and improve the lives of carer-employees, and there are free resources. However, those of us who are aware of the burden carer-employees carry need to advocate to government leaders, the C-suite, and communities across Canada about the importance of building carer-friendly workplaces.

As principal of the *CIHR/SSHRC Healthy Productive Work Partnership Grant, Mobilizing a Caregiver-Friendly Workplace Standard: A Partnership Approach* (McMaster University), I want to share the four pillars, or objectives, outlined in the *Balancing Work and Care* report we produced with Carers Canada (with funding from PetroCanada CareMakers Foundation<sup>TM</sup>):

- Policy: Canada will rank first among the G7 in carer supports, which include financial programs that provide the means for carer-employees to modify their employment while caregiving.
- Culture: Work and life will be meaningfully integrated and normalized so that caregiving responsibilities can be equitably accommodated.
- Leadership: Employers will engage employees in the creation of carer-friendly and supportive workplaces as part of their core organizational operating procedures.
- Motivation: Employers across Canada will have access to independent, applied research to inform their policies and practices for carer-employees.

The *Balancing Work and Care* report is a clear path toward action to improve the lives of over a third of Canada's working population. Its proposed vision is that workplace accommodations for and inclusion of carer-employees will be a universal practice that is documented and transparent.

The report can be used to inform government policy and can be found [here](#).

In the context of staffing shortages, developing carer-friendly workplaces helps support and retain carer-employees while benefiting recruitment efforts. It is a win-win.

The first step is simply to begin—to start with one department, one team or one location. Numerous resources are available to both Canadian businesses and carer-employees, including the complimentary *Carer-Friendly Workplace Standard* (and the accompanying *Quick Start Implementation Guide*), which offers practical ideas for creating carer-friendly workplaces.

Available in both official languages, The voluntary *Standard* is one-size-fits-all: it applies to any organization, regardless of size, public or private sector, geographical location or community setting. It can be used in conjunction with a company or organization's management systems or human resource programs, or in the absence of a workplace program to support carer-employees.

*The Standard* was developed jointly with The Canadian Standards Association (CSA) and has been downloaded over 1,000 times. The *Standard* is a Canadian innovation and success story and the basis for the International Standard Organization Standard created by an international working group initiated by and including Canadians (please see [ISO/DIS 23889:2020\(E\)](https://www.iso.org/standard/69011.html)).

McMaster University's *Gender, Health and Caregiver Friendly Workplaces*' (<https://ghw.mcmaster.ca/>) research program's goal is to improve, promote and sustain health for carer-employees by providing the evidence needed by employers, labour organizations, and various professional groups such as human resources, occupational health and safety, and public health, to enact meaningful change in the workplace.

On behalf of the over 25 partners who work to mobilize carer-friendly workplaces in Canada, I encourage you to contribute to change and assist employers in achieving more inclusivity and better carer-employees' lives.

-----30-----

**Author:**

**Dr. Allison Williams**

**McMaster University Faculty of Science Research Chair, CIHR/SSHRC Healthy Productive Work Partnership Grant**

Dr. Allison Williams is a professor in the School of Geography and Earth Sciences at McMaster University. A health geographer by training, Dr. Williams currently leads a multi-year Canadian Institute for Health Research/Social Science Humanities Health Research (CIHR)/SSHRC Healthy Productive Work Partnership Grant. Through the partnership grant, the work of academic researchers, business and non-profit leaders is helping employers to adopt the CSA Carer-Inclusive and Accommodating Organizations Standard. In doing so, workplaces have the potential to enhance work-life balance, retention, autonomy and reduce health insurance costs.

A strong advocate for policy and practice improvements at the national, provincial, and local levels, Dr. William's work also informs international carer-friendly workplace policies. Her insights, skills, and knowledge lead to strong collaborative partnerships with organizations representing caregiver advocacy, health services, and labour. She cares for her aging parents and uncle and has two lovely children living at home with her and her partner.