

OVER 8 MILLION CANADIANS (1 IN 4) are providing unpaid care to support someone with diminishing physical ability, debilitating cognitive condition or a chronic life-limiting illness. Carers (also known as caregivers or family caregivers) come from all walks of life— all ages, all genders and all income levels. They are students, employees and retirees. Whether it's a sudden onset or a gradual transition, caring impacts an individual's life physically, emotionally, socially and financially.¹

CONNECTING CARERS is a campaign to raise awareness of carers' needs and the importance of connecting and accessing supports earlier rather than later in their care journeys.

CONNECTING caregivers to each other so they can share their experiences and benefit from each other's expertise. Building and maintaining these connections is important because:

Caring is a personal and emotional experience.

The compassion, understanding and counsel from other carers who are in, or have gone through similar caring experiences, are the benefits of peer to peer support.²

Caregivers have expertise, wisdom and skills.

Peer to peer caregiver supports provide opportunities for experienced caregivers to mentor newcomers, sharing their coping skills, strategies and familiarity with accessing and navigating the often-complex health and social care systems.²

CONNECTING caregivers to employers and schools so they can maintain a balance between their caregiving duties and career or educational pursuits. Building and maintaining these connections is important because:

Caregivers make up 30% of paid labour force.

Carers' access to flexible work arrangements varies widely. Carer-friendly employment practices result in numerous business benefits including increased productivity, less recruitment and retention costs, reduced sick leave and lower staff turnover.³

Young carers are found in every classroom in Canada.

Young carers are at risk of not finishing school or acquiring the skills, knowledge and social maturity necessary for future success. Schools and teaching professionals must recognize and understand the needs of young carers.^{4,5}

CONNECTING caregivers to a social network so they can have a personal life and a support system to lean on. Building and maintaining these connections is important because:

Caregivers experience social isolation.

Finding time to focus on one's own personal needs and relationships is vital to ensuring carers' health and well-being. Staying connected with friends, family members, colleagues and others keep carers engaged.⁶

Caregiving impacts family dynamics.

Relationship quality can change with caregiving. Being connected to counselors help carers address tensions in family relationships and reduce stress.⁶



USING TECHNOLOGY TO CONNECT

Online and mobile technology makes peer to peer carer support more accessible and convenient through the use of chat rooms, blogs, and video meetings.⁷



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Virtual classrooms, telework, intranet portals, teleconference or videoconference capabilities, as well as software to support document sharing provide flexibility to balance care, work, learning and life.⁸



USING TECHNOLOGY TO CONNECT

Technologies such as video chat, voice calls (e.g. Skype) and social network sites help caregivers stay connected to their interests, family and friends.⁷

(1) Statistics Canada. 2013. Portraits of Caregivers (2) Saint Elizabeth. 2011. Promising Practices and Indicators for Caregivers Education and Support Programs (3) RAPP. 2014. Combining Care Work and Paid Work: Is it Sustainable? (4) Statistics Canada. 2012. Young Canadians Providing Care (5) The Vanier Institute of the Family. 2012. Young Carers in Canada: The Hidden Cost and Benefits of Young Caregiving (6) Eales, J. & Keating, N. 2017. Social Consequences of Family Care of Adults: A Scoping Review (7) AARP, 2016, Caregivers & Technology: What They Want and Need. (8) Eales, J. & Keating, N. 2017. Social Consequences of Family Care of Adults: A Scoping Review.

Learn more on how AGE-WELL is supporting caregivers through research and technology: <http://agewell-nce.ca/research/research-themes-and-projects/workpackage-2>

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