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Caregivers in Canada providing billions in care with little support: New report

Women providing most care, often in prime earning years

March 19, 2018, TORONTO – More than eight million Canadian caregivers are keeping our health care systems afloat, 30 per cent of whom are “sandwich generation” women, according to a new report by the National Institute on Ageing (NIA), at Ryerson University’s Ted Rogers School of Management.

The NIA’s report *Why Canada needs to better care for its working caregivers*, authored by Dr. Samir Sinha, Ivy Wong and Julie Dunning, show that Canadian caregivers contribute \$25 billion to provincial health care systems every year through unpaid care, with women doing most of the heavy lifting. Most caregivers are balancing work and caregiving responsibilities, with 35 per cent of the Canadian workforce providing care to others. Overall, 54 per cent of caregivers are female, and women are more likely to spend at least 20 hours per week providing care, while men on average provide care for less than one hour per week.

“Canada’s governments, health care systems and employers need to start recognizing that millions of Canadians are providing billions of dollars’ worth of care every year, and we should be supporting them,” said Dr. Sinha. “Otherwise, we are reducing the ability of caregivers, particularly women in their prime earning years, to participate in the workforce and to simultaneously shoulder the economic burden of caring.”

The report makes five evidence-informed recommendations, including:

- Recognizing all caregivers with a common definition;
- Supporting caregivers with financial assistance and training;
- Changing workplace cultures to recognize and support the unique challenges Canadian caregivers face;
- Developing national standards that both governments and employers can use to measure how well we are meeting the needs of working caregivers.

In 2012, almost 30 per cent of Canadian caregivers were women aged 35-44, which are pivotal years for building a strong career and working towards financial security, at a time when they are often caring for their young children as well.

“The recent federal budget took important strides toward increasing women’s participation in the workforce and closing the persistent earnings gap between men and women,” said Michael Nicin, Executive Director of the NIA. “But any attempt to increase and sustain labour force participation will fall short of the mark unless more support is provided by governments and employers to specifically address the financial toll on working caregivers, the majority of whom are women.”

Organizations that do not support their employees to balance their caregiving and work-related responsibilities are likely to experience increased absenteeism and decreased workplace productivity. Costs associated with caregiving have been estimated at approximately \$1.3 billion annually in lost productivity, absenteeism, and turnover for Canadian employers. Approximately 30 per cent of caregivers for older parents took time off work, with the average time off taken estimated at 450 working hours per year (or approximately 8.5 hours per week) per caregiver.

Despite the financial challenge of providing care to others, the vast majority of caregivers receive no financial assistance because they are unaware that they are eligible, do not understand the application process, or do not know how to apply for benefits. In fact, as of 2012, only 14 per cent of caregivers of spouses and 5 per cent of caregivers of parents received financial assistance from the government.

“We’re proud to have funded the NIA’s report on *Why Canada needs better care for its working caregivers*”, says Stuart Cottrelle, President of Bayshore HealthCare. “Through our employer programs like Seniors Care Assistance and home care services like respite care for caregivers, we want to ensure caregivers have access to the resources and services they need to care for themselves as well as for their loved ones.”

[Read the full report here.](#)

About the National Institute on Ageing (NIA)

The National Institute on Ageing (NIA) is a new policy and research centre based at Ryerson University in Toronto. The NIA is dedicated to enhancing successful ageing across the life course. It is unique in its mandate to consider ageing issues from a broad range of important perspectives, including those of financial, physical, psychological, and social wellness. The NIA is also focused on leading cross-disciplinary research to better understand the issues that can lead to the development of evidence-informed actionable insights that can meaningfully contribute towards shaping the innovative policies, practices and products that will be needed to address the multiple challenges and opportunities presented by Canada’s coming of age. The NIA is committed to providing national leadership and promoting a collaborative approach that also seeks to continually establish municipal, provincial, federal and global partnerships with other academic centres, and other ageing-related organizations. Funding for this report was generously provided by Bayshore



HealthCare. All of the research, writing, and recommendations herein have been independently produced by the NIA on the basis of sound evidence.

To learn more about the NIA visit our website at <http://www.ryerson.ca/nia> and follow us on Twitter @RyersonNIA

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