



*Image from Pexels by Vlada Karpovich*

## Let's celebrate and raise awareness about the role of caregivers in Canadian society

May was National Caregiver Month. During that month, caregiver organizations across Canada said, "this is a time to celebrate and raise awareness about the experiences of Canada's 8+ million people who give care to a family member or friend". The campaign also raised awareness about the issues caregivers face in performing their important role.

On the website of Family Caregivers of BC, they say that a "caregiver is family or friend who provides unpaid care and support to someone living with a disease, disability, mental health challenge, or age-related frailty". Many caregivers are 65 years and older, with the majority being women.


The services provided by Caregivers are varied and extensive. Caregivers may provide personal care such as bathing, hygiene, mobility assistance, dressing and assisting with eating. Or they might provide supports like phone check-ins, companionship and emotional care, medication management, light housekeeping, gardening, and yard work. Or caregiving can entail providing other housekeeping support such as preparing meals and running errands. Caregivers might provide transportation to appointments, or transport to a specific program targeted at the loved one or friend. Some caregivers might also provide financial aid and support.

Caregiving can come at a price though. Family Caregivers of BC say, "the caregiving relationship is often shaped mutually by both the caregiver and the person receiving care, and it frequently coexists with other personal, professional, and social responsibilities".

In Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence "Caring in Canada report", they report that "56% of caregivers providing more than five hours of care per week experienced financial stress." In the same report, "half of caregivers found accessing supports difficult and 58% of caregivers reported feeling tired because of caregiving".

The report says that no one should undervalue the importance of caregiving. The health care system would not be sustainable without the 8+million who provide support to a loved one. Caregiving is crucial to the Canadian economy: replacing care from unpaid caregivers would cost the federal government an estimated \$35 billion annually.

**Many caregivers are 65 years and older, with the majority being women.**



For seniors to age at home for as long as possible without an increased burden to caregivers, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons are advocating for increased funding for home and community care, more practical healthcare supports such as home care and nursing, more supports to make homes accessible, and removing barriers to access to health care.

On the home front, the North Shore Community Resources Caregiver Support Program hosts support groups and workshops, consultations and referrals to health care and community services. They offer stress management strategies, resources and more. They can be reached at 604-982-3302, or on the NSCR website. Family Services of the North Shore also offers counselling services for caregivers who are experiencing stress. Call them at 604-988-5281, ext. 226.

Caregivers in our community deserve our thanks and support

*Margaret Coates is the co-ordinator of Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. She has lived on the North Shore for over 50 years and has worked for and with seniors for 30 of those years. Ideas for future columns are welcome – email lions\_view@telus.net.*