

# Older and Wiser: Family Caregiver Month a time celebrate important work during strange times

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The experience of caregiving can be an incredible challenge to a person's life, especially during the pandemic

*The province has proclaimed that May is Family Caregiver Month. Getty Images*

In 2017, B.C.'s seniors advocate [published a report](#) that stated "Caregiver distress is rising in B.C. while supports and services are not keeping pace with growing need."

While things may have changed for the better in the few years before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, [a recent survey](#) commissioned by the Family Caregivers of British Columbia stated that, unfortunately, caregivers have been negatively impacted by the pandemic.

The survey results show that more than 50 per cent of caregivers reported their mental health had gotten worse, more than 40 per cent reported their physical health had declined, and caregiver anxiety levels increased 19 per cent, reflected in feelings of concern, nervousness, and anguish.

The survey state that "Family and friend caregivers are on the front lines of COVID-19. The pandemic is highlighting the essential role caregivers are playing to help our health-care system cope with this emergency."

This is not good news for the roughly 1.1 million family and friend caregivers in British Columbia.

However, it appears that the province recognizes the role caregivers play as a vital link in the health-care system by declaring May as Family Caregiver Month.

Family Caregiver Month is a great time to celebrate the amazing work that family caregivers provide usually without monetary rewards.

Most of us have taken on the role of an unpaid caregiver or will take on the role if we have loved ones or friends who need support.

Family caregivers are often a relative or friend who provides care and support to someone living with disease, disability, or frailty due to aging. Their ongoing work may involve transportation to appointments, or transport to a specific program targeted at the loved one or friend. One such program is [My Parkgate Break](#) in North Vancouver, a gathering place for individuals experiencing the changes associated with early to moderate dementia and support services for their caregivers.

Caregivers may also 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.

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Unfortunately, according to Family Caregivers of B.C., caregivers are often "unrecognized, unsupported, and underappreciated."

But the role of the caregiver cannot be underestimated. The Canadian Association of Retired People states that the economic value of unpaid caregivers who look after seniors can save Canada's health-care system up to \$31 billion annually.

A family caregiver in Canada, according to CARP, is usually over 65 and those they are caring for are mainly seniors.

Caregiver supports, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, are essential given the incredible stress caregivers are under. Generally, even though given with love, much of the work of caregiving has an emotional and physical toll. Health and well-being is as important for the caregiver as it is for their loved ones.

During COVID-19 people have not always been able to access adult day care for respite, in-home help, and informal assistance from family and friends. This has added extra pressure to an already tough situation.

But there are some options for the caregiver. A caregiver could try getting some support through caregiver support groups such as those run by North Shore Community Resources. The NSCR 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 604-982-3320 or by [visiting their website](#).

Family caregivers deserve our support for their critical role in our community, especially now during these unprecedented times.

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