



CITY OF TORONTO CAREGIVER STRATEGY REPORT

BACKGROUND

Our Aging Population

Toronto's population is steadily aging. For the first time in the history of the city, there are now more Torontonians aged 65 or older than children aged 15 or under (Toronto Public Health, 2019). While this is a relatively new trend, demographic projections suggest that it will remain the norm for many years to come (Statistics Canada, 2018). This shift towards a more senior population will bring with it an increased demand for services, supports, and resources that address the unique needs of this population – especially those related to health.

In Canada, individuals aged 65 and older are more likely to have multiple chronic health conditions than any other age group (Statistics Canada, 2018). The prevalence of conditions such as hypertension, arthritis, dementia, and back problems have all been demonstrated to increase with age (Statistics Canada, 2018; Public Health Association of Canada, 2017). These chronic conditions, in addition to many other age-associated changes, have been closely linked to the utilization of health-related supports and services (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2011).

As the prevalence of chronic conditions and age-associated health changes continue to increase with the maturing of Toronto's population, it is likely that the request for supports to manage these needs will increase as well.





The Current State of Caregiving

Across Canada and within Toronto, unpaid caregivers (defined as family members, friends, or neighbours, who provide unpaid care to a person who needs support due to a disability, illness, or age-related changes) currently serve as one of the most significant and impactful forms of support available to individuals with chronic health conditions and/or age-related needs.

According to the Change Foundation, family caregivers represent almost 30 per cent of Ontarians who provide unpaid care to those who need assistance due to a health condition, disability, or challenges related to aging (A Profile of Family Caregivers in Ontario, 2016). Many of these caregivers are working full-time and/or are seniors themselves. Caregiving is rewarding but it can also be emotionally, physically, and financially stressful.

With trends suggesting that Canada and Toronto's population will continue to increase in average age moving forward, it is likely that the role of caregivers will continue to expand along with the amount time required for their support.

Currently, unpaid caregivers account for a significant portion of care received by individuals in the community (Statistics Canada, 2015). It is estimated that nearly 10% of unpaid caregivers in Canada provide ten or more hours of support per week (Statistics Canada, 2015). This support (in addition to including assistance with a household tasks and chores) often includes a variety of complex tasks such as wound care, administering intravenous medications, maintaining feeding tubes, operating medical equipment, and dispensing oral medication (Reinhard, Levine, & Samis, 2012; Arriagada, 2020). These forms of support, which are likely to increase in breadth and duration for many caregivers in the coming years, have already been shown to lead to adverse outcomes in terms of economic security, health, and well-being (Keefe, Légaré, Charbonneau, & Décarie, 2012).

To minimize the risk of adverse outcomes associated with the unpaid caregiver role, it is imperative that steps be taken to support these individuals before dependency and demand on them becomes too great.



City of Toronto Seniors Strategy and Caregiver Strategy

By 2030, it is expected that nearly 20% of Toronto's population will be age 65 or older (Toronto Public Health, 2019). Recognizing the significant policy, service and resource implications of this demographic shift, City of Toronto Council adopted the Toronto Seniors Strategy 2.0 (EX34.2) on May 22, 2018 which includes 27 new recommendations including the creation of a Caregiver Strategy (Recommendation 6) with an emphasis on the needs of senior caregivers.

Recommendation 6 calls on the City and its partners to bring its resources to bear to better support family caregivers with information, respite, transportation, and financial supports, and improve access to other existing supports and services that may be available but unknown to caregivers (Toronto Seniors Strategy, 2.0). Recommendation 6 further calls on the City and its partners to address long-standing health inequities in the system and improve access to community-based and government services for caregivers of people who need support to continue to live in the community.

The Caregiver Strategy aims to better understand the alignment of community based social service organizations, city, provincial, and federal services available in Toronto, improve navigation and communication across sector by developing a common framework for matching services to caregiver needs, and enhance the knowledge of front-line workers by equipping them with information, tools, and resources to be able to address the needs of caregivers.

COVID-19

On March 11, 2020, The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. COVID-19 has caused unprecedented and widespread disruption in society and proven a tremendous burden on the already overly stretched health care system.

COVID-19 has further unmasked frightening gaps in our social safety net and the strain it has imposed on our health care system has amplified the need for increased community supports, especially for our most vulnerable populations.

As health care professionals, we have had to quickly adapt to a ‘new normal’ and navigate the unforeseen challenges of service delivery without a playbook for the difficulties faced. As organizations, we were forced to reimagine a way of going about business and ensuring that those we care for do not fall through the cracks. And yet, COVID-19 has also spurred innovation and a wave of collaboration in the health care sector. We turned to one another and openly shared resources, opportunities, lessons, learnings, frustration,

and most of all – a sense of solidarity. It is this collaborative spirit that is embodied in Recommendation 6 - the need to be unified and coordinated in supporting senior caregivers.

Although work on the Caregiver Strategy had been underway prior to COVID-19, the disruption the pandemic has caused to our society and systems has made us pause, reexamine our initial objectives, and forced us to adjust the scope of our work to a broader approach to address the landscape of caregiving and system-wide effects brought on by COVID-19, identify emerging trends in the sector, map out the impact of COVID-19 on individuals, organizations and the health care system, and examine how the needs of caregivers have evolved.

We are hopeful the data collected in support of Recommendation 6 as part of the development of a caregiver strategy work can inform community agencies’ strategic directions and decision-making in their day-to-day.



Methodology

- Leverage the Accountability Table to guide the development of the process and involved members in providing input from a provider perspective through a survey.
- Employ Ontario Caregiver Organization Wish List as a jumping point for discussion in focus groups.
- Host and facilitate series of 8 focus groups geared towards caregivers to, not only obtain first-hand feedback and lived experience, but also to make the process inclusive.
- Host and facilitate series of 4 Health Care Provider Focus Groups.



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