



## OLDER CANADIANS PROVIDE CARE

***Contrary to popular belief, older adults are not solely receivers of care. Many older adults (aged 65 and older) provide some sort of assistance or care to someone they know, kin and non-kin alike. This includes caring for adults (including adult children) with long-term health problems or disabilities and grandchildren.***

### 1 million older adults are caregivers

Among Canadians aged 45 and older who provide care to adults with long-term health problems, one in four (24%) is over the age of 65. That means that in Canada nearly 1 million older adults provide care to others; 82,000 of them are Albertans. While the majority of these caregivers are aged 65-74 (65%), one-third is over 75. The gender gap is surprisingly small: 56% of older adult caregivers are women and 44% are men<sup>1</sup>.

Care is given based on affective ties: most older adult caregivers care for friends and neighbors (38%), a spouse or partner (20%), parents or parents-in-law (15%), and siblings/siblings-in-law (13%). While most (62%) care for one person, more than one in four cares for 2 or 3 people and 10% care for 4 or more<sup>2</sup>.

### Older adults' unpaid care is valued at \$3.8 billion

On average, older adults spend 14 hours per week providing care to others. However, 10% spend 35 hours or more per week caring, the equivalent of a full time job<sup>2</sup>. The majority of time is spent on meal preparation and clean-up, house cleaning, laundry and sewing, followed by assistance with personal care, tasks that often are needed on a daily basis. A couple of hours per week are also spent shopping for groceries and other necessities, providing transportation, helping with banking, and doing home maintenance and outdoor work<sup>3</sup>.

This care often is a long-term commitment. One in four older adult caregivers has been caring for someone for one or two years, but 23% have been caring for 3 to 5 years, and 17% for 6 to 10 years<sup>2</sup>. This time adds up. Collectively the time that older adults spend providing unpaid care is valued at more than \$3.8 billion per year<sup>3</sup>. That's a significant contribution to society!

## 58,000 older adults continue to parent an adult child with a disability

Older adults are also an important source of support for adult children with chronic illness or disabilities. For 7% of older adults in Canada (58,116 of them), parenthood extends far beyond the normal time frame and becomes a lifelong responsibility caring for adult children with disabilities<sup>2</sup>. And this figure is increasing with rising rates of survival and greater longevity of children with congenital birth defects and childhood injury and illness. As they grow older, many older adults are concerned about who will care for their adult child when they are no longer able to do so.

## Older adults spend 4 million hours providing unpaid child care

Older adults not only care for friends and family members with long term health problems, but many also take care of their (healthy) grandchildren. Extended family ties are highly regarded, and grandparents feel obligated to provide child care to grandchildren, particularly in ethnic minority and aboriginal families<sup>4,5</sup>. Chinese grandparents, who are either new immigrants or temporary visitors to Canada, provide a wide range of support to their children and grandchildren, including child care, housework, shopping for groceries and snow shoveling. Many of these grandparents described their unpaid care work as more than a full-time job<sup>5</sup>.

More than one in five (22%) adults aged 65-74 and 9% of those aged 75 and over help with child care<sup>6</sup>. Collectively, older adults spend more than 4 million hours on unpaid child care each week<sup>7</sup>. Grandparents, especially grandmothers, are an important source of support for parents of children with developmental disabilities<sup>8</sup>. Overall, older women spend more time than men on child care: grandmothers typically talk with their grandchildren about emotional and interpersonal issues, while grandfathers offer advice on education, job seeking and finances<sup>9</sup>.

## 75,000 grandchildren live with their grandparents

Caring for grandchildren is an even bigger commitment for some older adults. In Canada, more than 75,000 grandchildren live with their grandparents with no parents present in the household, and in Alberta, about 9,400 grandchildren live in the same situation<sup>10</sup>. These figures are increasing every year<sup>11</sup>. Grandparents who raise grandchildren are more likely to be female, First Nation heritage and unemployed. Grandmothers are more disadvantaged than grandfathers in that they are poorer, less likely to be married, more likely to be unemployed, and more than twice as likely to provide 60 or more hours per week of unpaid child care compared to grandfathers<sup>12</sup>.

Overall, older adults' caregiving contributes to the social fabric of Canada. Providing care strengthens the relationship between older adult caregivers and those who receive the care. Moreover, the unpaid care provided by older adults alleviates the burden on the health and continuing care sectors<sup>13</sup>.

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