

Four trends have accompanied the shift from collective to increased individual responsibility for care:

- *Cost containment in health, income security and social services*, which limits support for unpaid caregivers, and affects women disproportionately.
- *Increased privatization of health and continuing care* leaves caregivers and receivers to cover costs of private services, or leaves unpaid caregivers to fill the gap with additional care.
- *A shift from institutional to community-based health and continuing care* increases demands on unpaid caregivers as they try to support the care receiver in the home or community.
- *Increased geographic inequity in health and social services delivery* results in different support and eligibility criteria and co-payments from region to region across the country.

“Unpaid caregivers in Canada are doing more than ever before,” says David Hay, Director of the Family Network. “More hours of care and work, more juggling of multiple responsibilities, more managing of multiple services and providers, more negotiating and advocating for care, more complex care. The situation is, quite simply, unsustainable.”

The costs of caregiving are both economic (out-of-pocket expenses for drugs or medical supplies, employment related), and non-economic (decline in social, emotional and physical well-being).

The papers propose a values, or principles-based framework to guide policy choices to ensure they are driven not simply by cost reduction, but recognize caregiving as socially worthwhile. This perspective underlines collective responsibility and the shared interest of governments, employers, communities and families in sustainable caregiving.

Among the principles the authors say should guide policies for caregivers:

- The caregiving environment must meet the needs of both caregiver and receiver – we cannot assume the home is the best location for care.
- Caregiving must be voluntary – we must not force individuals to be caregivers.
- Caregivers must have choices over what, and how much, care they will provide.

The kinds of support caregivers need include: information on available supports; recognition, validation and support from family, community, employers, governments and health care providers; training and skill development; respite and help with daily caregiving; emotional and financial support.

“It’s time to replace the patchwork of caregiving benefits now available in Canada,” says Hay, “with a basic level of fair and appropriate supports for this work, which is so central to our economic and social well-being.”

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- La prestation de soins doit avoir un caractère facultatif – il ne faut pas obliger les gens à être des soignants.
- Les soignants doivent avoir des choix concernant le type et la quantité de soins qu'ils seront appelés à prodiguer.

Les formes d'appui dont les soignants ont besoin comprennent les suivantes : des renseignements sur les mesures de soutien disponibles; une reconnaissance, une validation et un appui de la famille, de la communauté, des employeurs, des gouvernements et des fournisseurs de soins de santé; la formation et le perfectionnement des compétences; des services de relève et d'aide pour les soins quotidiens à donner; un soutien émotionnel et financier.

« Le moment est venu de délaissier la série de mesures de soutien disparates qui sont disponibles à l'heure actuelle pour les soignants au Canada », de souligner Hay, « pour les remplacer par un ensemble de base de mesures de soutien justes et indiquées pour ce travail, qui est si important pour notre bien-être économique et social ».