



# Innovating Integrated Supports for Alberta's Family Caregivers

## Strategy & Action Plan Overview

### Project Overview

**Innovating Integrated Supports for Alberta's Family Caregivers** Strategy & Action Plan is a three-year project to bring together multi-level, interdisciplinary collaborative partners from across the province to fortify the support systems available to family caregivers in Alberta. The aim is ensuring that family caregivers receive care that is centered around their needs to support their caregiving and maintain their own wellbeing. A strategy and implementation/action plan to achieve mutually agreed-upon goals will be co-produced by collaborative partners with an interest in supporting family caregivers.

Building on our foundation of co-design and collaboration, the **Innovating Integrated Supports for Alberta's Family Caregivers** project **draws together** family caregivers, health and community care leaders, providers from health, and community sectors, business and not-for-profit organizations, educators, policy influencers, researchers, and designers **in a shared purpose** to enable Alberta's family caregivers to thrive. With a timeline to 2027, the project will proceed in four phases: project planning and discovery; co-design of a draft framework; engagement and development; and implementation and evaluation.

Taking a co-design approach, the project will include engagement of collaborative partners and scanning of existing services and gaps/opportunities. It will facilitate co-design and validation of a strategy and an action and implementation plan with identified collaborative partners to integrate care and support across the community and health sectors and fortify the systems available to family caregivers and support their health and wellbeing.

### Context

#### Family Caregivers

Family caregivers contribute more than three times Canada's national expenditures on home, community, and long-term care<sup>i</sup>. Currently, family caregivers provide 75–90% of the care for people with physical or mental illnesses, disabilities, or frailty who live in the community and assist with 15–30% of the care in congregate care settings<sup>ii</sup>. Demographic models predict there will be fewer family caregivers because of smaller, more dispersed families, and employed caregivers. There are significant financial, emotional, and physical costs associated with caregiving. Family caregivers will continue to be the largest care workforce.

#### Challenges

Currently, family caregivers' role remains inadequately recognized in health and social care systems. These systems are hard for caregivers to navigate because of a lack of integration between service organizations and inconsistent assessment of caregiver needs and inadequate preparation of the care providers to meaningfully engage family caregivers. It is well recognized that there is a critical need to build a better system around caregivers to support them.

#### Caregiver-Centred Care Program ([caregivercare.ca](http://caregivercare.ca))

This project continues a ten-year journey<sup>iii</sup> of exploring the role of the healthcare system to support family caregivers revealed the need for health workforce training to support family caregivers. Core competencies were developed in 2019 addressing what the health workforce required to partner with family caregivers to sustain care and to support their health and wellbeing. A co-design approach with over 100 collaborative partners was used to create education modalities to advance this work—and is now being implemented in Alberta and across Canada. The project will include further implementing and embedding Caregiver-Centred Care education, training champions to promote best practices, and understanding the impacts on family caregivers, community, and health-based providers, and organizations.

### Project Goal

To develop a strategy, action and implementation plan with a sustainable network of Alberta organizations that will support caregivers by partnering with them in care and maintaining their wellbeing.

#### Objectives

- To effectively co-design a practical and actionable strategy for Alberta.
- To create a network ready and able to collaborate on priority areas in supporting family caregivers.
- To identify key priorities and actions to deliver these supports, as well as resources required.
- To co-create implementation plans with those committed to take action on priorities.

# Project Approach

## Continuum of Caregiving

Family caregivers play a critical role in society and in our health, social, and care systems. A family caregiver (carer, care-partner) is a person of any age (family, chosen family, friend, neighbor, community member, church volunteer) who has a significant relationship with, and who takes on a generally unpaid caring role for people of all ages providing emotional, physical, or practical support in response to mental or physical illness, disability, or age-related needs.

## Caregiver-Centered Care

Caregiver-Centered Care is a person-centered approach that fosters a collaborative relationship between family caregivers and healthcare providers. This approach involves engaging caregivers in decision-making, personalizing support to their unique needs, and leveraging their strengths while ensuring they have access to resources that promote their own health and well-being. By working together, health and social care providers and caregivers can enhance the experience and maintain the well-being of caregivers, the people they care for, and care providers.

## Co-design

This project draws on [collective impact](#) and [learning health system](#) models of social and health innovation<sup>iv</sup> to support a commitment to co-design in defining problems, developing, implementing and evaluation solutions in real-world settings. Co-design in health, community and related sectors is the action of intentionally and iteratively creating a solution with the people who will experience it— involving caregivers, those experiencing care, leaders, researchers and other collaborative partners. [Collective Impact and learning health system principles of practice](#) include a priority on equity, inclusion of community, data-informed development and improvement, a culture of trust and customization for local context.

## Integrated approach

Health and social care systems and providers need to recognize family caregivers as essential members of the care team, incorporate their needs and preferences into care plans to improve patient outcomes and provide them with adequate support, resources, and training. We will use a collective impact integrated health and social care approach.

# Project at a Glance



<sup>i</sup> Fast, J. "Value of Family Caregiving in Canada." 2. Edmonton: University of Alberta, 2022.

<sup>ii</sup> Coe, N. B., and R. M. Werner. "Informal Caregivers Provide Considerable Front-Line Support in Residential Care Facilities and Nursing Homes." *Health Affairs* 41, no. 1 (2022): 105-11.

<sup>iii</sup> Parmar, J., N. Jette, S. Brémault-Phillips, and J. Holroyd-Leduc. "Supporting People Who Care for Older Family Members." *CMAJ* 186, no. 7 (2014): 487-88.

<sup>iv</sup> This combined framework aims to create a more responsive, coordinated, and effective approach to supporting family caregivers that continuously evolves based on collaborative partners' input and data-driven insights. This approach leverages the strengths of both methodologies to address complex health challenges and improve outcomes for caregivers, the people they care for, providers, and health and community systems.