



# Innovating Integrated Supports for Alberta's Family Caregivers

## Draft Primary & Supporting Strategies for Engagement and Development

January 2025

*Help us to identify strategic areas for action. Let's come together to improve the wellbeing of Albertan's hidden workforce of caregivers.*

### Family Caregivers: A Hidden Workforce

Family caregivers are the unsung heroes of Alberta and Canada's healthcare system, providing essential care to individuals with chronic illnesses, disabilities, and age-related challenges. An estimated 26% of Albertans provide unpaid caregiving, contributing millions of hours annually—work valued at \$11 billion, about 1/3 of Alberta's entire yearly health spending. Increasingly, family caregivers are taking on complex medical tasks traditionally performed by healthcare professionals, including managing medical equipment, administering medications, and caring for wounds, often with little formal training or support.

Beyond medical care, caregivers foster well-being, dignity, and social connections, enabling individuals to live meaningful lives. Their involvement improves patient safety, care quality, and continuity, benefiting not only care recipients but also healthcare systems. Yet, despite their indispensable contributions, caregivers often face emotional, physical, and financial challenges that undermine their well-being and the quality of care they provide.

Since 2013, Caregiver Centred Care at the University of Alberta has worked with key collaborative partners, using co-design principles, to learn from caregivers and support their needs. We are driven by a vision where family caregivers are recognized, supported, and empowered as integral partners in the health system and in health neighborhoods—fully engaged in integrated care systems of health, social, and community services.

### Who is a family caregiver (carer, care-partner)?

A family caregiver is any person (family, friend, neighbour, or chosen family) who takes on a generally unpaid caring role and provides emotional, physical, or practical support in response to physical and/or mental illnesses, disabilities, or age-related needs.

### Our Project

**Innovating Integrated Supports for Alberta's Family Caregivers** Strategy & Action Plan, led by Dr. Jasneet Parmar and the [Caregiver-Centred Care](#) team, is a three-year project to bring together 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 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. We are engaging many partners in co-designing an integrated Alberta Caregiver Strategy, Action and Implementation Plan (Strategy Map). This includes strategy mapping with actionable priorities to integrate care and support across the community and health sectors, education, communities of practice, scale up and spreading of solutions and evaluation.



Project phases and timeline for **Innovating Integrated Supports for Alberta's Family Caregiver** Strategy & Action Plan

## Discovery

We have established a co-design team of family caregivers and representatives from the health and social/community sectors to guide the development of the strategy. As critical partners, their lived experience, expertise and advice throughout the process is vital to developing a strategy that will have lasting impact.

From July-September 2024, the project team interviewed 44 individuals involved in providing health and social/community programs and services to Albertans. Those interviewed included organizational leaders and professionals with insights and expertise in caregiver supports, the community-based service sector, the health care system, the delivery of care and services, allied health professions and integrated health, social and community service models.

This work captured valuable information on the current successes and efforts underway to support family caregivers across Alberta—including programs and services for caregivers, education and capacity-building efforts, caregiver engagement and information provision, community-led initiatives, collaboration, planning and evaluation. We also gathered insights into the challenges and barriers impacting these efforts and advice for developing an Alberta strategy.

We analyzed the transcripts for common themes related to barriers, gaps, and opportunities in supporting caregivers. From this, the team identified 18 initial potential priority areas. These were shared with the Alberta Family Caregiver Co-design Team in Fall 2024. Through group discussions, the Co-design team affirmed these initial priority areas as a valid foundation and offered detailed feedback to help refine wording, meaning, intent and alignment of the priority areas. The project team drew on this focused input to refine and consolidate these into **primary strategies** and **supporting strategies** and **strategic actions** and to develop **guiding principles** to further anchor the strategy development.

## Engagement and Development

The project team is now seeking input from across Alberta to shape **Innovating Integrated Supports for Alberta's Family Caregivers** Strategy & Action Plan. As we move towards action and implementation, we invite health, social and community care leaders and those with experience and expertise in family caregiving to help us determine which strategies and actions to move forward together.

In early 2025, we will be bringing together groups with like interests and roles for focused discussions (over 2-3 meetings) on the primary and supporting strategies and guiding principles—to share what's important to them and their interest and ideas in working towards action. Contact us to learn more.

### Contact us

**Dr. Sharon Anderson**  
Research/Project  
Co-ordinator  
[sdanders@ualberta.ca](mailto:sdanders@ualberta.ca)

**Dr. Jasneet Parmar**  
Project Lead  
[Jasneet.Parmar@albertahealthservices.ca](mailto:Jasneet.Parmar@albertahealthservices.ca)



## Innovating Integrated Supports for Alberta's Family Caregivers

### DRAFT Primary and Supporting Strategies and Actions

#### Overarching Goal

Build a better system to support family caregivers throughout their caregiving journey.

		PRIMARY STRATEGIES				
STRATEGIC ACTIONS	Consistently Recognize	Meaningfully Partner	Assess and Address Caregiver Needs	Enable Seamless Navigation	Ensure Workplace Supports for Employed Caregivers	
	Recognize family caregivers as essential members in care teams.	Include caregivers in care planning, decision-making and transitions across health and social/community care settings.	Engage family caregivers in conversations about their needs in providing care and maintaining their wellbeing.	Equip individuals who play a formal or informal navigation role with the knowledge, tools, and training needed to guide caregivers to supports.	Identify organizational approaches to foster healthy workplaces for family caregivers.	
	Identify caregivers in health and social/community care planning and service provision.	Define and clarify caregivers' roles on care teams.	Identify family caregivers' needs and risks early and provide timely access to supports and services.	Define and communicate provider responsibilities for co-ordinated navigation across health, and social/community services.	Embed caregiver supports into Employee Assistance Programs.	
	Document caregiver involvement in care recipient/caregiver records.	Embed equity, diversity, and inclusion principles in caregiver-centered care.	Strengthen mental health supports.	Enhance communication among providers and caregivers, including referral outcomes, to reduce challenges in navigation and co-ordination.		
			Provide information about financial supports.	Maintain inventories of caregivers' resources and update them regularly.		
			Enhance access to flexible services—respite care and day programs.			

STRATEGIC ACTIONS	SUPPORTING STRATEGIES		
	Amplify Education	Fortify Policy Foundations	Enhance Research and Evaluation
	Equip health and social/community care providers and trainees with knowledge, skills, approaches and best practices to engage and support family caregivers.	Develop consistent policies and practices for caregiver identification, partnership and support.	Develop a robust research and evaluation framework to measure the impact of family caregiver support initiatives.
	Integrate caregiver-centred care education into post-secondary health workforce curricula and accreditation standards.	Identify and scale policies for flexible services.	Enhance data collection for care co-ordination and evaluation/research.
	Increase preparedness of family caregivers to engage and partner with health and social/community care providers.	Expand effective policies to reduce the financial burden on caregivers.	
		Clarify policies on consent processes to support caregiver involvement.	

## Guiding Principles

<b>Person-centred</b>	Meeting the unique needs, and preferences of, family caregivers. Giving caregivers choice and control, ensuring they have the confidence and power to make decisions that affect their lives. Reflecting a whole-person view that respects cultural values and considers the overall well-being of both caregivers and the people they support. Ensuring that caregivers have access to the resources, recognition, and support they need to provide care while maintaining their own well-being
<b>Strengths-based</b>	Building on what individuals and caregivers can do and helping them work toward their own goals and vision of a good life. Building on knowledge, lived experience, assets and strengths that exist in individuals, groups, communities, organizations and networks to reduce barriers and bridge gaps.
<b>Diversity and Inclusion</b>	Recognizing that family caregivers come from all walks of life and that their needs are as diverse as the people they support and that some experience greater barriers to access care and support. Working to ensure caregiving support systems are culturally safe, inclusive, equitable, and designed to meet the unique needs and address the social determinants of health for all caregivers.
<b>Integrated and Collaborative</b>	Improving the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities through the seamless connectivity, alignment and collaboration of health, social and community care and supports. Promoting the comprehensive delivery of quality services across the life-course, designed according to the multidimensional needs of the individual and delivered by a coordinated multidisciplinary network of providers working across settings and levels of care

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