



The Ontario Caregiver Coalition is the voice of Ontario’s caregivers. We advocate for recognition and support for the family, friends, and neighbours whose unpaid care is the hidden backbone of Ontario’s health system.

## September 2024 Newsletter

### At the OCC

#### September 2024 Annual General Meeting

On September 19<sup>th</sup>, the OCC hosted our Annual General Meeting, an important opportunity to report to the membership on our activities and status, reflect on successes and learnings from the previous year, and share plans for the upcoming year.

We were grateful to OCC member Amy Altweger for providing an inspiring **Caregiver Keynote**. From her own experiences as a caregiver, Amy learned about the importance of supportive workplaces, the shortfalls in the way so many workplaces approach care, and the transformational power of “bothering for people”. As a volunteer-led organization dedicated to making change for caregivers, the idea of “bothering for people” beautifully encapsulated what motivates us to do what we do. The OCC also shared our [Annual Report](#) for the 2023-2024 year. Motivated by our mission, the OCC undertook many significant efforts towards change, including supporting [Motion 94 in the Ontario Legislature](#), developing our Caregiver Survey, and launching our [Policy Briefs](#). Guided by our Strategic Plan, we also worked towards strengthening our foundations by augmenting our governance structure, stabilizing our finances, deepening our member collaboration and engagement, and strengthening our communications capacity. The AGM concluded with presentations from our Committees outlining how during the upcoming year, we plan to continue to build on our successes. Our thanks go to all of those who contributing to organizing, hosting and presenting at this successful AGM.

#### Please Welcome Our New Board Members

At our September 19<sup>st</sup> Annual General Meeting, the OCC welcomed a new slate of Board Directors for the upcoming year.

Several directors returned for another year of service, including **Lauren Bates, Rose-Marie Fraser-Haswell, Keena Naik, Daniel Nowoselski** and **Liana Sikharudlize**.

We are very pleased to welcome the following new Board members.

**Daniel Corvino** is well known to OCC members as a very active member of the OCC's Research & Advocacy Committee. In particular, he has played a lead role in our government relations efforts regarding caregiver financial distress, a highpoint of which was the introduction of Motion 94 in the provincial legislature earlier this year. Dan is the Manager of Government Relations and Advocacy at MS Canada, and brings many years of experience in effectively connecting with decision-makers. Daniel is particularly interested in ensuring the voices and experiences of younger caregivers and their families are included in the programs and services meant to support caregivers. Daniel will be Co-Chairing the Research & Advocacy Committee, alongside Lauren Bates.

**Neha Hassan** holds an MBA from Dartmouth College and brings over a decade of experience in marketing, communications, and product strategy, with a deep commitment to social impact. She has worked across various sectors, including CPG, Financial Services, and Nonprofit, honing her ability to craft compelling narratives and lead cross-functional teams in multiple countries. Neha will be Co-Chairing the Communications & Awareness Committee, alongside Daniel Nowoselski.

**Debbi Leith** is a seasoned Volunteer Coordinator with experience in leading programs across healthcare, community services, and higher education. With a Master of Arts and Certified Volunteer Administrator credentials, Debbi excels in volunteer recruitment, training, and engagement, ensuring impactful experiences. Her expertise includes re-engaging volunteers post-pandemic and delivering specialized courses for Fleming College. She also has a background in the non-profit retirement home sector, where she taught and developed curriculum for Centennial College's Retirement Communities Management program. Her roles have equipped her with a deep understanding of the needs of seniors, emphasizing the importance of quality care and services. In addition to her professional commitments, Debbi became a caregiver to her aunt in 2018. This personal experience has deepened her understanding of the challenges faced by caregivers and fueled her dedication to supporting vulnerable populations.

**Adriana Shnall** is a long-time member of the OCC, representing Baycrest, where she serves as the Program Director of the Koschitzky Centre for Innovations in Family Caregiving. Adriana has made significant contributions to the field of geriatric care, earning her prestigious recognitions, such as the Baycrest Outstanding Innovations Award and the Stephen Herbert Award for Excellence in Education. In addition to her clinical work, Adriana is an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto and a board member of the Petro Canada CareMakers Foundation. Adriana will be Chairing the Partnership Committee.

We also said goodbye to three outstanding Directors.

**Kyle Fitzgerald** was a long-time member of the OCC, in his role as is Director of Government Relations and Public Policy at ASO. He served in the past on the R&A and Partnership Committees. As a Board member, he revitalized the Partnerships Committee, where he spearheaded new initiatives such as the Member Spotlight. We wish Kyle all the best as he pursues new horizons in Alberta.

**Dana MacMillan** was a long-serving Board member. She is the Executive Director at Wesway, a not-for-profit respite organization that supports family caregivers living in Thunder Bay or in a rural or remote community in Northern Ontario. Dana contributed widely on the Board during her tenure, including as Board Secretary for the past two years. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with Dana as she continues her membership with OCC.

**Patti Lennox** has been a member of the OCC almost since the beginning, and joined the Board when we incorporated as a non-profit in 2019. Patti has been part of the Membership and Governance Committee since that time, and last year she took on the role of Chair for that Committee. In that role, she oversaw the development of a suite of foundational policies and procedures for the OCC, updated our financial oversight processes, created a new Board Orientation process, and led a very successful Board and Committee recruitment campaign.

We thank our outgoing Directors for their dedicated and invaluable service over many years, congratulate our incoming Directors on their nominations, and look forward to another strong year.

Our Executive Committee for 2024/2025 is:

**Chair:** Lauren Bates

**Co-Chair:** Liana Sikharulidze

**Vice-Chair:** Daniel Nowoselski

**Board Secretary:** Vacant

**Treasurer:** Keena Naik

## Addressing Caregiver Financial Distress: Learning from our Caregiver Survey

*“We are living below the poverty line, and food, fuel costs as well as loan interest is going up. The financial stress can be crushing.”*

-Respondent to the 2024 OCC Caregiver Survey

The 2024 OCC Caregiver Survey reinforced the message that the OCC has been sharing for years: the financial impacts of caregiving can be crushing, affecting the quality of supports that

caregivers can provide to their loved ones and the health and wellbeing of caregivers themselves, leading to avoidable strains and pressures on Ontario's health and social services systems. Meaningful and accessible direct financial supports for caregivers are urgently needed.

The second of the OCC's six Policy Briefs drawing from the OCC Survey focuses on the causes, impacts and solutions for caregiver financial distress. Building on the OCC's multi-year advocacy efforts related to caregiver financial distress, the Brief calls on the Ontario government to implement the Ontario Caregiver Support Benefit, a monthly direct financial support to address the financial hardships associated with unpaid caregiving.

The OCC's Brief, [\*Building a Better Ontario for Caregivers by Alleviating the Financial Hardships of Caregiving\*](#), will be an important tool for the OCC, as well as for our members and friends, in mobilizing for change. Please share it widely!

Our third Brief, focusing on improving access to mental health supports for caregivers, will be released later this fall. If you are interested in contributing to this or other Briefs, whether by sharing information, doing an interview with us, or joining a subcommittee, please let us know. The more that we can build on the collective wisdom and experience of our membership, the stronger and more effective our Briefs will be.

## Of Interest

### National Seniors Council: Final Report on Supporting Canadians Aging at Home

As is well-known, the vast majority of Canadian seniors hope to age in place. The National Seniors Council has released their [final expert report on Supporting Canadians Aging at Home](#), making recommendations to our federal government on how to better support Canadian seniors at home.

In October 2022, the National Seniors Council was tasked with studying new and enhanced measures that could support seniors to age at home. Their final report contains recommended actions they believe will help achieve those measures.

The panel identified four key barriers to ensuring quality of life, creating their four key policy priorities: Availability, Accessibility, Affordability and Accountability – Known as the “4As”. These pillars are the foundation for their recommendations on how to improve services and support for those aging at home.

One major recommendation is the creation of an “Age at Home” benefit. This benefit would be personalized to each senior's needs, covering expenses like health care, personal care, or help

with daily tasks. This could increase access to home care and support services for seniors and caregivers.

For caregivers, one important suggestion is converting the difficult to access [Canada Caregiver Credit](#) into a refundable tax-free benefit, which would allow all caregivers in Canada to receive up to \$1,250 a year. This could help more individuals both qualify for the benefit and be able to access it.

Other recommendations include: increasing funding for caregiver support programs, expanding support for age-friendly communities, and improving services to help older persons access new and existing social programs. The panel also suggests: increasing the [Guaranteed Income Supplement](#), and encouraging discussion at the United Nations for the development of a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.

Among their many suggestions, the panel strongly believes in three priority areas for action: creating additional financial benefits for lower-income older persons, reinforcing existing community-based supports, and creating new initiatives to help plan for aging and retirement.

The panel notes that tax credits are not enough and often don't help those in need the most. Making supports accessible by broadening eligibility criteria may make an important difference both for caregivers and Canadians as we age.

The panel believes that the federal government can lead the way in implementing these changes by creating a framework for the Provinces and municipalities to follow. Through collaboration between older persons, caregivers, government, and advocacy groups, the panel believes that we can achieve and maintain quality of life as we all age in Canada.

## Chosen Family Training Program: Upcoming October Events

[Fondation Emergence's Chosen Family Training Program](#) tour across Ontario for LGBTQ+ caregivers is still ongoing, and it is not too late to sign up for their October events.

The program aims to build community through group discussions of the unique challenges of LGBTQ+ caregivers. It also seeks to raise awareness of existing support services and to spread knowledge that can help attendees navigate their unique role.

There are two English language events still upcoming, their [Chosen Family Workshop on October 23](#), in Toronto, and their [Workshop in North Bay, on October 31st](#).

To see their full list of October events, including French language workshops, and to read more about their Chosen Family program, [please visit their website](#).

## 2025 International Short Breaks Conference: Call for Speakers

Are you interested in presenting or running a workshop at [The International Short Break Association \(ISBA\)](#)'s upcoming conference?

The ISBA is a global network of organizations that provide health and respite services for families that care for loved ones with disabilities, as well as their care recipients. The ISBA seeks to spread the knowledge and experience of Short Break Care across the globe.

Their [2025 International Short Breaks Conference](#) is taking place in Santiago, Chile from May 21 to May 24, 2025. Through presentations and workshops led by policymakers, researchers, and caregivers, the ISBA aims to foster a community of families and caregivers exchanging their unique knowledge and experiences on how to improve quality of life both for caregivers and their care recipients. Attendees will have the opportunity to take part in discussing how to promote and develop social service for families, and be able to share in discussing best practices for caregiving with perspectives from around the world.

The ISBA currently has an open call for the [submission of proposals to be a speaker or workshopper](#) at the event. Submissions should be between 100 and 500 words, and should be focused around the key themes of: Community and Care Support, Support Services, Innovation and Development, and Care Policies.

The deadline for submissions is coming up soon, on Friday, October 4th, 2024. To learn more about proposal requirements, please see the [ISBA's Call for proposals document](#). To apply, please fill out the [ISBA's online application form](#).

## Opportunities to Participate in Caregiver-Focused Research

### Caring for the Family Caregiver

Do you care for someone with dementia or a neurodegenerative disease, and are you open to learning new strategies to manage your stress? [Toronto Metropolitan University's Stress and Healthy Aging \(StAR\) Lab](#) is conducting research into [Caring for the Family Caregiver](#), and is seeking caregiver participants between the ages of 50 to 70 to take part in their study.

The StAR lab will test the effect of two wellness programs that may support the wellbeing of family caregivers of persons with dementia and other neurodegenerative diseases. While not all caregivers experience chronic stress, it is an all too common problem. Many face stress so intense that it can affect their ability to care for their loved ones.

All participants will receive an 8-week stress management program. Some will also be randomly chosen to join an 8-week mindfulness program. Both programs are held virtually over Zoom, allowing caregivers to connect with others through breakout sessions.

The StAR lab hopes to better understand the potential benefits of remote mindfulness training on family caregivers. If you choose to take part, your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

For more information on how to participate, please call the StAR Lab (416-979-5000; ext: 553233) and leave a message asking about the “Caregiver Study”. You can also contact the StAR lab through their email, [star.lab@torontomu.ca](mailto:star.lab@torontomu.ca). Or, [please see our website posting](#) for more information.



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