

## The Value and Distribution of Family Caregiving in Canada



### What this research is about

Research has shown that family caregiving is often unrecognized and devalued. In addition, care work and its related costs are unequally distributed within society. Canada is currently experiencing a “care crisis” in which long-term underfunding of formal care services has increased pressure on family caregivers. To address this, it is essential to put an economic value on caregivers’ contributions and to explore how care work responsibility is distributed.

Estimates of the monetary value of unpaid care work in Canada are outdated and incomplete. They are based on data collected in 2002, and focus only on people aged 45 and older who provided care to people aged 65 and older. A study was conducted to provide an accurate and up-to-date assessment of care work that is comparable to paid sectors of the economy. Researchers used General Social Survey (GSS) data to estimate the current monetary value of caregiving in Canada, position it relative to the broader economy, and report ways in which care work is distributed among family caregivers.

### What the researchers did

This study was a secondary analysis of data from the 2018 GSS on Caregiving and Care Receiving. Information was collected from Canadians aged 15 and older living in the 10 provinces. The participants included 6,888 people who cared for at least one person with chronic health conditions, disabilities, or ageing-related problems.

The value of family care work was calculated by multiplying time spent on seven care tasks (transportation, domestic work, home repairs and outdoor work, personal care, medical care, coordinating care, and managing finances) by the

### What you need to know

Researchers used two replacement cost methods and national median wage rates to estimate the monetary value of family care work. They also examined the effects of four “equity” factors in accounting for care contributions.

Findings show that it would cost between \$97.1 and \$112.7 billion per annum to replace caregivers’ unpaid care with paid workers. Disproportionate contributions come from co-resident, Baby Boom and Depression Era, lower income, and women caregivers. By comparing the value of unpaid care work with the broader economy and identifying those who shoulder an unfair responsibility for care provision, findings can inform public policy.

price of that time. The researchers used generalist and specialist replacement cost methods. For the generalist cost, the price of time was the national median hourly wage of home support workers (\$17/hour). For the specialist cost, the national median hourly wage of paid workers whose work most closely resembled each task was used (e.g., time spent transporting care receivers was valued at the median wage of a taxi or car service driver).

The study also examined four factors that could result in an unequal share of care work: gender, annual personal income, living arrangements, and generational cohort. Using a multi-phased analysis, researchers estimated the relative importance of each in explaining the variance in caregiving time and its monetary value.

## What the researchers found

In 2018, nearly 7 million Canadians spent 5.7 billion hours providing care to family and friends. Depending on the wage rate used, the value of this care work was estimated at between \$97.1 and \$112.7 billion per year. This represents between 4.2% and 4.9% of Canada's annual GDP. It also represents between 32% and 37% of total public health care expenditures, and three to four times the public expenditures on home, community, and long-term care.

Caregiving time and its monetary value were not shared equally. All groups of caregivers contributed substantially to care work, but caregivers who made the largest contributions overall were those who lived with a care receiver, were born in the Depression Era (1928–1945) and Baby Boom (1946–1964) generations, those with annual personal incomes of \$75,000 or less, and women.

Between 81% and 83% of the variation in the monetary value of care could be explained by living arrangements. Much less could be explained by the caregiver's generation (14%–15%), income (2%), and gender (1%–2%). This means that, while caregivers who live with care recipients represent 38% of caregivers, they contribute 73% of the total value of caregiving, nearly four times more than those caring for someone living in the community and seven to eight times more than those caring for someone living in supportive housing.

This is important because the proportion of caregivers living with care receivers increased over the last decade, from 27% in 2012 to 38% in 2018.

## How you can use this research

Monetizing the value of family care work in Canada helps move it from a private concern to a societal issue worthy of public action. Data shows that public health and continuing care systems cannot afford to replace caregivers' valuable work with paid personnel. Identifying caregivers at risk of taking on an unequal share of care work provides evidence to inform and invest in better systems of home and continuing care that could sustain caregivers and those for whom they care.

## About the researchers

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## Citation

Fast, J., Duncan, K. A., Keating, N. C., & Kim, C. (2023). Valuing the contributions of family caregivers to the care economy. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-023-09899-8>

## Study funding

Funding for this study was provided by AGE-WELL NCE as part of project AW CRP-2020-16.

Research Snapshot by Jacquie Eales

## About the Vanier Institute of the Family

The Vanier Institute of the Family has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots.

The Vanier Institute is a national, independent, charitable organization committed to enhancing family wellbeing by making information about families accessible and actionable. Positioned at the centre of networks of researchers, educators, policymakers, and organizations with an interest in families, we share evidence and strengthen the understanding of families in Canada, in all their diversities, to support evidence-based decisions that promote family wellbeing.

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