

# Social Prescribing and Caregivers

In Canada, approximately one in four people are caregivers, providing unpaid support to family members or friends with long-term health conditions, disabilities, or age-related needs.<sup>1</sup> While they are the unseen backbone of Canada's health care system, many face significant personal strain.

Over 50% of caregivers report feeling exhausted and anxious, 46% feel overwhelmed, and nearly one-third experience loneliness and isolation.<sup>2</sup> Many also struggle with financial stress and limited access to support<sup>3</sup> with few caregivers being asked about their caregiving, well-being and overall health.<sup>4</sup> These challenges not only impact their ability to provide care but also increase the demand for health care support.<sup>5</sup>

**Caregiving is vital to the Canadian health care system, contributing an estimated 7 billion hours of care or \$97.1 billion to the Canadian care economy.<sup>2</sup>**

Ensuring caregivers' well-being is essential, not only for those they care for but also for the long-term sustainability of health and community care systems.

## What is Social Prescribing?

Social prescribing enables health care professionals to identify and refer caregivers to non-clinical community-based programs and services with the support of a dedicated connector/navigator. By improving access to respite care, financial support, peer networks, mental health resources, and other services through a co-creative, person-centred approach, social prescribing can play a crucial role in supporting caregivers. This leads to improved well-being and quality of life for both caregivers and those they care for.



## Social prescribing initiatives have shown positive impacts, including:

- Four out of five caregivers shared that free counselling and mental health supports are important to address the toll on their well-being.<sup>5</sup>
- Person-driven social interventions (such as a gardening course or an adult learning class) can reduce the risk of caregiver depression by over 20%.<sup>6</sup>
- After 9 months of virtual support with a social worker, family caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia reported a 75% reduction in falls and a 68% decrease in hospitalizations for those they care for.<sup>7</sup>
- A systematic review found that physical activity interventions for caregivers led to a notable increase in activity levels, with participants averaging a 30% increase in physical activity.<sup>8</sup>

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## How Social Prescribing Supports Caregivers

- ✓ **Reduces loneliness and social isolation:** Social prescribing plays a key role in reducing loneliness and isolation by linking caregivers to peer groups, community activities, and local resources. This connection fosters meaningful relationships, strengthens their support networks, and enhances their sense of belonging.
- ✓ **Improves mental and emotional well-being:** By participating in meaningful social activities and accessing tailored mental health support in the community, social prescribing helps caregivers navigate the emotional and mental strain of caregiving.
- ✓ **Enhances physical well-being:** Connecting caregivers to physical activities, such as exercise classes or gardening, supports their physical health and overall well-being, helping them better manage the physical demands of caregiving.
- ✓ **Improves access to practical support:** Social prescribing helps caregivers access the right support at the right time by connecting them to services like financial advice, legal assistance, and respite care, easing some of the challenges they face.
- ✓ **Supports caregivers in providing care:** By improving access to information, education and support services that are tailored to individual needs, social prescribing helps caregivers feel more prepared to provide ongoing care while prioritizing their own health and wellbeing.
- ✓ **Empowers caregivers and strengthens resilience:** Through a tailored, co-creative approach centred on what matters most to each caregiver, social prescribing improves their ability to manage their health, fosters a greater sense of control over their well-being, and promotes long-term self-care and resilience.



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