



THE ONTARIO

caregiver

ORGANIZATION

Essential Care Partner Practices for Ontario Health Teams



INTRODUCTION

Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) across the province are working to ensure that Ontarians receive seamless, integrated care while facing unprecedented demands on health system resources. One proven strategy to help address these challenges is to proactively integrate and include family caregivers into your Ontario Health Team's plans, processes and models of care.

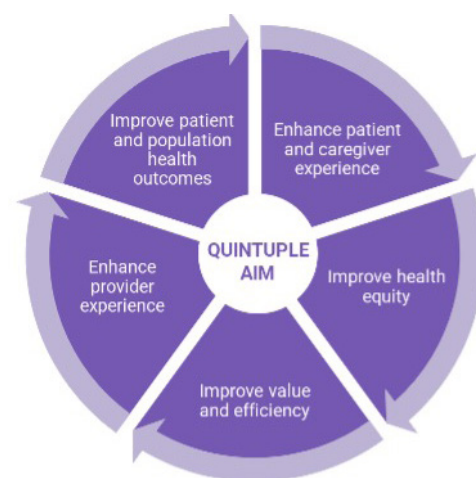
Four million family caregivers across Ontario provide an estimated 75% of the care in the system by caring for their families, friends and neighboursⁱⁱ. **Family caregivers are essential care partners**, but are not always included and empowered as part of the care team.

Essential Care Partner (ECP) practices that identify, include and support caregivers are an opportunity to advance the Quintuple Aim^{iii,iv,vv,vi,vii} and mitigate pressures within the healthcare system.^{iv, v,vi}

There is growing recognition of the importance of including essential care partners in the delivery of care. In partnership with Ontario Health, the Ontario Caregiver Organization (OCO) has launched the [Essential Care Partner Support Hub](#) to facilitate implementation across care settings and communities.



[Go directly to Action Steps, Tools and Resources](#)





Essential care partners provide physical, psychological and emotional support, as deemed important by the patient/resident. This care can include support in decision making, care coordination and continuity of care. Essential care partners can include family members, close friends or other caregivers.ⁱ

Note about inclusive language:

Caregiver includes family members, partners, and/or friends. The term **patient** is intended to be inclusive of residents and clients as applicable to the care setting.

THE EVIDENCE

When Essential Care Partner (ECP) practices are in place, there are benefits for patients, families and providers, and the overall healthcare system. Research shows:

- Improved patient care and safety^{x, viii, x}
- More equitable and culturally-safe care^{viii}
- More successful care transitions^{ix}
- ALC prevention and mitigation^{ix}
- Improved healthcare outcomes, including lower readmission rates, sustained cognitive function among older adults^{iv}
- Enhanced patient, caregiver and provider experience, including lower patient anxiety and higher patient satisfaction^{iv}
- Improved quality metrics, including reduced falls and better medication adherence^{iv}

All of these benefits add up in cost savings and efficiency for Ontario Health Teams, their partner organizations, and the health care system.

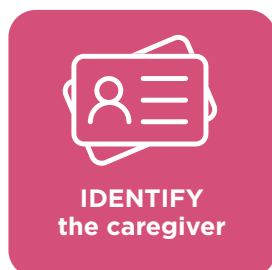


WHAT IS AN ESSENTIAL CARE PARTNER PROGRAM?

An Essential Care Partner (ECP) program can help an OHT to solidify their commitment to recognizing caregivers as essential partners in care. It involves the implementation of practices across your OHT and community to ensure that caregivers are identified, included and supported to participate as part of the care team. It is also about removing potential barriers to care partner presence, inclusion and access to support – even during health system pressures and outbreaks.




The adoption of ECP practices is an opportunity for OHTs to shift towards more person and family-centred care across the full continuum of care.

Every OHT is unique and Essential Care Partner practices and implementation plans will differ across OHTs, but they are centred on three key components:





ECP programs for OHTs may include all or some of the following key practices:

 IDENTIFY THE CAREGIVER	 INCLUDE THE CAREGIVER AS PART OF THE CARE TEAM	 SUPPORT THE CAREGIVER
<p>IDENTIFICATION Essential care partner identification (Caregiver ID) is used to identify and formally recognize essential care partners.</p> <p>CLIENT DESIGNATION Clients/patients/residents are empowered and encouraged to designate their essential care partners(s).</p> <p>DOCUMENTATION Care partners are documented in patient files/records, including contact information and level of participation in care.</p>	<p>STAFF EDUCATION AND TRAINING Education and training is provided to all staff across the OHT, including partner organizations, on the important role of care partners and practical ways to include and support them.</p> <p>INTEGRATION Essential care partner role is integrated into OHT models of care, including ALC strategies, care pathways, point of care workflows, client assessment, care planning and transition planning.</p> <p>COMMUNICATION Essential care partner information and program is pro-actively communicated across OHT partners, communities, patients, families and essential care partners.</p>	<p>LINK TO SUPPORT Connect essential care partners to caregiver and community supports and resources for their own well-being.</p> <p>ESSENTIAL CARE PARTNER EDUCATION AND TRAINING Essential care partners are provided education and support to validate their role and empower them to participate in care.</p> <p>ESSENTIAL CARE PARTNER ORIENTATION There is a process for onboarding and orienting essential care partners.</p>

WHAT STEPS CAN OHTs TAKE TO INTEGRATE CAREGIVERS AS ESSENTIAL CARE PARTNERS?

As a starting point for assessing your OHTs readiness to embed ECP practices as part of your OHT plans, consider the following questions:

- Do our OHT strategies and priorities recognize the value and importance of essential care partners?
- Are we asking caregivers what they need to participate as part of the care team?
- Does our OHT recognize that restrictions to essential care partner inclusion can result in harm to patients, increase caregiver distress and place more demands on health care teams?
- How can our OHT enhance how we identify, include and support essential care partners across our OHT settings?
- What makes sense as a first/next step for our OHT? Consider:
 - **The What:** ECP practices and action steps to phase in first
 - **The Who:** Potential to begin with focus on a specific patient population
 - **The How/Where:** Roll-out using a site-centred model (launch in specific care settings and expand to other sites over time) or a community-based model (build community-wide caregiver recognition and inclusion of care partners)

INFORM, PLAN, ASSESS

- Discuss and prioritize the importance of essential care partners at OHT Leadership table and working groups
- Contact OCO to support OHT exploration/planning
- Review and assess current OHT priorities and processes and plan your approach based on the needs of your OHT community, priority populations and pathways.
- Leverage OHT organizational partners that have expertise in caregiver support and inclusion
- Meaningfully engage caregivers and patient partners in planning and design

IMPLEMENT

- Implement Caregiver ID as a tool to facilitate care partner inclusion and demonstrate commitment to ECPs
- Develop processes to encourage patients to identify and designate their ECP(s)
- Develop processes to document ECPs in patient files/records
- Provide education and training to staff and providers
- Integrate ECPs into OHT models of care
- Connect caregivers with the support they need to be empowered in their caregiving role and prevent burnout

These action steps are further detailed in the [Action Steps, Tools and Resources section](#).

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TO OHTs?

Essential care partners play a key role in supporting patient/client/resident care across all care settings. Ontario Health Teams are uniquely positioned to ensure that caregivers are consistently identified, included and supported given their collaborative and integrated care model and community focus.

Research has shown that not involving essential care partners as part of the care team can result in risks to patients/clients/residents, caregivers, care providers and the health system. These risks include harm to patients, poor health outcomes, reduced quality of care, caregiver burnout, impacts on workplace culture, greater demands on the healthcare team and more pressure on the overall health system.

Pro-active inclusion and support of essential care partners across care settings:

- Supports OHT deliverables such as improved transitions and reduced ALC stays;
- Enables integrated, sustained continuity of care for patients/residents and families;
- Contributes to the Quintuple AIM: enhanced patient, caregiver, provider experience, enhanced health equity, improved patient and population health outcomes; and
- Enables healthcare efficiencies.



If caregivers are not included as essential care partners

Risk and harm to patients

Risk to Healthcare System

ACTION STEPS, TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Through collaboration with OHTs, hospitals, and long-term care homes, the OCO has created and identified resources and tools that OHTs can use to identify, include and support caregivers as essential partners in care across your OHT. Every OHT is unique and has unique community needs. A continuum of options to integrate caregivers is provided in the table below. The meaningful engagement of caregiver, patient, OHT and community partners will help to identify and adapt these action steps to the priorities and needs of your OHT.

ACTION STEP	WHAT'S IN THE TOOL/RESOURCE	TOOLS/RESOURCES
INFORM, PLAN, ASSESS		
<p>Discuss and prioritize the importance of essential care partners at OHT Leadership table and working groups</p>	<p>Resources that provide evidence to support OHT leadership conversations about the evidence and importance of ECP practices and benefits for organizations.</p>	<p>Integrating Essential Care Partners as Part of the Care Team - Business case demonstrating the importance of care partner inclusion (Long-term Care version also available)</p> <p>Essential Care Partner Evidence Summary - A summary of evidence regarding the critical role of essential care partners (Long-term Care version also available)</p>
<p>Contact OCO to support OHT exploration/planning</p>	<p>The OCO team is available to present to OHT Leadership/working groups and/or meet to support planning for the best approach within your OHT</p>	<p>Contact partners@ontariocaregiver.ca</p>
<p>Review and assess current OHT practices and plan your OHT's approach</p>	<p>Summary of key practices that can be included in OHT Essential Care Partner programs</p> <p>Examples of ECP Program implementation in OHTs</p>	<p>Essential Care Partner Programs - Key Practices for OHTs</p> <p>Algoma OHT Case Study</p> <p>Caregivers in the Hills Case Study</p>

ACTION STEP	WHAT'S IN THE TOOL/RESOURCE	TOOLS/RESOURCES
Leverage the expertise of organizations within your OHT network to inform planning		Providers and partners within your OHT may have caregiver experience as well as expertise in caregiver inclusion, caregiver support, and co-design
Meaningfully engage caregivers and patient partners in planning and design	Rapid-Improvement Support and Exchange (RISE) has a number of resources to support patient, family and caregiver engagement and partnership, including a community of practice and a patient, family and caregiver group	Review resources on the RISE web page: Resources to Support Patient, Family, Caregiver Engagement and Partnership
IMPLEMENT: IDENTIFY THE CAREGIVER		
Implement Caregiver ID to facilitate care partner inclusion and demonstrate OHT commitment to the importance of essential care partners	<p>Webpage provides information about Caregiver ID and has a link to adaptable templates that can be used by organizations</p> <p>Implementation Toolkit offers guidance on site-centred and community-based approaches to Essential Care Partner Programs</p>	<p>Caregiver ID</p> <p>Essential Care Partner Program Implementation Toolkit for OHTs</p>
Develop processes to encourage patients/clients to identify and designate their essential care partner(s)	Information for caregivers and care providers on consent and privacy	Health Privacy and Consent Resources
Document essential care partners (e.g in the electronic medical record (EMR), including contact information to support improved transitions in care across settings	<p>A quick-reference resource for clinicians that summarizes the quality standard and includes links to helpful resources and tools</p> <p>Quality Standards can assist professionals in knowing what care they can be offering, help health organizations measure, assess and improve their performance and help patients, families and caregivers know what to ask for in their care</p>	<p>Quality Standard Placemat for Transitions Between Hospitals and Long-Term Care Homes</p> <p>Transitions Between Hospital and Home Quality Standard</p>

ACTION STEP	WHAT'S IN THE TOOL/RESOURCE	TOOLS/RESOURCES
IMPLEMENT: INCLUDE THE CAREGIVER AS PART OF THE CARE TEAM		
<p>Provide caregiver-focused education and training to staff/providers across the OHT and community</p>	<p>Caregivers as Partners e-Learning modules to help providers understand the caregiver role and learn about effective ways to include and communicate with caregivers. Mental Health and Addictions Series also available</p>	<p>Caregivers as Partners e-Learning for Health Providers</p> <p>Contact the Ontario Caregiver Organization for tailored education sessions for providers partners@ontariocaregiver.ca</p>
<p>Integrate Essential Care Partners within OHT models of care</p> <p>Prioritize Essential Care Partner inclusion as a key enabler for improving care planning, care transitions, ALC management, point of care workflows, and client assessment</p>	<p>This toolkit was created to guide OHTs in the implementation of an ECP program based on two approaches for OHTs</p> <p>Essential Care Partner Support Hub websites includes guidance and resources for hospitals and long term care homes that may play a role as initial OHT implementation sites</p> <p>Guidance tool to support OHTs to include caregivers at point of care to enable improved transitions and reduced ALC stays</p> <p>Ontario Health guide including evidence-based leading practices for the care of older adults who are at risk of ALC</p>	<p>Essential Care Partner Program Implementation Toolkit for OHTs</p> <p>Essential Care Partner Support Hub</p> <p>Essential Role of Caregivers in Improving Transitions and Addressing Alternate Level of Care</p> <p>ALC Leading Practices Guide (page 13) (Ontario Health)</p>
<p>Pro-actively communicate Essential Care Partner program plans and information across OHT partners, communities, patients, families, and essential care partners</p>		<p>Communication plans will be designed based on program plans - likely to include public (e.g., website, care setting signage), point-of-care communication, written communication and meetings with OHT leaders and staff</p>

ACTION STEP	WHAT'S IN THE TOOL/RESOURCE	TOOLS/RESOURCES
IMPLEMENT: SUPPORT THE CAREGIVER		
<p>Provide caregivers with the supports, tools and resources they need to be a caregiver and avoid caregiver burnout</p> <p>Create a section of your OHT website that is dedicated to caregiver specific resources and supports</p> <p>Contact OCO at partners@ontariocaregiver.ca for input on OCO resources, supports and services for inclusion</p>	<p>Caregivers can be connected to the Ontario Caregiver Helpline, which is a one-stop, 24/7 resource for information and referrals connecting caregivers to the support they need</p> <p>This toolkit includes information to support new or long-time caregivers. It was created by caregivers, for caregivers, with input from mental health professionals and resources</p> <p>Examples from different OHTs across the province who have created sections on their website dedicated to caregiver specific resources and supports</p>	<p>Ontario Caregiver Helpline</p> <p>I am a caregiver toolkit</p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algoma OHT • East Toronto Health Partners OHT • Eastern York Region North Durham OHT • Hills of Headwaters OHT • Huron Perth Area OHT • North York Toronto Health Partners OHT • Windsor Essex Area OHT
<p>Reach out to OCO for guidance on how OCO programs and services for caregivers can be included into access/navigation models and referral pathways</p> <p>Contact OCO at partners@ontariocaregiver.ca to learn more or set up a meeting/information session</p>	<p>This OCO resource provides OHTs with key actions to include and support caregivers in their access and navigation models</p>	<p>Including Caregivers in OHT Access and Navigation Models</p>

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