



THE ONTARIO

caregiver

ORGANIZATION

Integrating and Engaging Caregivers to Achieve OHT Deliverables



INTRODUCTION

Integrating and engaging caregivers is one strategy and approach that can help OHTs meet a number of OHT expectations set out by Ontario Health.

Research^{i,ii,iii,iv} shows that the active inclusion of caregivers leads to better patient experiences and improved healthcare outcomes, reinforcing the core values of Ontario Health Teams.

By proactively and intentionally involving caregivers in decision-making, care planning, navigation services, and quality improvement initiatives, OHTs can create a patient-centered, integrated, and sustainable healthcare system. Caregiver inclusion is essential to OHTs being able to fulfill their vision of a connected health system delivering comprehensive and coordinated care.

This guidance document details how caregiver inclusion relates to a number of key components outlined in [Ontario Health Teams: The Path Forward guidance document](#) (issued by the Ministry of Health in November 2022).

To support OHTs in getting started or furthering their integration of caregivers, the Ontario Caregiver Organization has created the resource *Caregiver Integration: A Practical Guide for OHTs* containing modules on these topics, aligned with OHT and Ontario government priorities:

- *Including Caregivers in OHT Access and Navigation Models*
- *Essential Care Partner Practices for OHTs*
- *Including and Supporting Caregivers to Improve Transitions from Hospital to Home*
- *Essential Role of Caregivers in Improving Transitions and Addressing Alternate Level of Care*



Four million caregivers across Ontario provide an estimated 75% of the care in the system by caring for their family, friends, and neighbours.

IMPORTANCE OF CAREGIVER INTEGRATION AND ENGAGEMENT

[The Ontario Health Teams: The Path Forward guidance document](#) builds on the [Ontario Health Teams: Guidance for Health Care Providers and Organizations](#). These guidance documents underscore the Ontario government's commitment to delivering comprehensive care through the leadership of OHTs and holding providers accountable for the outcomes of patient care.

The vision of a connected health system, where patients receive comprehensive and coordinated care tailored to their needs, reiterated in the November 2022 document, can only be achieved through meaningful inclusion of caregivers in making change.

The government is committed to improving health care in Ontario where Ontarians can expect²:

- one integrated team of health care providers working together to meet your needs
- smoother transitions between health care providers or places where you receive care
- timely access to your health record
- help navigating the public health care system 24/7

The creation of the Ontario Health Teams is the primary strategy to achieve this improved health care system.

Integrating caregivers as partners in the circle of care is an important and proven way for OHTs to achieve this goal.



MEETING OHT DELIVERABLES THROUGH CAREGIVER INTEGRATION

The expectations set for OHTs under the *Delivering Better Care and Building OHTs to Last* sections of the Ontario Health Teams:

The Path Forward guidance document include elements that can be achieved, wholly or in part, through meaningful inclusion and engagement with caregivers. These expectations include the following:

Delivering Better Care – Common Clinical Pathways to Improve Patient Care:

- **Implementation of Integrated Clinical Pathways (for chronic conditions and priority populations):** To be successful, OHTs need to include caregivers in designing and implementing integrated clinical pathways to be responsive to the local health care system and settings.

Family caregivers are often referred to as the glue that keeps the health care system together. This is most evident in transition points of a person’s health care journey, especially during the transition back to home^{vii.viii}. The benefit of caregiver involvement is even more important for vulnerable or complex patients^{ix.x}. By actively including caregivers at point of care and adapting the transition strategies to reflect the specific caregiver knowledge and experience, patients are more likely receive the necessary support and resources to thrive in their communities, reducing readmissions and improving overall patient outcomes^{xi.xii}.

“Through OHTs, Ontarians can expect to receive comprehensive and coordinate care wherever they interact with the health system that is suited to their needs^{vi}.”

- **Development of Collaborative Quality Improvement Plans (cQIP):** Involving caregivers in the development of Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) is an expectation for OHTs. Their experiences and feedback offer valuable insights for enhancing OHT strengths and to identify and target meaningful improvement initiatives to help meet performance targets.

Building OHTs to Last: Consistent Collaboration in Decision-Making

- **Embedding patient, family and caregiver voices in OHT decision-making:** Including the distinct voice and experience of caregivers in OHT decision-making processes ensures their experiences and insights are considered when creating strategies and implementation plans. Caregiver involvement and engagement should start at the governance level of OHTs, and continue to program and service planning committees and working groups, and also be embedded at the point of care for each patient. Regular involvement in structure and program planning, as well as discussions about treatment options, care plans, and discharge planning improve outcomes, while fostering shared responsibility and patient-centered decision-making is essential.
- **Equity-based and Culturally Appropriate Approaches to Integrated Care:** By collaborating with caregivers from diverse backgrounds and cultures, OHTs can tailor integrated care plans that are sensitive and responsive to different cultural contexts and can support solutions to address potential structural racism.

OHTs can extend this engagement to the point of care for patient from a range of social-cultural and vulnerable communities. Research about caregiver restrictions during COVID showed that additional disparities were experienced by vulnerable patients, especially because family members weren't able to advocate to mitigate potential structural racism in healthcare^{xiv}.



“The inclusion of patient families and caregivers will enable OHTs to benefit from diverse experience and lived / living experience now and as they continue to advance^{xiii}.”

Caregiver involvement and engagement across the spectrum of decision making, planning and at point of care can go a long way to help OHTs ensure that care is inclusive and respectful of individual differences, which is imperative to ensuring culturally-responsive and equitable healthcare.

Visit our website to find the [*Caregiver Integration: A Practical Guide for OHTs*](#) containing modules to support your caregiver involvement, integration and engagement activities.

Institute for Patient and Family Centred Care. Better Together Partnering with Families, Facts and Figures about Family Presence and Participation. <https://www.ipfcc.org/bestpractices/Better-Together-Facts-and-Figures.pdf>

“Equity-based and culturally appropriate approaches to integrated care are key ways for OHTs to improve patient outcomes and reduce health disparities^{xv}.”

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- ^v <https://www.ontario.ca/page/improving-health-care-ontario>
- ^{vi} A Plan to Accelerate Ontario Health Teams, pg. 3
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