



Recognizing caregivers to support integrated care across an OHT

When it comes to supporting and including caregivers as partners in care, Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) face a unique challenge: implementing a consistent program experience across diverse settings.

When caregivers aren't recognized for their crucial role, providers miss out on getting their unique insight on patients' medical history and other needs. When recognized, caregivers' insights can ensure more human-centered, culturally affirming care for patients, which improves the experience for providers, too.

That's why Essential Caregiver Programs exist: to make it so that caregivers are formally recognized for their role, and they can be identified, included, and supported across the continuum of care.

In the Great River OHT, the Cornwall Community Hospital started an Essential Caregiver Program, with thought given to how it might eventually expand to other organizations.

In the spring of 2024, the Great River OHT brought the Cornwall Community Hospital together with other regional hospitals, Carefor and St. Joseph's Continuing Care Centre, to plan a pilot project to expand the Essential Caregiver Program and establish referral pathways to the Essential Caregiver training at the hospital.



“This work has been incredibly important in **ensuring caregivers are recognized** across the healthcare system and has **helped staff have a better understanding of the Essential Caregiver role** as a part of the care team no matter the care setting.”

Tracy Crowder, Project Manager at the Great River Ontario Health Team



Pilot launched Oct 2024 | 73 caregivers trained | 73 badges administered

Since an OHT partner had already implemented an Essential Caregiver Program, the Great River OHT was able to build on the learnings from that location to facilitate collaboration across its other settings and sectors to improve patient care and success with transitions.

Through their Essential Caregiver Program, the hospital will provide caregiver education on topics such as infection prevention and control and personal protective equipment, and provide each caregiver with a caregiver ID badge that will be recognized in these organizations within the OHT: at [St. Joseph's Continuing Care Centre](#), [Carefor](#), [Cornwall Community Hospital](#), [Hôpital Glengarry Memorial Hospital](#), and [Winchester District Memorial Hospital](#).

Here's how they're doing it

Ensuring recognition across the continuum of care

Understanding the critical role of caregivers in transitions, Great River OHT made caregiver recognition across settings a priority. Rather than having programs, policies, or initiatives duplicated across settings, each one leveraged what they already had to support adoption elsewhere.

For example, because Cornwall Community Hospital already established a Caregiver ID program, St. Joseph's and Carefor — two organizations in a community setting — refer caregivers to the hospital to receive their badges and training.

Collaborative planning with OHT partners

To facilitate this kind of collaboration, Great River OHT engaged organizations in the development process. Below are the actions that made the project successful:

- Strong leadership and buy-in from key partners who established a working group to plan, execute, and adapt current initiatives, policies, and programs across the OHT
- Shared learning, open communication and active problem solving, ensuring all solutions aligned with the existing goals and the needs of all settings
- Ensuring that caregiver needs were front and center, with each organization presenting those that were most critical to their site before aligning priorities across all settings

- Sharing evidence and resources across settings, where one location's existing policies, processes, and guides could be repurposed to support adoption elsewhere (for example, Cornwall Community Hospital provided resources that were adapted for use by community organizations)
- Unifying staff training across all partner organizations to ensure a standardized staff training module

Staff and caregiver education

As the project progresses, staff across participating organizations will undergo training on the Essential Caregiver Program's principles and the significance of caregiver inclusion in patient care. This educational effort underscores the program's commitment to fostering collaborative relationships between caregivers and healthcare professionals for improved patient outcomes.

Work is underway to review data collected and lessons learned to expand to more organizations in phase 2 of the project, with the long term goal of having Essential Caregivers be recognized across the entire healthcare system in the Great River OHT.

Learn more: groht.ca/event/ecp

