



THE ONTARIO

caregiver

ORGANIZATION

Simple Strategies to Support Caregivers in Remote and Rural Communities

Strengthening caregiver well-being for
better care experiences and outcomes



Across Ontario, an estimated **800,000 caregivers live in rural and remote communities**, supporting family, friends, and neighbours with complex health needs. Caregiving in these areas presents unique challenges, including long travel distances, limited access to health and social services, financial strain, fewer culturally appropriate supports, and only 54% of rural households have adequate broadband internet access, compared to 87% in urban areas, restricting access to virtual care and online supports.

In 2025, the Ontario Caregiver Organization (OCO) hosted surveys and in-person roundtables with caregivers in Northern and Southwestern Ontario to better understand their experiences. Caregivers opened up about the barriers they face as well as the practical strategies they use to navigate these challenges. Supporting caregiver well-being strengthens care coordination and promotes better health outcomes, which also improves experiences for both the care recipient and the provider.



Addressing Barriers to Service Access



Need for Empathy, Compassion, and Coordination

Rural caregivers often travel long distances for appointments, with inflexible scheduling, road closures, and weather-related travel disruptions adding stress. Many report that services are unavailable outside standard business hours and that providers may lack awareness of their experience. Rural caregivers want providers to better understand the challenges they face.

How OCO can help:

- [Practical tips](#) and [e-learning modules](#) for providers to identify and support caregivers, including conversation prompts to increase connection and understanding
- Free training sessions and workshops for your team focused on the essential role of caregivers, recognizing caregiver needs, and how to connect them to support



Financial Strain

Caregivers frequently reduce or leave employment, incurring significant financial challenges. Rural caregivers face additional travel, accommodation, and vehicle costs, with a reported average monthly out-of-pocket expense of \$758, up from \$641 in 2024. One in four caregivers have taken a loan or used a line of credit to cover these costs.

How OCO can help

- The Ontario Caregiver Helpline (1-833-416-2273) connects caregivers to support in their local community or to programs offered by OCO
- Toolkits and materials that can be printed or shared digitally, including free Caregiver Helpline [posters](#), [postcards](#) and the [I am a Caregiver Toolkit](#)



Access to Culturally Appropriate and Safe Services

Caregivers highlight gaps in culturally safe and responsive services. Indigenous caregivers, for example, report that experiences of prejudice and rural challenges are sometimes incorrectly grouped within Indigenous experiences, despite being distinct.

How OCO can help

- The [I Am a Caregiver Toolkit](#) has been tailored for diverse communities including for Indigenous, Black, 2SLGBTQIA+ caregivers and others
- [Landscape of Caregiver Support in Ontario](#)



Recognition of Unpaid Labour and Emotional Burden

Caregiving is emotionally intense. Many caregivers describe feeling close to a breaking point during appointments and noted that they often feel their stress, grief, and mental health needs go unseen and under-supported. Caregivers want to be acknowledged not only for their relationship with the care recipient and for their contributions towards the care recipients' health outcomes, but as individuals who are within the health system.

How OCO can help:

- [1:1 Peer Support](#) and [Online Support Groups](#) providing safe, non-judgmental spaces where caregivers can share experiences, connect with others, and receive guidance and encouragement.



Supporting Caregivers Mental Health

Caregivers in remote or rural areas often face unique challenges, including isolation, limited access to services, and high levels of stress or burnout. Supporting caregivers' mental health and well-being is essential to help them sustain their caregiving role while maintaining their own health.

How OCO can help

- Free programs designed to support caregiver mental health and well-being, such as OCO's [SCALE \(Supporting Caregiver Awareness, Learning and Empowerment\)](#), which offers:
 - 8-weekly psychoeducational webinars (live or recorded) that acknowledge and unpack difficult caregiving emotions
 - Workbooks that offer strategies, tools, and resources to help cope with the emotional aspects of caregiving
 - Access to free online group or individual counselling for short term support
- [SCALE Together](#) is an adapted version of the online program, providing the opportunity for community partners to offer in-person caregiver support through live or recorded sessions and group debriefs facilitated by a community partner team member

In 2025, OCO piloted SCALE Together with [Elliot Lake Family Health Team](#), a rural primary care provider, receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback from caregivers. Community partners across Ontario can now bring this in-person support program to rural and remote sites, helping caregivers care for themselves while continuing to support others.

Learn more or get started: partners@ontariocaregiver.ca

Ready to start? Secure materials and tailored support at no cost.

Get your free package of resources and access to 1:1 support, including an organizational assessment of current practices and future opportunities for supporting caregivers across your organization.

[Book a time with our team here](#), or email us at ecpsupporthub@ontariocaregiver.ca

Get insights on caregiver inclusion and support, straight to your inbox



[The Partners in Care Bulletin](#): A quarterly letter with case studies from healthcare organisations across Ontario



[The Essential Care Partner Support Hub's Learning Collaborative](#): Community letter with events, evidence-informed resources, and news about caregiver inclusion and support

Free Tools for Caregivers



24/7 [Ontario Caregiver Helpline](#) 1-833-416-2273 (CARE), available in 150 languages



[Toolkits](#) for caregivers



[Caregiver Programs and Services](#)



Learn more at ontariocaregiver.ca