THE ONTARIO caregiver ORGANIZATION

TURNING POINT

2025-26 IMPACT REPORT



The Ontario Caregiver Organization (OCO) exists to improve the lives of Ontario caregivers. Its Strategic Plan focuses on four key objectives:



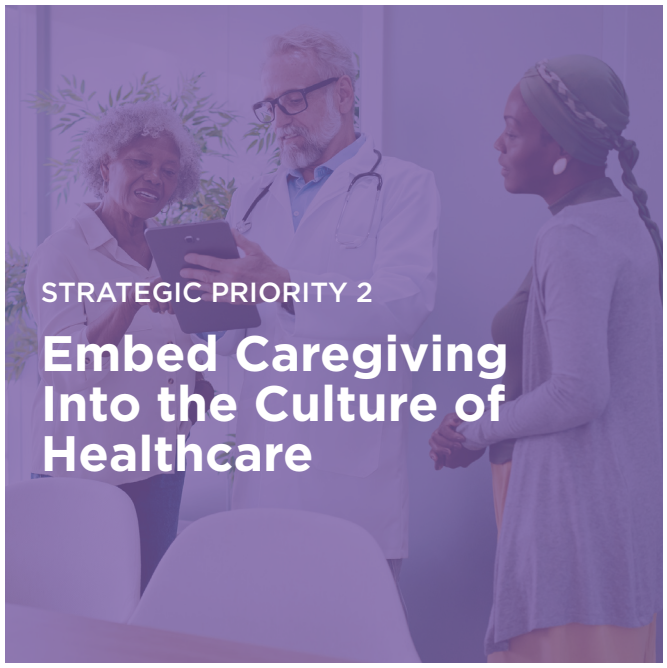






TABLE OF CONTENTS

How OCO Drives Impact 4
Message from the Board Chair and CEO 5
Karen's Journey 7

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1 - Connect More Caregivers With the Support They Need to Improve Their Experience and Well-Being

Bringing Caregiver Mental Health Support Into the Community 8
Supporting Families who Care for Adults with Developmental Disabilities 9
Reaching Caregivers in Rural Ontario 10
Strengthening Support for Francophone Caregivers 11

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #2 - Embed Caregiving Into the Culture of Healthcare

Essential Care Partner Support Hub - From Awareness to Action 12
A Model for What's Possible: The Great River OHT 13
Essential Care Partner Support Hub Recognized for its Innovation 13
When Knowledge Changes Individual Practice 14

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #3 - Generate Solutions With Caregivers and System Partners to Address Issues That Impact Caregivers

A Social Prescription for Caregiver Well-Being 15
Bringing the System Together: Caregivers as Partners Knowledge Mobilization Day 17

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #4 - Amplify Caregiver Voices and Evidence to Influence Change

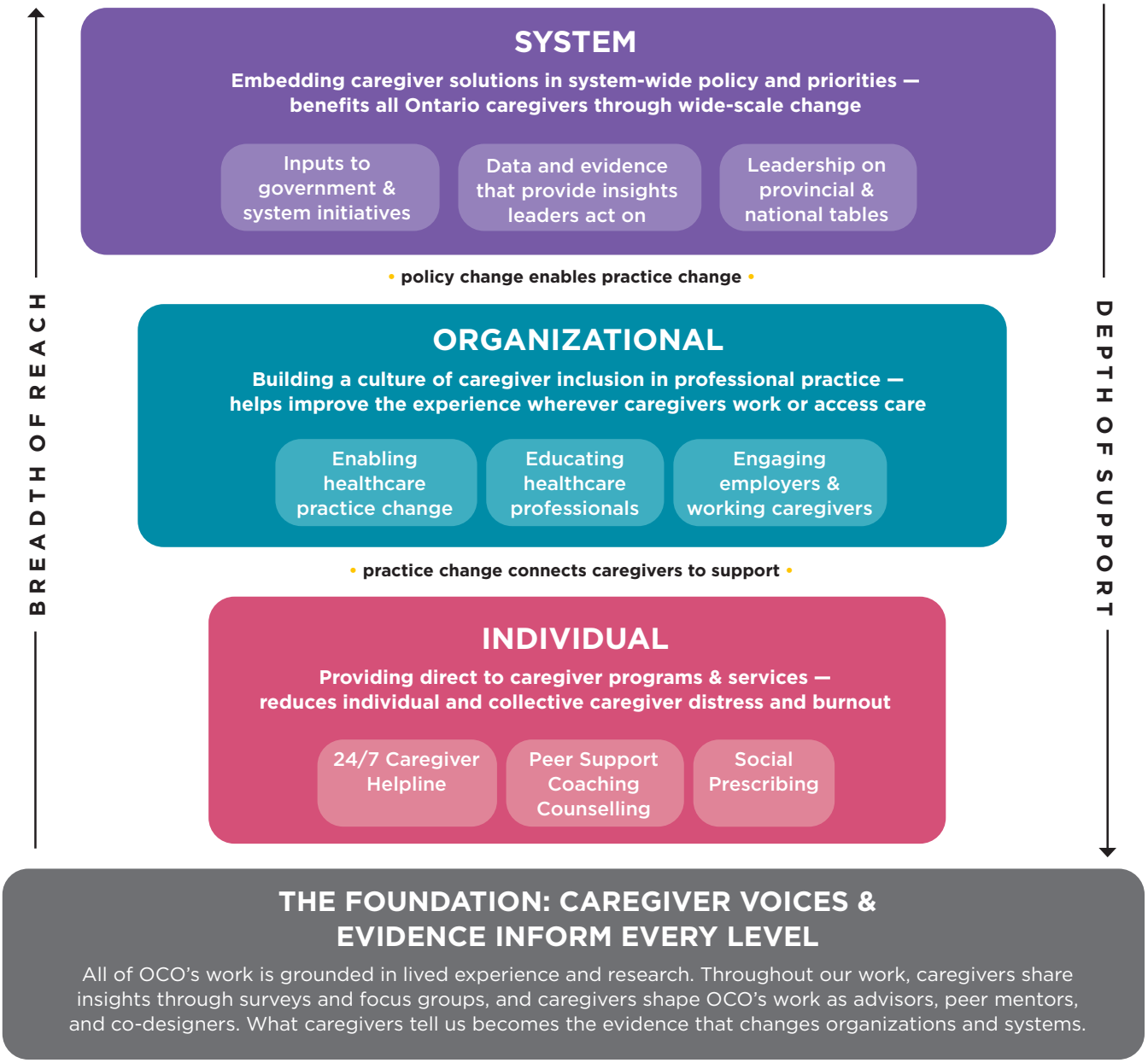
Spotlight on Ontario Caregivers: Evidence that Drives Change 18
Bringing Caregiver Voices to Where System Decisions Are Made 19
Caring in the Age of AI and Technology 20

The Janet Beed Impact Award – Celebrating Brina Ludwig Prout 21
Thank you to OCO's Volunteers 22
Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility 23
We Are at a Turning Point 24

HOW OCO DRIVES IMPACT

Caregivers say they need things to be easier. This includes a system that recognizes them, practical solutions, and supports for their own health and wellness.

OCO exists to improve the lives of Ontario caregivers by informing policies and practices that impact the caregiving experience in health and social care and directly supporting caregivers through programs and services that aim to reduce stress and burnout. We do this by working at a system, organization, and individual level.



There are 4.2 million caregivers in Ontario and that number is expected to reach 6.5 million by 2030.



Behind every number is a person - a family member, partner, friend, or neighbour - providing physical and emotional support to someone who needs them, often at a significant cost to their own health, finances, and overall well-being. OCO's most recent Spotlight Report tells us that 69% of caregivers feel so burnt out they don't know if they can keep going. Caregivers provide up to 90% of the care in the health system. Supporting them is not separate from health system transformation; it is essential to it.

Reflecting on this past year, there's been a notable shift in the way the health system is responding. Since the Essential Care Partner (ECP) Support Hub launched, OCO has been building awareness, cultivating partnerships, and supporting the implementation of leading practices that ensure caregiver recognition and support. Last year, we saw that work advance in new ways. More healthcare organizations are embedding caregiver-inclusive practices into their work. System partners are seeking out OCO's expertise and increasingly bringing caregivers to the table in meaningful ways. The seeds planted over years of purposeful effort are influencing change across the health system. We are at a turning point. We must harness this momentum to make meaningful and lasting change for all caregivers across the province.

The increased demand for OCO's direct to caregiver supports reflects this momentum. Last year, OCO connected with caregivers through 207,000 encounters*, demonstrating a continued pattern of growth in demand for caregiver programs and services. Whether through the 24/7 Caregiver Helpline, peer support, coaching, education, or community-based programs, OCO is connecting

69% of caregivers feel so burnt out they don't know if they can keep going.

*Encounters are defined as engagement, information, education, or support provided to a caregiver or professional intermediaries through a variety of activities, programs, and services.





4.2M
caregivers

69%
of caregivers feel so burnt out they don't know if they can keep going

4 in 5
caregivers felt better able to cope after accessing an OCO program

with more caregivers. Each encounter is an opportunity to reduce caregiver burnout and distress and change the trajectory of the caregiving experience. Last year, 4 in every 5 caregivers who accessed a program through OCO said they felt better able to cope with their situation.

OCO's purpose is to improve the lives of Ontario caregivers. We cannot do this work alone. Supporting caregivers must be a shared responsibility across health and social systems. This includes all those involved in our health system recognizing caregivers as essential partners in care. It requires employers to understand the reality of working caregivers, and educators to recognize the unique challenges of students in a caregiving role. **The stories shared in this report are not just about what OCO has accomplished - they are about what becomes possible when we work together.**

Thank you to our funders who make this work possible, the organizations that collaborate with OCO, and the caregiver volunteers who provide support by informing our programs and services, acting as peer mentors, advisors, and directors. We are grateful for your support.

We are proud of what we achieved last year. Moving forward, we have ambitious goals that reflect our deep commitment to improving the lives of Ontario caregivers. We look forward to continuing our work with caregivers and system leaders to drive change and bringing new programs and services to caregivers who need support.

Sincerely,

Yves Savoie
Board Chair, The Ontario Caregiver Organization

Amy Coupal
CEO, The Ontario Caregiver Organization

"I Didn't Know There Was Something For Me"



My journey of grief and loss began when first my mum, and then my dad, were diagnosed with terminal cancers. Caregiving quickly became exhausting - being completely unable to control anything and knowing that no matter what I did, it wouldn't make a difference in the end. It was the loneliest, most isolating feeling in the world.

They died 19 months apart.

I didn't think of myself as a caregiver. I was just a daughter trying to help the people I love. Things became so overwhelming that I stopped looking after myself. Everything just seemed to fall away. How can you care about your own needs when all you want to do is give everything you've got to them?



The call came from a former co-worker who knew my situation and reached out to tell me about OCO's SCALE Together program. I remember thinking - wait, there's support out there for me?

The moment I said yes, the fear set in. So many of the emotions you carry as a caregiver feel shameful - the exhaustion, the resentment, the grief you're not supposed to feel yet. But I thought: what if there are people who understand? Why would I deny myself that chance? So, I went.



The moment the first SCALE webinar began, it was like an arrow straight to the heart. I was in a room with caregivers from all walks of life and for the first time, I didn't feel alone.

By the end of those eight weeks, I learned I was important enough to reach out for support. That speaking the words you feel on the inside, out loud, matters. There are many things I knew before - I'm no stranger to therapy - but SCALE made them real.

And that changed everything. I want every caregiver to know. Help is out there. And it's for you.

— Karen, Caregiver

Connect More Caregivers With the Support They Need to Improve Their Experience and Well-Being

OCO's first strategic priority is to connect more caregivers to the support they need to improve their experience and well-being. Last year, this included bringing mental health programs into communities, strengthening peer networks, listening to the needs of caregivers living in rural Ontario and deepening support for Francophone caregivers.

207,000
caregiver encounters

8,038
caregivers registered for SCALE Program

1,056
caregiver coaching sessions delivered

Bringing Caregiver Mental Health Support Into the Community

Caregiving can be an isolating experience. The guilt, the grief, the exhaustion, the moments of feeling utterly alone - these are emotions many caregivers carry quietly, often without anywhere to turn. OCO's SCALE Together program is changing that by bringing structured, evidence-informed mental health support directly into the communities where caregivers live.

SCALE Together is an in-person adaptation of OCO's online SCALE (Supporting Caregiver Awareness, Learning and Empowerment) program. Delivered in partnership with community organizations, the program includes eight weekly sessions, each designed around the real emotional experiences of caregiving burnout, guilt, grief, anger, loss of identity, and isolation. Caregivers watch psychoeducational webinars, participate in facilitated group discussions, and have access to workbooks, free counselling, and other OCO supports. OCO provides all program content and implementation support; community partners provide the space and a trained facilitator.

SCALE TOGETHER

The pilot program launched mid-year and quickly had 665 caregivers registered across 16 pilot sites. **The pilot evaluation showed that 86% of participants felt more emotionally supported in their caregiving role, and 85% experienced a helpful change in their outlook toward caregiving.**

OCO is now expanding the program beyond the pilot phase, growing partnerships with community organizations across Ontario.

Supporting Families who Care for Adults with Developmental Disabilities

When caregivers have a community of people who genuinely understand their experience - people to learn from, lean on, and share with - they feel less isolated and better equipped to support those they care for. Through the Capacity-Building Grants for Family Support Networks (FSN) program, made possible by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, OCO is helping to foster just that.

Last year, OCO awarded 43 grants to FSNs across Ontario, funding groups that support caregivers of adults living with various developmental conditions, to build capacity within their networks to better support and connect caregivers.

Stronger community partnerships led to increased interest from diverse cultural groups. As a result, OCO was able to fund groups offering culturally grounded support for Chinese, South Indian, Latino, and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, in addition to Francophone FSNs. These grants provide an opportunity for FSNs to lead impactful projects for their caregiver members, strengthening their connections, access to support, and amplifying the voice of their network across their community.



"The FSN grant has greatly enhanced our group's sustainability by enabling us to organize meaningful caregiver events and educational workshops that attracted new families and strengthened our community network. These initiatives have increased awareness, engagement, and collaboration among parents, caregivers, and professionals."

– Tamil Community Services for Special Needs



Reaching Caregivers in Rural Ontario

Caregiving in rural and remote Ontario can bring different challenges for caregivers and the people they support.

Through funding from the Petro-Canada CareMakers Foundation, OCO set out to better understand the unique pressures facing caregivers in rural and remote communities. In-person forums in Thunder Bay and Stratford, followed by an Ontario-wide survey of over 200 caregivers living in rural and remote communities, painted a picture of what life looks like when distance, limited services, and financial strain collide.

The numbers tell part of the story. Eighty-six percent of respondents identified mental and emotional stress, social isolation, and financial stress as their top three challenges and 63% reported transportation barriers when accessing medical appointments or support services as a major concern. Fifty-six percent experienced direct financial impact from their caregiving role - often because they had reduced or left employment entirely, while also shouldering the costs of long-distance travel to appointments.

But the research also surfaced something less visible: the compounding effect of inequity. Nearly 78% of respondents said they were unable to access culturally or community-specific services in their rural community.

OCO responded to these shared experiences with action. Video diaries documenting caregiver stories were created in both English and French so the authentic voices of caregivers in these geographic areas could be shared to inform change. OCO's Helpline promotional tool was translated into Western Ojibwe and Oji-Cree, and a new tip sheet was developed to help healthcare providers better understand the realities of rural caregiving. OCO will continue to find opportunities to support caregivers in the rural and remote areas of Ontario because understanding a community is only the first step. Acting on what you learn is what makes the difference.









Strengthening Support for Francophone Caregivers

Last year, OCO continued to take meaningful steps to support Francophone caregivers across the province, updating and enhancing French-language resources to better reflect the unique realities of caregiving in a minority language context. The team expanded connections with Francophone caregivers to better understand their experiences and shared their stories with media and in other communications to help ensure their voices were amplified.

In addition, OCO hosted unique French-language events such as an interactive Open House in the Fall, and its first French-language Caregiver Day event.

OCO continues to build connections across Ontario's Francophone communities with both caregivers and organizations, working in collaboration to ensure inclusive and culturally responsive French-language services.



"It is already wonderful that you publish your resources in both languages, but this morning, on this day of the Franco-Ontarian flag, I see that you are creating documents specifically for the Franco-Ontarian community with people we recognize. What a thoughtful touch that I appreciate very much."

— Francophone caregiver



Embed Caregiving Into the Culture of Healthcare

From hospitals and long-term care homes to primary care and community settings, OCO is working alongside healthcare organizations and providers to embed caregiver inclusion into the structures, practices, and education that shape how care is delivered every day. The stories reflect what's possible when the health system includes caregivers as part of the care team - and what happens when that understanding takes root early in a care provider's career.

525
healthcare organizations connected with the Support Hub since launch

223
new organizations connected to the Support Hub in 2025–26

8,230
healthcare providers reached through Support Hub education activities

Essential Care Partner Support Hub - From Awareness to Action

Three years ago, OCO launched a first-of-its-kind initiative - the Essential Care Partner Support Hub. The Support Hub provides healthcare organizations with the guidance, resources, and practical support they need to formally identify, include, and support caregivers as part of the care team.

The growth since launch reflects both the urgency and need. By March 2026, the Support Hub had connected with 525 healthcare organizations - 223 of them in 2025–26 alone - spanning hospitals, long-term care, home care, primary care, Ontario Health Teams, and community support services. The Support Hub's Learning Collaborative has brought together 323 organizations from across sectors to share how they're advancing caregiver-inclusive care. To date, 146 partner organizations are adopting at least one leading practice. It also delivered more than

350 guidance and coaching meetings, hosted 10+ knowledge exchange events, and developed seven new resources to support program implementation.

A Model for What's Possible: The Great River OHT

For Ontario Health Teams, the challenge of caregiver inclusion is specific: how do you create a consistent experience for caregivers moving across multiple organizations?

With help from the Support Hub, the Great River Ontario Health Team (GROHT) brought together Cornwall Community Hospital, St. Joseph's Continuing Care Centre, Carefor Health and Community Services, Hôpital Glengarry Memorial Hospital, and Winchester District Memorial Hospital to build an Essential Caregiver Program that would follow caregivers across every setting in GROHT. Caregivers receive training and a caregiver ID badge that's recognized at every partner organization - a simple but powerful signal to staff that this person is part of the care team. Rather than duplicating programs, GROHT built on what already existed: Cornwall Community Hospital became the hub for training and badge administration. Resources were adapted and staff training standardized across all partners. In its first phase, 73 caregivers were trained and 73 badges administered, with plans underway to expand to more partner organizations in phase two.



"The Ontario Caregiver Organization staff and ECP resources provided practical guidance and responsive support and played a key role in helping the GROHT develop and implement our Essential Caregiver Program."

— Tracy Crowder, Project Manager, Great River OHT

Essential Care Partner Support Hub Recognized for its Innovation

OCO is proud to have been recognized at the 2025 Canadian Caregiving Awards of Excellence, presented by the Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence. The inaugural award for Innovation in Caregiver Programming recognized OCO's Essential Care Partner Support Hub for its innovative approach to advancing caregiver inclusion across sectors. This award is a testament to the impact of OCO's Support Hub and the organizations across Ontario that are helping to make caregiving visible within the health system.



(L to R), Liv Mendelson, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence, Amy Coupal, CEO of OCO, Alison Kilbourn, Manager, ECP Support Hub, OCO, and Lisa Salapatek, Executive Lead, Strategic Partnerships and Innovation, OCO.

When Knowledge Changes Individual Practice

Last year, OCO delivered 147 education sessions that reached more than 5,000 professionals including nurses, Personal Support Workers (PSW), social workers, paramedics, and other healthcare professionals and leaders.

OCO is shaping not just what providers know, but how they practice. Eighty-nine per cent of people who attended Support Hub education sessions said that they intend to make changes to their professional practice as a result of the learning event.

Last year, OCO worked with the Centre for Advancing Collaborative Healthcare and Education (CACHE) to develop a roadmap that will expand our reach and impact of caregiver-focused education for healthcare professionals. Informed by healthcare leaders, providers, and educators from 16 organizations, new collaborations have already taken shape.

OCO collaborated with CACHE and Collaborative Advocacy & Partnered Education (CAPE) to pose a challenge to interprofessional student teams as part of the University of Toronto's Senior Interprofessional Design Projects: how do we better prepare PSWs to collaborate with caregivers?

Over a three-month period, the student teams designed practical solutions: a podcast series featuring caregiver stories for PSWs to access on-the-go; a case-based learning workshop co-facilitated with caregivers with accompanying tip sheets and a pocket guide; and plans for an interactive platform to help PSWs access OCO resources in real time. These student-led solutions are inspiring OCO to think about new ways we can educate care professionals. But the learning went deeper than the student design projects.

When that understanding carries forward into a career, the culture of healthcare shifts in ways that no policy alone can achieve. OCO continues to build new partnerships to advance the understanding of the critical role of caregivers as partners in care.



"Caregivers are the essential thread holding a patient's care plan together, yet they are frequently overlooked, treated as mere bystanders rather than vital partners."

— Third-year student in Medical Radiation Sciences.

Generate Solutions With Caregivers and System Partners to Address Issues That Impact Caregivers

Generating solutions with caregivers and system partners to address issues that impact caregivers requires the right people working together toward a shared goal. Last year, OCO piloted social prescription in collaboration with community organizations and convened system partners to turn shared learning into collective action.

A Social Prescription for Caregiver Well-Being

Caregivers play a critical role in the health system, yet navigating the supports they need can be confusing, time-consuming, and emotionally exhausting. OCO is working to bridge that gap through its Caregiver Social Prescribing Program – a program designed to connect caregivers to supports tailored to who they are and what they need.

The program launched as a pilot across Southwestern and Northeastern Ontario, embedding caregiver support directly within Integrated Primary Care and Community Paramedicine settings. Healthcare providers identify caregivers who could benefit from support and issue a social prescription and connect them to a dedicated OCO Link Worker. Link Workers contact the caregiver to provide personalized support and connect them into community and OCO programs.

The results of the pilot surpassed its initial implementation goals, engaging 11 pilot sites, receiving 142 caregiver social prescriptions, and supporting caregivers through 495 encounters.



86%

of participants in the social prescribing program reported improved mental well-being



50%

of caregivers who participated in the social prescribing program reduced their primary care visits



36%

said the social prescribing program helped the person they care for avoid a hospitalization

Link Workers facilitated 75 referrals to community programs and OCO services, while establishing new connections with seven community agencies and co-developing five new community services.

Caregivers reported high levels of satisfaction, with 79% very satisfied with the Link Worker support and a Net Promoter Score* of 79. The majority felt seen, heard, and better equipped to navigate their caregiving role. “All experiences were good,” one caregiver shared. “The Link Worker uplifted me just with her conversation and her empathy for my situation. She is there for me with any information I may need.”

An independent evaluation of the pilot found that **the program also demonstrated meaningful reductions in health system utilization, with half of caregivers reducing their primary care visits and half avoiding a non-urgent emergency department visit or hospital admission due to decreased burnout, anxiety, stress, or depression**. OCO’s Social Prescribing program has since moved out of pilot phase and is now being expanded across Ontario with select partners.

The Social Prescribing program reflects the kind of shared accountability OCO is working toward: where partners across sectors play an active role in improving the lives of caregivers. OCO is laying the groundwork to scale this program across Ontario - reaching more caregivers, in more communities, before distress and burnout take hold.

The Social Prescribing program is made possible through funding from the Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence, a program of the Azrieli Foundation, in partnership with the Canadian Institute for Social Prescribing.





* The Net Promoter Score* (NPS) is a widely used measure of satisfaction and loyalty, asking respondents how likely they are to recommend a program or service to others, with scores ranging from -100 to +100. A score of 79 is considered exceptional.

Bringing the System Together: Caregivers as Partners Knowledge Mobilization Day

As a system convenor, OCO brings together the leaders, organizations, and voices needed to drive change. Last year, OCO's Essential Care Partner Support Hub hosted the Caregivers as Partners Knowledge Mobilization Day in partnership with Trillium Health Partners' Institute for Better Health, drawing together more than 120 caregivers, patients, healthcare providers, researchers, and system leaders from across Ontario.

The event showcased leading practices already underway across Ontario: caregivers being identified early, flagged in electronic medical records, included in care planning and discharge processes, and connected to structured support. Discussions elevated caregiver voices and surfaced persistent system barriers, creating space for cross-sector dialogue, collaboration, and tangible next steps to advance consistent caregiver inclusion.

100% of participants said they found the day highly valuable and energizing, reflecting OCO's deliberate strategy to create the conditions for system-wide change - convening the right people, surfacing what's working, and turning shared learning into collective action.



"What an incredible experience to be part of. I'm feeling very humbled to hear different caregivers and organizations speak of their experiences, successes, and challenges. WE have a lot of work to do, but the work that is happening is amazing. Thank you OCO for bringing us all together."

- Jessica Brown, Patient Engagement and Experience at Brockville General Hospital



(L to R), Judy Linton, Executive Vice President, Acute and Hospital-Based Care, Ontario Health, Amy Coupal, CEO, OCO and Janine Pajot, Vice Chair, OCO Board of Directors.



Hear from Dave on the importance of being recognized as a caregiver in the health system.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4

Amplify Caregiver Voices and Evidence to Influence Change

Changing the experience of caregiving requires evidence, presence, and the ability to anticipate what caregivers will need next. Last year, OCO continued to bring caregiver voices into the places where it matters most: the rooms and conversations where system priorities are set, the media conversations that shape public understanding, and in discussions related to AI and what caregivers are looking for in the way of support in using technology.

627
media mentions

30,352
subscribers to OCO's online community

2,068
caregivers provided insights through surveys and focus groups

Spotlight on Ontario Caregivers: Evidence that Drives Change

Each year, OCO releases its Spotlight Report - one of the most comprehensive looks at the caregiving experience in the province. The research captures the challenges that caregivers face and takes the pulse of caregiver distress across the province. But the value of this work goes well beyond the data itself - it becomes a tool for change.

When OCO sits down with health system leaders, government decision-makers, and organizations that interact with caregivers, the Spotlight report ensures caregiver data is informing conversations and decisions. The findings make the invisible visible: the financial strain, the health toll, the workforce disruptions, the quiet crisis of burnout that so many caregivers face. These are not abstract statistics. They are the lived experiences of 4.2 million Ontarians, translated into evidence that leaders can act on.

The report also serves as a catalyst for broader public awareness. Last year, OCO was mentioned in media 627 times*. When paired with practical ways that anyone can use to support a caregiver, this kind of reach doesn't just inform; it helps to make caregiving a shared social priority.



Bringing Caregiver Voices to Where System Decisions Are Made

To influence change, OCO shows up in the places where healthcare priorities are set. Over the past year, OCO provided input to government and system leaders through 57 meetings and submissions, bringing caregiver perspectives into conversations on home and community care, long-term care, transitions, palliative care, aging in the right place, and system navigation. These conversations are translating to real change as new caregiver-focused strategies are being embedded as a priority within key health system initiatives.

OCO shares caregiver insights gathered through research and direct engagement to help inform decision-makers at the most senior levels of the health system. Last year's Spotlight Report unveiled that 1 in 5 caregivers have taken the person they care for to the emergency room because they needed a break. Data points like this one have been pivotal in capturing the attention of health system leaders and conveying that more support for caregivers will benefit caregivers, the people they support, and the overall system.



* media mentions refer to the number of times OCO was mentioned on third party platforms and includes broadcast and social media.

Caring in the Age of AI and Technology



Caregivers are already using technology. The question is whether they have the support to find and use digital tools in a practical and safe way.

This key insight is from OCO's exploratory research into how caregivers are using digital tools and artificial intelligence in their roles. Through surveys and focus groups, we set out to understand what's working, what's getting in the way, and where OCO can make the greatest difference.

Caregivers value technology most when it reduces the workload and helps them manage tasks, prepare for appointments, coordinate information, communicate with others, and support the safety of the person they care for. Technology, when it works well, provides real relief: two-thirds of caregivers said it helps them stay organized and makes caregiving more manageable.

But high use doesn't mean high confidence. Most caregivers are navigating the technology landscape on their own. Caregivers told us that what they need is a trusted guide to help them find, and learn how to use, the right tools. They look to OCO to fill this gap.

As technology and AI become more embedded in daily caregiving, there is a growing need for a trusted, impartial voice that can help caregivers navigate this landscape safely and with confidence. OCO is well-positioned to fill that role. This research will directly inform how we support caregivers, because in a world where technology is moving fast, caregivers shouldn't have to navigate it alone.

Celebrating Brina Ludwig Prout

“I just don’t want people to feel alone.”
How Brina Ludwig Prout is driving healthcare system transformation for caregivers.

When Brina became the primary caregiver for her husband, she felt like her role within the health system went unrecognized. She experienced firsthand how often caregivers are overlooked, despite how essential their contributions are when it comes to providing effective care.

So, she made a vow: to be “the most effective volunteer I can be to drive attention and action towards the essential role of caregivers in healthcare.”

As Chair of Bridgepoint’s Patient and Family Advisory Council, Brina co-led the Changing Care Project, which created Ontario’s first comprehensive, caregiver-friendly hospital model. She became Caregiver 001, establishing formal caregiver recognition practices that continue to influence care today. To this day, she continues to engage in regional and provincial caregiver leadership to influence caregiver-friendly policies and practices in healthcare settings across the province.

We’re proud to celebrate Brina as the recipient of the 2026 Janet Beed Impact Award, which recognizes a caregiver who’s raising awareness, generating solutions, and leading through collaboration to make a real difference with and for caregivers.





Janet Beed
IMPACT AWARD

Volunteers are at the Heart of Everything we do

More than 100 volunteers give their time, energy, and expertise to help OCO improve the lives of Ontario caregivers.



They could say no. Life is full. Schedules are packed. And yet, they show up. They lead peer support sessions and mentoring conversations. They sit on advisory groups and working groups, helping to shape the programs and services that reach caregivers across Ontario. They serve on the board, participate in research, provide peer support and lend their expertise wherever it's needed.

OCO volunteers bring their lived experience as caregivers so that everything OCO does is grounded in what caregivers need.

To all the volunteers who make this work possible: thank you. Your compassion, leadership, and commitment are at the heart of everything we do.



Support That Reflects who Caregivers are

Caregivers are unique, and so are their experiences - shaped by age, identity, background, language, and the community they call home. What unites them is the need for support that reflects who they are.

That is the foundation of OCO's commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA). It shapes how programs are designed, how resources are developed, and how partnerships are built. Last year, OCO:

- developed Vietnamese and Korean adaptations of the I am a Caregiver Toolkit (now available in 14 cultural adaptations)
- translated and adapted the Ontario Caregiver Helpline postcard into Ojibwe and Oji-Cree.
- hosted knowledge exchange sessions within two rural Ontario communities. These sessions deepened OCO's knowledge and will inform how supports are designed and delivered for caregivers whose geography adds another layer of complexity to an already demanding role.
- continued to offer webinars designed to meet caregivers where they are, with programming that reflects the diversity of caregiving experiences across the province. Last year's topics included healthy aging for adults with developmental disabilities and their caregivers, cultural perspectives on caregiving, financial planning and support for caregivers of people with disabilities, and navigating special education in Ontario schools.







OCO's Board remains committed to IDEA as a key organizational priority. Staff learning continued through quarterly debriefs, an expanding resource catalogue, and sessions focused on the experiences of caregivers from diverse backgrounds. OCO also maintained representation from all teams on its internal IDEA working group and continued implementing its Leading Equitable and Accessible Delivery (LEAD) Improvement Plan in partnership with the Abilities Centre, advancing the policies and processes that make OCO more accessible and inclusive to all caregivers.

We are at a Turning Point

This past year, OCO witnessed a shift. The health system is moving from awareness to action. That shift is now visible in the organizations formally recognizing caregivers as essential partners in care, and in those seeking OCO's expertise and asking not just why this matters, but how to act on it.



We reached more caregivers who need support, particularly those living in rural and remote areas of the province and from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Programs like SCALE Together, Social Prescribing, and the Essential Care Partner Support Hub are proving what's possible when the right support reaches caregivers where they are. Our focus is to continue to spread and scale OCO programs and services and find new ways to reach caregivers sooner, before they reach their breaking point.

The landscape ahead is one OCO is closely attuned to. Health system transformation will continue to be an opportunity to address caregiver distress and embed caregiver-inclusive practices into the structures and culture of care delivery in a lasting and impactful way. In anticipation of the growing number of caregivers in Ontario, we will raise awareness on how people can proactively prepare for their caregiving role to mitigate stress and burnout. And as AI becomes more embedded in daily life, caregivers will need a trusted resource to help them navigate it in a way that is effective and safe.



4.2 million caregivers across Ontario - many pushed to their limits and struggling quietly. Improving their lives is not just what OCO does. It is why it exists.

Right now, a caregiver in Ontario is wondering if they can keep going.

They may be caring for an aging parent, a child with a disability, or a partner facing a serious illness. They're doing it out of love — but they're exhausted, and they need someone in their corner.

There are more than four million family caregivers in Ontario. They provide up to 90% of the care in our healthcare system, often at a serious cost to their own health and well-being. In fact, 69% say they don't know if they can continue.

That's where you come in.

Your gift to the Ontario Caregiver Organization (OCO) connects caregivers with free, compassionate support to help them care for themselves while caring for others. Reaching caregivers early makes a real difference: it reduces burnout, eases distress, and helps them keep going.

Every caregiver deserves to know they're not alone. Your donation today makes that possible.

DONATE TODAY

About the Ontario Caregiver Organization
The Ontario Caregiver Organization (OCO) exists to improve the lives of Ontario's estimated 4.2 million caregivers - ordinary people who provide physical and/or emotional support to a family member, partner, friend, or neighbour. OCO provides caregivers with one point of access to information, services, and supports that empower and help enable caregivers to be successful in their role. Where gaps exist in caregiver programs and services, OCO partners with caregivers, health care providers, and other organizations to find new and innovative ways to bridge those gaps so all caregivers, regardless of age, condition, or geographic location have access to the help they need. OCO is funded, in part, by The Ministry of Health.

Ontario Caregiver Helpline
1-833-416-2273

The Ontario Caregiver Organization
Email: info@ontariocaregiver.ca
Phone: 416-362-CARE (2273) or
1-888-877-1626

ontariocaregiver.ca

@caregiverON
@ontariocaregiver
@ontariocaregiverorganization
@the-ontario-caregiver-organization
Time to Talk Podcast

The views expressed in this publication are the views of the Ontario Caregiver Organization and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province.

© 2026 Ontario Caregiver Organization

THE ONTARIO caregiver ORGANIZATION