

Position Paper | January 2025

## **The Critical Role of Paid Caregivers in Long-Term Care: Addressing Staffing Challenges and Enhancing Support**

### **Background**

Caregivers are central to safe and equitable long-term care (LTC). As Canada's population ages and the prevalence of disabilities and complex health conditions increases, the demand for caregiving in LTC is rising. Unfortunately, while this need grows, the number of available caregivers is declining, and many of them are aging themselves.

Although the work of unpaid caregivers is incredibly important for residents in LTC homes, this paper will focus on paid caregivers that fall within the federal government's National Occupational Code's 33102 and 44101. It is important to clarify the difference between paid- and unpaid caregivers as there can be overlap in policies addressing caregiving. In the simplest terms, unpaid caregivers are recognized as familial or voluntary, while paid caregivers operate in a professional capacity under specific conditions. We also recognize the invaluable work of the full care team in LTC, including but not limited to nurses, physicians, and all health care providers on the interdisciplinary team.

Paid caregivers in Canada receive financial compensation for their work, which can include wages, benefits, and, in some cases, pensions or other employment-related perks. Many of these caregivers, such as personal support workers (PSWs) or health care assistants (HCAs), undergo formal training and may require certification to perform their duties. Their responsibilities often involve providing personal care and hygiene support, assisting with mobility, and performing other activities of daily living as needed. The efforts to regulate and professionalize many unpaid caregiver positions is underway but lacks consistency across provinces and territories. Additionally, paid caregivers are entitled to legal protections under Canadian employment laws that address various aspects of working conditions, including vacation pay, and sometimes paid sick leave, depending on the province where they reside.

A snapshot of paid caregivers in Canada reveals that this group is under strain, employers are struggling with recruitment and retention amid an aging workforce. Action is needed to address these challenges.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/nurses-psws-ontario-foi-document-1.7202282>

## Best Practices for Caregiving

To address the challenges in caregiving, one recommendation is that the government should promote the National Occupational Standard for Personal Care Providers (NOS-PCP)<sup>2</sup> and encourage provinces and territories to align provincial curriculums to have the same knowledge outcomes, as part of a comprehensive National Caregiving Strategy that includes paid caregivers in long-term care.

Such occupational standards would establish consistent competency outcomes for Personal Care Providers across the country. However, the key to success in achieving national alignment of competency outcomes to these standards is that the Federal and Provincial/ Territorial governments must ensure sufficient resources and support systems are in place to enable their implementation.

In addition to this, other resources and supports need to be considered. Wage levels and benefits, for instance, play a critical role in both attracting and retaining caregivers given the highly competitive environment across the health care system. Governments' need to support LTC employers to offer competitive salaries with improved operating budgets that allows for compensation packages that reflect regional norms for a living wage. Hours of care must be considered to address workload concerns as it allows for more staffing and provides employers with the opportunity to create more full-time caregiver positions. In addition, the federal government can help stabilize the caregiving workforce and protect both caregivers and residents by offering incentives through tax assisted mechanisms, such as a registered savings program for PSWs as an example.

## Potential Policy Solutions

- 1. Increase Staffing**
- 2. Invest in Training and Education**
- 3. Enhance Support for Caregiver Well-Being**
- 4. Support Technological Innovations**
- 5. Financial Investments and Incentives**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://nos-nnp.ca/>

## 1. Increase Staffing

One of the most pressing needs in the LTC sector is to increase staffing levels to ensure healthier work environments so that caregivers are not overburdened with tasks. Caregivers frequently experience heavy workloads due to staffing shortages, leading to physical and emotional strain.

In addition to investments in health human resource planning and bolstering provincial and territorial support, the government has other tools at their disposal. One such tool is expanding programs that facilitate **foreign credential recognition programs specially for LTC**. This would help address workforce shortages by allowing internationally trained caregivers to work in Canada's long-term care sector more seamlessly.

Currently, many qualified caregivers from abroad face significant barriers in getting their credentials recognized, which prevents them from contributing to the health care system.

Streamlining and expediting this process through government-led initiatives or partnerships with educational and regulatory bodies could open the doors for a skilled workforce to fill crucial roles in the LTC sector. Not only would this help address urgent staffing needs, but it could also contribute to improving the quality of care by ensuring diverse perspectives and experiences are brought into caregiving environments.

Such initiatives could include offering more **bridging programs, mentorship, and integration supports**, making it easier for internationally trained caregivers to meet provincial standards while gaining work experience. LTC homes should be integrated into these programs and these processes as they are a great opportunity for these professionals to obtain employment and be integrated into Canada and the health care system.

There is work underway provincially to enable internationally trained caregivers to gain employment in the Canadian health care system, however, this varies considerably across provinces and territories. Whereby some provinces work to eliminate barriers and others still have significant roadblocks. A national approach to foreign credential recognition is needed to ensure LTC homes are appropriately staffed and provide equitable access across the country.

International students participating in caregiver education programs in Canada at Designated Learning Institutions (DLI) also need to be considered. Graduates from a caregiver program from a DLI College that is less than 8 months are not qualified to receive a Post Graduate Workers Permit (PGWP). Given the high demand for caregivers in LTC homes, programs of six months duration should be considered eligible for a PGWP.

Additionally, targeted funding could be allocated to support certification exams, language training, or other educational needs, helping individuals transition into the workforce more efficiently. By prioritizing the recognition of foreign credentials, and purposefully including the LTC sector in this process, the government could significantly enhance the availability of qualified caregivers in Canada's LTC sector. This work is especially pertinent for LTC homes in rural and remote areas due to their increased shortage of PSWs when compared with urban areas.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Invest in Training and Education

A National Caregiving Strategy must prioritize investment in training and education programs for paid caregivers, starting with alignment of competency outcomes across provincial programs based on the **National Occupational Standard** for Personal Care Providers (PCP) which is a title that includes PSWs and other names used for this role. The Occupational standard ensures that caregivers entering the workforce have consistent competencies required to provide quality care. Currently, in Canada, PCP training and certification vary significantly across provinces and territories due to different regulatory frameworks and provincial health care priorities.<sup>4</sup> Access to caregiving educational programs needs to be flexible that supports entry into long term care. There has been success in many European countries using an apprenticeship model for caregiver education<sup>5</sup>. Similar concepts are gaining

acceptance in Canada such as British Columbia's Health Career Access Program (HCAP)<sup>6</sup>. The Federal governments support for a PSW apprenticeship model would assist individuals interested in entering the occupation by easing any financial barriers in starting a new career. In addition to minimum standards across the country, as care needs become more complex - particularly with the rise of dementia and other cognitive impairments - caregivers need additional specialized training to effectively manage these increasing challenges. Residents with these conditions often exhibit expressive behaviours, which can present as aggression, anxiety, wandering, depression, hallucinations, and communication difficulties.<sup>7</sup> Without proper training, managing these behaviours can be overwhelming for caregivers and can impact the overall quality of care.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.cia-ica.ca/app/themes/wicket/custom/dl\\_file.php?p=349354&fid=349358](https://www.cia-ica.ca/app/themes/wicket/custom/dl_file.php?p=349354&fid=349358)

<sup>4</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9134716/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nhsprofessionals.nhs.uk/campaigns/hcswd>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/job-seekers-employees/find-a-job/health-care>

<sup>7</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3181717/#:~:text=Psychological%20symptoms%20and%20behavioral%20abnormalities,suffer%20from%20such%20behavioral%20disorders>

A strong focus on specialized training will not only improve care outcomes but also enhance caregiver confidence and job satisfaction. It is also critical to offer **continuing education** and **professional development** opportunities to ensure that caregivers stay updated on the latest best practices, contributing to the long-term sustainability of the workforce. This will require investment with LTC homes to cover costs with continuing education, such as cost to access educational programming, staff replacement costs to attend training, and investment in a staff educator that can be employed by the LTC home.

Investing in caregiver education not only improves the quality of care but also supports **career advancement and retention**. By creating clear pathways for professional growth, the caregiving sector can become more attractive to new workers, helping address persistent shortages. Collaboration between the federal government and provincial governments is essential to ensure consistent, high-quality education standards across the country. This partnership can also help develop targeted funding for training programs, particularly in areas facing acute workforce shortages. This also means that we must understand supply and demand with workforce and educational data on the unregulated caregivers such as PSWs. Consideration must be given to education, training and distribution of paid caregivers who are primarily employed in long term care homes. Generating this data is necessary to effectively plan to meet resident care needs now and into the future.

We must also ensure that career options for paid caregivers are promoted, and the importance of the work is shared. A recent OECD report<sup>8</sup> noted a significant decrease among young people who are interested in any career in healthcare, and we must collectively take steps to address the negative image healthcare and paid caregiving roles have received.

By addressing the growing complexity of care through education and training, the government can support a caregiving workforce that is prepared for the challenges of tomorrow.

### **3. Enhance Support for Caregiver Well-Being**

Burnout is a significant issue among paid caregivers, and addressing their well-being is essential for improving retention. Burnout is fueled by the physical demands of the job, emotional stress, and often insufficient support. Addressing this is vital for improving

caregiver retention, which in turn can lead to better quality and continuity of care for residents. LTC employers have made significant investments in employee wellness and assistance programs, but stigma can be a barrier to access these resources.

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/what-do-we-know-about-young-people-s-interest-in-health-careers\\_002b3a39-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/what-do-we-know-about-young-people-s-interest-in-health-careers_002b3a39-en.html)

Studies show that peer support and counselling help reduce stress and increase job satisfaction for caregivers, who often report high levels of emotional exhaustion due to the challenging nature of their work.<sup>9</sup>

To this end, to address the mental health needs of caregivers in LTC homes, government can support LTC employers with funding and resources to offer high level mental health programs that homes must assess through third party providers. Educational resources on mental health are also needed, so that LTC employers can access training and education through organizations that can offer highly skilled and recognized programs on mental health education and support for the workplace.

Peer support groups are another valuable resource, fostering a sense of camaraderie and shared understanding among caregivers. Through these groups, caregivers can openly discuss their challenges and strategies for coping, reducing feelings of isolation. Programs like Ontario's *Behavioural Supports Ontario* (BSO) demonstrate that peer support networks can reduce stress and improve job satisfaction.<sup>10</sup> Government investment in expanding peer support networks or investing in caregiving resources through the Mental Health Commission of Canada<sup>11</sup> could help establish similar programs across Canada, providing caregivers in all provinces with a support system.

By taking steps to reduce the physical and emotional strain on caregivers, the government can help improve job satisfaction and reduce turnover, ultimately contributing to more stable and higher-quality care in LTC homes.

#### **4. Support Technological Innovations**

Technology offers a valuable opportunity to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of caregiving. One of the main areas where technology may improve the caregiver's role in LTC homes is improved care coordination, communication abilities between resident and caregiver and instant information through wearable technologies and sensors for residents.<sup>12</sup> New medical technologies can also improve communication between caregivers and the resident's family members.

However, although new technology has the potential to improve efficiencies in LTC homes ultimately helping caregivers provide high-quality care, there needs to be sufficient support and resources for the implementation of these technologies, which the government can assist with. Ultimately, technology can not take the place of a caregiver but can be an important tool in addressing workload.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10002014/>

<sup>10</sup> [https://behaviouralsupportsontario.ca/Uploads/ContentDocuments/2019-07\\_BSO\\_Review\\_of\\_Qualitative\\_Stories.pdf](https://behaviouralsupportsontario.ca/Uploads/ContentDocuments/2019-07_BSO_Review_of_Qualitative_Stories.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/what-we-do/caregiving/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10637095/>

LTC homes need to be in a position to adopt new technologies, including upgrades to existing buildings to allow for the appropriate installation while also ensuring that those within the home (i.e., staff, residents, and their families etc.) are involved in the development, selection and implementation of the technology as well as the opportunity to be trained on their use.<sup>13</sup> Technologies that streamline workflows and improve communication can enhance the caregiving process and allow caregivers to focus more on resident care. While new technology is a great opportunity for improving the work-life of caregivers in LTC homes, as well as the care provided to residents, it is important to ensure that these technologies are designed in ways that genuinely reduce caregiver burden, rather than contributing to burnout.

## **5. Financial Investments and Incentives**

In addition to the solutions provided above, there are a variety of financial levers that the government can use to help attract and retain caregivers to the LTC sector by providing financial support through initiatives such as tax incentives.

### ***Deductible Professional Development Expenses***

To encourage ongoing education and professional development among paid caregivers, the government should allow caregivers to deduct the cost of training, certification programs, and other development activities from their taxable income. By offering this incentive, the government can help caregivers acquire new skills and advance in their careers, benefiting both the caregivers and the residents they serve.

### ***Tax-Free Allowances for Work-Related Expenses***

Caregivers can sometimes bear significant out-of-pocket expenses, such as uniforms, professional fees and memberships, insurance premiums (if applicable) and transportation depending on where they work.<sup>14</sup> The government should provide tax-free allowances or reimbursements for these work-related costs, helping to reduce the financial burden on caregivers and alleviate some of the stress associated with their roles.

### ***Child and Elder Care Expense Deduction for Caregivers***

Paid caregivers in LTC homes are also likely to care for elderly family members and children at home. To support caregivers with young children and aging relatives, the government could enhance the existing expense deduction or expand the Child Care Benefit for those working as caregivers.

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.mcmasterforum.org/docs/default-source/product-documents/evidence-briefs/tech-in-ltc-eb.pdf?sfvrsn=9bcb0fb\\_4](https://www.mcmasterforum.org/docs/default-source/product-documents/evidence-briefs/tech-in-ltc-eb.pdf?sfvrsn=9bcb0fb_4)

<sup>14</sup> <https://ontariopswassociation.com/>

This could include increasing the maximum allowable deduction or offering a higher percentage deduction for caregivers, making it easier for them to balance their work and family responsibilities. By providing this support, the government can help retain caregivers who might otherwise leave the workforce due to family obligations.

## Conclusion

Paid caregivers are the backbone of the LTC sector, providing essential care to some of Canada’s most vulnerable populations. Without immediate action to support and sustain this workforce, the LTC system will face increasing challenges in delivering safe and high-quality care. By adopting the recommendations outlined in this paper—investing in staffing, education, well-being, and technology—the government can help ensure that Canada’s paid caregivers are equipped and supported to meet the growing needs of the population.

## About CALTC

The Canadian Association for Long Term Care (CALTC) is the leading voice for quality long-term care in Canada. As the national voice of the long-term care sector, CALTC is a trusted source of information on federal long-term care matters, common issues facing Canada’s provinces and territories, and emerging issues in the long-term care sector. CALTC’s membership is comprised of provincial and territorial long-term care associations and corporate providers across the continuum of long-term care in Canada, who provide resident-centered care services to seniors across the country when they can no longer live at home.

Since its inception in 2002, CALTC and its members have been working alongside long-term care staff, volunteers, residents, and their families to share information, best practices, and evidence to improve the quality of care provided to those in long term care, no matter where they live. CALTC is actively striving to aid in the creation of a health system in which quality, safe and comfortable long-term care is available to all Canadians.

