

Young Caregivers

A Policy Brief

Young caregivers, also known as young carers, are children, youth, adolescents, and/or young adults under the age of 25 who provide substantial and unpaid care to family members living with a challenge, illness, or disability. (Stamatopoulos, 2018)

1.25
Million

There are an estimated **1.25 million** young caregivers in Canada aged **15 to 24**. This data excludes Northern Canada and children under the age of 15, leaving out a significant number of children and youth who provide care for a loved one. (Statistics Canada 2013)

Young caregivers support their family members in various ways including: providing personal care (e.g. grooming, medication administration and dressing), caring for siblings, providing financial and practical care and emotional support. (Statistics Canada 2015)



Equivalent to a part-time job, caregivers spend 14-27 hours on caregiving

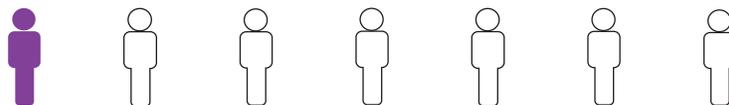
Unpaid care given by young caregivers corresponds to an annual savings of \$25,000–\$50,000



Stamatopoulos (2018) coined the term “**young carer penalty**” to describe short and long-term harm to young caregivers’ academic, social, and professional development, ultimately compromising their well-being and development in the absence of national supports and safeguards.

EDUCATION

Young caregivers may fall asleep in class, have difficulty concentrating or have poor grades because of their caregiving. Some may drop out of school, putting their future job prospects at risk.



15% said that their studies are affected

HEALTH

1 in 3

34% feel overwhelmed or short-tempered, or irritable

1 in 4

24% are tired and 1 in 10 report sleep disturbances

1 in 14

7% feel depressed

RELATIONSHIPS

While 85% of young caregivers say that caregiving strengthened their relationship with the person they care for, it may strain relationships with other family members or friends.



36% spend less time with friends or other socializing



12% report strained relationships with others

PAID JOBS

61% of young caregivers are employed alongside providing care & going to school (ualberta 2019)

1 in 4

23% work full time
(30+ hours per week)

1 in 3

38% work part time

1 in 6

17% arrived to work late, left work early, or took time off to provide care

In contrast to Canada, young caregivers have been identified in national legislation for over 25 years in the UK and Ireland. Please see below for a summary of young caregivers in the Canadian context versus what is being done internationally to support young caregivers. (Aldridge, 2018)

Canada	International
Young caregivers are not identified within national legislation (Stamatopoulos, 2016)	Young caregivers play multiple roles as carers, students, employees, friends, and family, and have been identified in national legislation for over 25 years in the UK and Ireland (Aldridge, 2018)
There is a paucity of research on young caregivers, especially those in rural and remote areas (Stamatopoulos, 2016)	Research on young caregivers in the UK began in the mid-1980s and has grown significantly over the years (Aldridge, 2018)
Canada lacks policies and services designed specifically to support young caregivers (Stamatopoulos, 2016) and only recently in 2020 have we seen national benefits for some of those over 16 via the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit, but this is a taxable benefit meaning it is only available for those who are working (Government of Canada, 2022)	In the UK, young caregivers have specific legal rights, designated services, and policies designed to support them in various sectors such as school systems, social service programs, and healthcare settings (Aldridge, 2018; National Health Service, 2015) In Australia, young carers have access to financial support via bursaries to stay in education (Young Carers Network, 2019)
In the past 10 years the number of formal programs that support young caregivers in some capacity has grown from 3 to 10 (Stamatopoulos, 2015, 2016)	Since 2015, in the UK, young carers have access to over 350 formal support programs specifically designed for them (Aldridge, 2018)

One of the main challenges to supporting young caregivers in Canada is that almost no one knows who they are or recognizes their contributions; they are currently not identified within national legislation in Canada.

Recommendations

EDUCATE

IDENTIFY

SUPPORT

- 1** **Educate** medical professionals, educators, and service providers about young caregivers so they can **identify** them, **support** them, and work with them.
- 2** **Support service providers** by creating stable opportunities for funding that include young caregivers within funding eligibility and scope.
- 3** Offer **academic support services at elementary and highschools** so that everyone who needs support is able to access it (examples: note takers, homework buddy, counselors, flexible attendance).
- 4** Making support services **accessible to all who identify** as young caregivers.
- 5** Work on creating a **safe and confidential environment** in schools where young caregivers can feel comfortable asking for help.
- 6** **Caregiver-friendly employers** who can provide supports such as: flexibility on where you work, opportunities to work flex hours, and services such as caregiving leave.
- 7** Continuing to provide **support services** through university, college, and trade school to help keep young caregivers in school.
- 8** Increase **awareness** in schools through **information sessions and classroom curriculum** as well as create systems to **refer students who need extra support** and resources outside of school.
- 9** Targeted **mental health support** for young caregivers to help with burnout and keep them mentally healthy in the long-term.

“If we continue to look the other way and not address the impact caregiving has on these youth now, we will have to deal with it down the road as secondary users of a physical or mental health care system.”

- Programme Director of Hospice Toronto's Young Caregiver Program (from Stamatopoulos, 2015)

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**SPARE A
THOUGHT FOR
DEMENTIA**

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