

# Caring for Caregivers

Recommendations for supporting Alberta family caregivers  
for people living with dementia  
in a pandemic

## BACKGROUND

Over 42,000 Albertans have a dementia diagnosis making family caregivers (FCGs) for persons living with dementia (PLWD) a valuable yet under recognized health care asset. They provide physically demanding, emotionally exhausting and time-consuming unpaid care to a vulnerable population. FCGs for PLWD are being confronted with considerable new challenges in the face of COVID-19 which has drastically altered their caregiving role.

## RESEARCH STUDY

University of Calgary researchers Dr. Gwen McGhan and Dr. Deirdre McCaughey recently completed a study to examine the caregiving experiences of FCGs for PLWD during the COVID-19 pandemic. The online survey and follow-up focus groups were conducted June through September 2020. Pandemic related public health measures have required FCGs to adapt to new care routines with very limited supportive care resources and services available to them. They require more information on how to continue providing care under these new circumstances and are experiencing high levels of burden, social isolation, and strain, as well as reduced quality of life as a result. Based on our research, we recommend the following actions be enacted in Alberta to better support FCGs for PLWD in their caregiving roles and ultimately minimize decline in PLWD and reduce FCG burden.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Caregiving support

Caregiving support resources should be consistently available for FCGs to provide effective care. COVID-19 public health measures make support services difficult or not possible to offer. Regular check-ins by case managers and resource information updates would enable access to the services that are available.

### 2. Clear, correct and concise information

FCGs require more timely information about public health protocols to enable optimal care provision and resource access. For effective delivery of this specific information, it should be communicated through multiple media sources.

### 3. Continued access to care recipients

FCGs are not just visitors, they are essential care partners that provide necessary care for PLWD in supportive living facilities. They recognize the need for essential infection control procedures and are willing to take appropriate training to ensure continued access.

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