

Staying Connected while Caring for Another

With a growing number of people in the 85+ age category, and a greater incidence of dementia and other chronic conditions, long-term care is commonly offered in the home, with family and friends taking on much of the care-giving burden.

Caregiving can lead to social isolation

- Of people living with dementia, it is estimated that half live in the community.
- Although the role of caregiver may be satisfying for people, and social supports can mitigate negative effects, caregiving exacts a physical and emotional toll from family caregivers.
- There is often a preference and commitment from family and other informal caregivers to help their aging family members stay at home; however, advanced dementia is associated with extreme physical challenges, behavioural problems, and increasing dependence on others.
- Caregivers are vulnerable to social isolation, especially if they are seniors themselves, caring for a spouse, relative or friend.

There are an estimated 1 million caregivers in British Columbia. Many have reported challenges due to caregiving, including social isolation, financial and employment-related problems. The evidence also tells us caregivers feel invisible, unsupported and distressed. Most feel they are alone in struggling with these challenges. **This loss of social connection is the highest risk factor for family caregivers.**

Common causes of isolation

Family members and friends often do not see themselves as 'unpaid caregivers'. They may not know about resources available.

Family members may live far away. If a caregiver is reluctant to ask for help, it can be difficult for relatives to support them.

Tending to the health of a loved one may leave caregivers tired or burned out.

Caregiving for a spouse can make socializing difficult. For many seniors, their spouse is the centre of their social network. When their spouse is unable to socialize due to health problems, caregivers may also withdraw.

What is "Caregiver Burnout?"

- Burnout can happen if caregivers feel overwhelmed or aren't getting the support they need.
- It can lead to feelings of powerlessness, anxiety, guilt and apathy.
- Caregivers dealing with burnout may struggle with basic self-care (such as eating and sleeping).



Helping senior caregivers maintain social connection

Encourage Regular Participation

- Having a support network helps caregivers keep a positive outlook and makes them better caregivers.
- Encourage caregivers to keep in touch with friends, even if it's only a call or email.
- Help caregivers you know connect with a *walking* program or a walking companion.



Provide Support for Caregivers

- Your involvement and support as a family member, friend or neighbor can be a major positive influence for a caregiver struggling with isolation.
- Small gestures, like offering to help with errands or just listening to them talk about their situation, can make a big difference.
- Learn about helpful resources in your community through your Community Seniors Resource Guide.

Help Caregivers Feel Connected and Valued

- Look for online discussion forums, support groups and other community resources for caregivers to share their experiences with others who understand.
- Check out transportation options available in your community that will help with socializing, running errands, and meeting other basic needs.
- Consider outreach programs like Meals on Wheels, which help to support socially isolated seniors.

Community Resources for Family Caregivers

Please note, these resources provide support in English:

- Family Caregivers of British Columbia (FCBC) – www.familycaregiversbc.ca
Caregiver Support Line: Mon. to Fri. 8:30am to 4pm PST (1-877-520-3267)
- Doctors of BC List of Community Resources for Family Caregivers of BC, including local community, home support and healthcare programs, and information on financial benefits.
www.doctorsofbc.ca
- Alzheimer Society of British Columbia - www.alzheimerbc.org;
non-English resources: <http://www.alzheimer.ca/en/bc/We-can-help/Resources/Non-English-resources>
- First Link Dementia Helpline 1-800-936-6033 (Lower Mainland 604- 681-8651)
- United Way of the Lower Mainland (UWLM) Family & Friend Caregivers Information and Resource Handbook – www.uwlm.ca/resources/caregivers-information-and-resources-handbook
- Community support groups for family caregivers:
 - North Shore Community Resources Caregiver Support Program
 - 604-982-3320 www.nscr.bc.ca
 - Burnaby Seniors Outreach Services Society Caregivers Support Group
 - 604-291-2258 www.bsoss.org