

## Promising Practices and Indicators for Caregiver Education and Support Programs

Many people, predominantly women, voluntarily provide health and social care to family members and friends. These efforts help sustain the healthcare system because individuals are cared for at home at no public cost. Educational and support programs for these caregivers are designed to provide information, coping strategies and skills to help them manage multiple, competing demands and stresses associated with their efforts. However, what makes programs effective is not easily or widely understood.

Building on MOHLTC's 2008 "Caring about Caregivers" workshops and academic literature, Echo: Improving Women's Health in Ontario funded this project. Saint Elizabeth researchers began with a review of research studies on effective education and support programs and moved to a web-based review of currently-available programs across Canada. Then, together with caregivers, the researchers identified 5 promising practices and 20 indicators of effective caregiver education and supports programs. Also, 8 programs were identified that demonstrate the various indicators in action.

<i>Promising Practices</i>	<i>Promising Practice Indicators</i>
#1 Respond to the Unique Care Situation	1. Ask caregivers what they need and tailor services & content accordingly
	2. Consider the relationship between the caregiver and care recipient
	3. Include strategies to address family dynamics and roles
	4. Consider the influence of gender
	5. Recognize cultural influences
#2 Stimulate Caregiver Involvement and Interest	6. Foster networking among caregivers
	7. Make connections to community services
	8. Offer online interactive program components
	9. Help caregivers apply knowledge and skills
#3 Address the Emotional Context of Providing Care	10. Reinforce that caregivers need to care for themselves
	11. Recognize different emotional stages of caregiving
	12. Affirm caregiver competence and confidence
	13. Encourage caregivers to consider their positive experiences
#4 Provide Relevant Information	14. Educate caregivers about how the system works
	15. Provide practical strategies for caring
	16. Address informational needs over time
#5 Enable Caregiver Participation	17. Arrange for respite if needed
	18. Arrange for transportation if needed
	19. Make the program convenient
	20. Provide a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere

Because evidence-based standards of care assist in reducing inequities in health,<sup>1</sup> this study moves the knowledge about caregiver support and education programs closer to such standards. Accompanying the research report is a *Guide* to assess current programs for improvement purposes and to help the design of new programs.

### **Recommended next steps**

The researchers recommend that the promising practices and indicators be disseminated widely and that current program providers be encouraged to review their programs, together with caregivers, to identify possible improvements. Further, the researchers recommend additional work be done to increase awareness about programs, and to develop guides to involve caregivers in program development and evaluation and to assist organizations involved in caregiver support and education to partner effectively. Also recommended are the development of outcome measures and a formal evaluation tool to critically evaluate programs, and further investigation of how to consider and meet gendered and cultural needs when supporting caregivers.

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<sup>1</sup> The Ontario women's health framework. Toronto: ECHO: Improving Women's Health in Ontario, 2011.