

From strategy to action:

Building pathways to support for caregivers



Seamless, integrated care. Improved transitions for patients, families, and caregivers.

To realize these goals, Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) are working with a new partner that's always been there: **caregivers**.

Providing critical patient information, caregivers help reduce preventable adverse events, lower readmission rates, improve quality indicators like reduced falls and medication adherence, and play a critical role enabling patients to remain in their homes.

These benefits support patients, make OHTs more efficient, and reduce pressure on healthcare providers and our system. But caregivers are struggling. More than two-thirds feel so burnt out they aren't sure how they will continue in their role¹.

To improve patient care, [Couchiching OHT \(COHT\)](#) knew they had to support caregivers first. Leveraging only their existing staff capacity, they embedded caregiver identification, inclusion, and support across all aspects of their work as a core enabler of person and family-centered care.

"We've observed that caregivers frequently arrive feeling overwhelmed and unsure, but leave with clearer direction, practical tools, and a greater sense of confidence. These sessions not only help them better support their loved one but also remind them that their own well-being matters."

—Jenny Wylie RP, Manager, Mental Health Services and Jen Henry RP, Mental Health Services Clinician

¹ <https://ontariocaregiver.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/OCO-Spotlight-Report-2025-Eng.pdf>



HERE'S HOW THEY'RE DOING IT:

Early engagement, real decision-making

To strengthen the patient-caregiver voice, COHT involved members of their Patient, Family, and Caregiver Network (formerly Council) in planning from the outset, with two co-chairs joining the highest rung of their org chart at their Joint Executive Team.

Chronic Disease Hub

Couching Family Health Team (CFHT), COHT's Chronic Disease Hub provides tailored support to patients, families, and caregivers as they navigate chronic disease.

This engagement has increased confidence among clinical teams to support caregivers and enhanced provider-caregiver relationships.

Orientation for every stage

Initially meant for new chronic disease patients and their families and caregivers, COHT expanded their orientation sessions for all caregivers of Chronic Disease Hub patients, no matter how long they've been in the role.

Validating caregivers' experiences, these sessions educate them on how chronic disease and stress impact their mental health and resources that can support. A referral can also be made to short-term counseling.

For patients who can't join in-person, the team has worked on videos that can be accessed online.

Tailored, accessible resources for caregivers

An information package known as a caregiver folder is shared with patients, families, and caregivers during orientation and is made available to them at all initial and follow-up patient appointments.

Its resources cover everything from managing chronic disease to mental health and system navigation support, useful for caregivers who must often reiterate medical history for the person they support and reestablish the importance of their role as they move from one setting to another.

A proactive, consistent caregiver mental health pathway

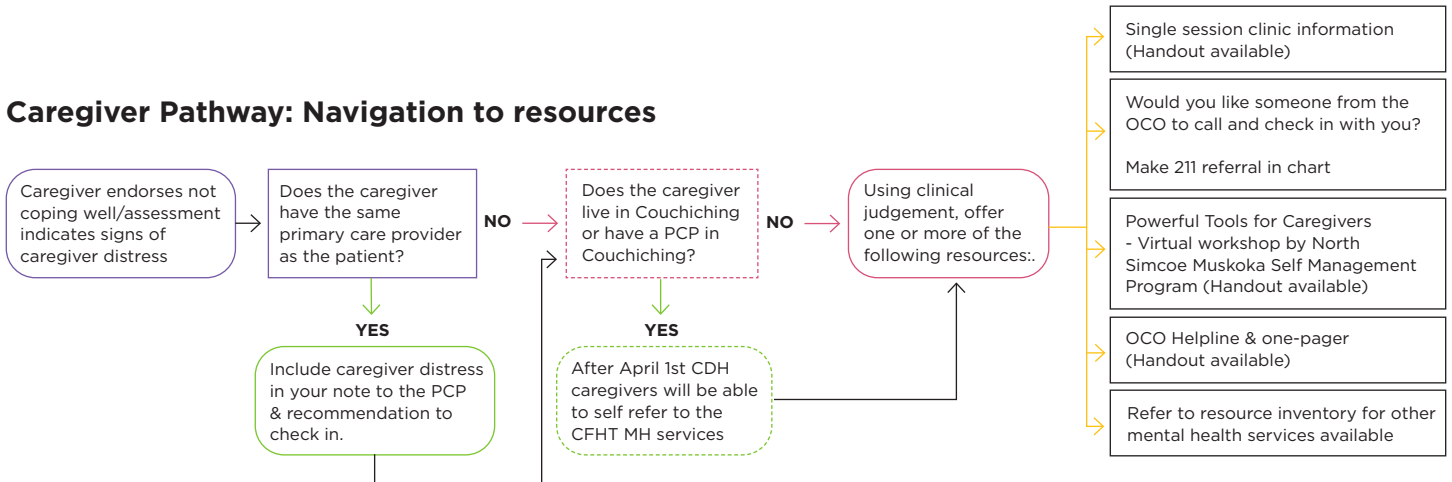
Because many caregivers struggle to self-identify ("I'm just doing what a daughter/husband/friend is supposed to") and seek out support on their own, providers will check-in, asking how they're doing at each appointment, sharing resources and connecting them to mental health support through CFHT if needed.





CHRONIC DISEASE HUB – CAREGIVER PATHWAY

Caregiver Pathway: Navigation to resources



“Our experience has shown us that caregivers rarely receive formal guidance within the healthcare system. By offering these sessions, we’ve seen the impact that validation, information, and support can have—helping caregivers understand that their feelings are valid and that both they and the patient are navigating their own unique journeys.”

—Jenny Wylie RP, Manager, Mental Health Services and Jen Henry RP, Mental Health Services Clinician

WHAT’S NEXT

COHT continues to prioritize caregiver well-being to help prevent burn-out and empower caregivers to provide care for complex patients. Upcoming is a Social Prescribing initiative, and newly launched is a Chronic Disease Exacerbation Line in partnership with County of Simcoe Community Paramedicine.

Long-term, COHT aims to have caregivers recognized and embedded as essential partners in care across all settings, at the table for clinical decisions with equal access to patient health information and full access to all facilities, as well as regular, structured contact with clinicians.