In Ontario, Canada it is estimated that there are 3.3 million unpaid caregivers providing care for family members, friends, neighbors or colleagues. These unpaid caregivers share a common frustration – the lack of integration in healthcare systems.

The Change Foundation, an independent charitable foundation that focuses on improving the experience of Ontario’s unpaid caregivers and health providers, saw a need to address this challenge. Changing CARE, the action phase of the Change Foundation’s Out of the Shadows and Into the Circle strategic plan, identified four thematic needs and created select partnerships to develop solutions driving greater unpaid caregiver and healthcare system integration.

Key Activities Needed to Support Unpaid Caregiver Healthcare System Integration

**Communication**—Better communication and information exchange between unpaid caregivers and health care providers.

**Assessment**—More identification and assessment of unpaid caregivers to determine their needs, abilities, and expectations.

**Recognition**—Formal recognition of the role unpaid caregivers play in the healthcare system by the patient’s care teams and by caregivers themselves.

**Education**—More opportunities for unpaid caregiver support and education to develop key care skills, from counselling to medical task training.
Changing CARE with Innovative Partnerships

Four select partnerships bring focus to different facets of the unpaid caregiver experience from a multitude of perspectives. These community-driven projects are comprised of locally-based organizations, programs and health systems with unpaid caregivers as equal partners. The initiatives identified are developed to address key issues, while building resources and content that can be scaled to the broader community.

1. Connecting the Dots... Easier Transitions for Family Caregivers

Addresses the needs of unpaid caregivers through defining and recognizing their role, and co-designing systems of care provisions and communication that meet their needs.

**Partner Organizations:** Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance; One Care Home and Community Support Services; North Perth Family Health Team; STAR Family Health; Southwest Local Health Integration Network

**Promotional materials** encouraging people to self-identify as an unpaid caregiver to their primary care practitioners. They are distributed through primary care practices. Community services are then made available when needed.

2. Embrace

Develops practices with unpaid caregivers to better support, recognize, and embrace their vital role in the recovery of their family members with addiction and mental health issues.

**Partner Organizations:** The Cornwall & District Family Support Group; Cornwall Hospital, Community Addiction and Mental Health Services

**Activated unpaid caregiver friendly framework, which includes:**

1. Unpaid caregivers as part of the patient’s care team.
2. Local resources and information to help unpaid caregivers navigate the health system for their family member and themselves.
3. A resource hub – a virtual and physician space in the hospital where unpaid caregivers can turn to for reliable information.
4. Showcasing unpaid caregiver and provider stories to promote understanding, learning and communication.
5. Visual identification which unpaid caregivers wear in the hospital to help staff recognize who they are and the role they play.
Changing CARE with Innovative Partnerships continued

3 Improving CARE Together
Improve the acknowledgement of and input from unpaid caregivers in programs and organizational planning.

**Partner Organization:** St. Joseph’s Health Care London

Care partnership with patients, residents, families and unpaid caregivers providing promotional materials aimed at unpaid caregivers posted around the hospital. Includes useful tools for patients and unpaid caregivers including a list for every patient with the names and role of their care team; a discharge binder that people can take home with them with instructions and follow up information.

4 Cultivating Change: The Caregiver Friendly Hospital and Community Hub
Redesigns the unpaid caregiver experience using the concept of the caregiver friendly hospital and community hub.

**Partner Organization:** Sinai Health System and WoodGreen Community Services

**Multi-level engagement** to support identification and support of unpaid caregivers.

- ID badge provided to unpaid caregivers to wear when they are in health care facilities.
- Information campaigns encouraging unpaid caregivers to identify themselves as caregivers to their health care teams.
- Caregiver resource center on the main floor of a community hospital, educational workshops and referrals to community supports.

References