



News Release: National Family Caregiver Day/National Carer Day

They are all around us but rarely recognized for their huge contribution.

They are Family Caregivers: sons and daughters, wives and husbands, who devote endless hours to support relatives who are going through physical or cognitive decline. About 8.1 million Canadians are assisting loved ones. The majority are also holding down full time jobs, a challenging and stressful balancing act.

Tuesday April 5 is when we collectively pay tribute on the annual ***National Family Caregiver Day***.

AGE-WELL, a national research network promoting the growth of technology to assist older people and their caregivers, joins in the celebration of these dedicated citizens. But it goes further—recognizing their contribution every day of the year and also reaching out to them for their expert advice in the development of new technologies that address their challenges.

Among the 25 core research projects that AGE-WELL is funding are several that focus directly on the issues, challenges and needs of caregivers.

“Caregivers are a really critical part of the equation,” said Janet Fast, a Family Economist at the University of Alberta and co-leader of a group of AGE-WELL projects that are exploring caregiver issues.

Professor Fast points out that family members provide as much as 90% of the care that older adults receive. It is unpaid work that is worth a staggering **\$66.5 Billion** per year in Canada. Many of them experience poorer health, social isolation and even lost pay or employment as they struggle to balance caregiving and full time work.

“So if we don’t support them we’re going to have a really big problem because demand for care is only going to keep growing. A lot of these people can be helped through assistive technologies,” said Fast.

Ron, a Toronto man who is assisting his mother in caring for his 77-year-old father, is an early adopter of technology.

“I use technology as leverage to support us. But it’s humans first,” said Ron.

His father has Alzheimer’s and has a record of wandering. Ron installed cameras in his parents’ apartment to allow him to monitor their well-being, door sensors to alert him when someone goes out and has equipped his father with a GPS locator that will send a warning if he strays too far.

AGE-WELL has now reached out to Ron to join a community advisory committee and he has also consulted with AGE-WELL researchers, giving them the benefit of his first hand experience as they develop new technologies to assist both older people and caregivers.



“They’re really focusing on getting answers from caregivers, getting them involved in research projects, getting them involved in the search for practical solutions,” said Ron.

As Canada pays tribute to Family Caregivers, AGE-WELL would like to issue an invitation:

“You play a crucial role and we need your wisdom, experience and knowledge,” said AGE-WELL Scientific Co-Director Alex Mihailidis.

“We want to hear from you and learn from you,” added AGE-WELL Scientific Co-Director Andrew Sixsmith.

Sixsmith and Mihailidis are asking caregivers to visit the community sign up page on the AGE-WELL website <http://agewell-nce.ca/join> and consider joining.

AGE-WELL is committed to involving older Canadians and their caregivers at every step of the research and development process. The more people who join the community, the deeper the pool of resources.

For more information or to arrange an interview with Janet Fast, Alex Mihailidis or Andrew Sixsmith, contact:

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