

Young carers

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1 Young carers are a growing proportion of caregivers in Canada

More than 100 000 people younger than 25 years are estimated to provide 20 hours or more of unpaid care per week to family members with long-term health conditions or disabilities (e.g., dementia, mental illness, cancer).¹ However, young carers' contributions are often not recognized by health care providers in Canada.¹

2 Young carers provide a variety of support

Young carers may provide personal care (e.g., bathing), emotional support, medical tasks (e.g., medication administration), transportation and translation of medical information, and may also take on household responsibilities and care for other family members.^{2,3}

3 Health care providers should recognize young carers during health care interactions

Providers may have patients who are young carers as well as patients supported by young carers in their practice. When a young person accompanies a patient, providers can ask, "Do you provide care or support for a family member or loved one, either in or outside your home?"¹ After caregiving is recognized, providers can help young carers by listening to and validating their experience. Providers can be advocates by inquiring about support systems to identify gaps and helping with system navigation.

4 Young carers can find health care system navigation — such as care transitions in and out of hospital — challenging

Young carers are often not recognized as caregivers and may lack experience with health care. Tailored, age-appropriate communication and informational support, such as discussing the care recipient's short- and long-term care plans, are important starting points for these interactions.⁴

5 Physicians can identify the implications of being a young caregiver and share targeted resources

Being a young carer has potential benefits such as personal growth and increased maturity.^{2,3} However, without support, providing care can affect young carers' academic performance, relationships, plans for career development and mental and physical health.^{1,2,5} Existing resources, such as peer support or respite, can aid young people in their caring role (Appendix 1, available at www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.230544/tab-related-content).²

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