

How to Align Caregiver Support With Your OHT Priorities Featuring Couchiching OHT

September 23, 2026

Land Acknowledgement

The OCO carries out its work while acknowledging the Indigenous Peoples of all the lands that we are on today. *This land is home to many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and acknowledging reminds us that our great standard of living is directly related to the resources and friendship of Indigenous people.*

Today's session

- ✓ About the OCO
- ✓ Impact of caregiving
- ✓ The critical role of caregivers
- ✓ Integrating caregivers across Couchiching OHT
- ✓ Chronic Disease Hub Pathway

Today's Presenters

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Executive Director
Couchiching
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Caregiver, PFCN
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Chronic Disease
Manager, Couchiching
Family Health Team

**Bianca
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Senior Project Lead,
Strategic Partnerships
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**Alia
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Implementation Lead
Essential Care Partner
Support Hub



What OCO Offers

Free Caregiver Support

Programs, services and resources co-designed with caregivers.

Collaborations and Partnerships

Work together to support caregivers locally and provincially.

Provider Support

Guidance and resources to identify, include and support caregivers as essential partners in care.

Guidance for Employers and Workplaces

Help develop caregiver inclusive cultures, practices and policies at work.



Ontario's Caregivers at a Glance



4.2 million in Ontario
Expected to increase to 6.5 million by 2030



From every age group:

- 16-25 years – 14%
- 26-45 years – 35%
- 46-65 years – 36%
- 65+ years – 15%



Gender:

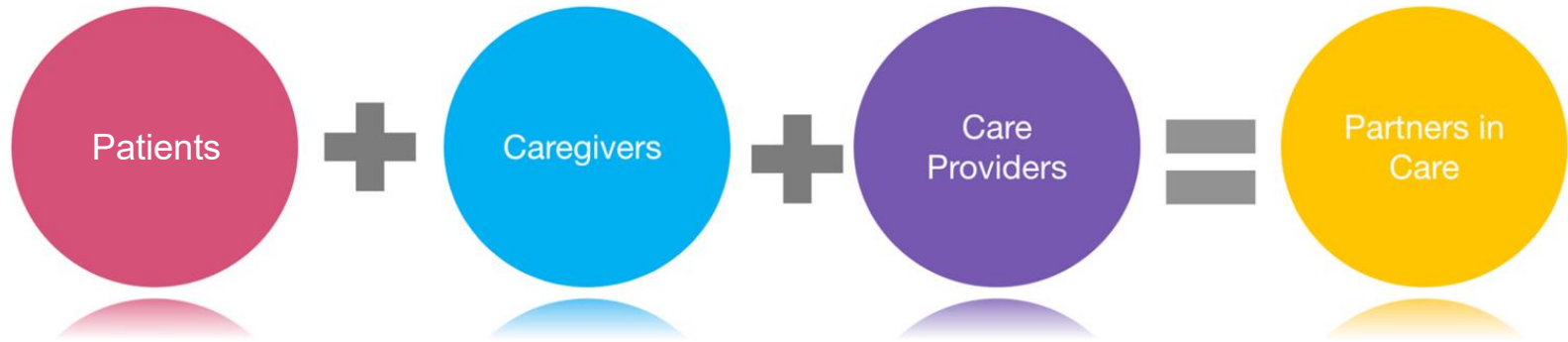
- Women – 52%
- Men – 46%
- Non-binary – 2%



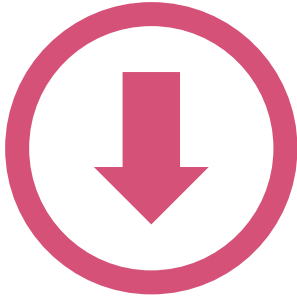
70% are employed



4.2 million caregivers across Ontario provide up to 90% of care in the system



Caregivers change outcomes



Caregiver involvement reduces:

- Readmission rates (HEC, 2020)
- Falls and injuries due to falls (IPFCC)
- Psychological comorbidities (including post-intensive care syndrome)
(Hochendoner et al., 2021; Munshi et al., 2021)
- Length of ICU stays (Munshi et al., 2021)



Caregiver involvement increases:

- Medication adherence (HEC, 2020)
- Understanding of discharge instructions
(Munshi et al., 2021)
- Sustained cognitive function for older adults (HEC, 2020)
- Earlier detection and treatment of cognitive changes (IPFCC)

Impacts of caregiving



Time

34% provide more than 10 hours of care per week



Work-Life Balance

43% have considered quitting their job to provide care



Finances

1 in 4 have taken out a loan or are using line of credit



Health & Wellness

32% say they're not coping well mentally or emotionally.

Caregiver Distress Continues to Rise

Insights from 2025 Spotlight Report



69%

feel so burnt out they
don't know if they can
keep going



72%

say they can't maintain
their own healthy
behaviours



76%

are concerned they will
not be able to handle
their caregiving duties
going forward



1 in 5

visited the Emergency
Room as a form of
respite

Impacts on care recipients

Caregiver burden negatively affects outcomes for care recipients.

It is associated with:

- Worse clinical and mental health outcomes
(Bidwell et al, 2017)
- Long-Term Care home placement for older adults and persons with dementia (Wolff et al., 2018; Cepoiu-Martin et al., 2016)
- Increased ER visits and unnecessary hospital admissions
(American Society on Aging, 2020; Ankuda et al., 2017)



Caregivers as ‘collateral casualties’

“Caregiving is an under-recognized, under-addressed contextual factor that significantly influences the health of recipients and caregivers”

(Leykum LK et al., 2022)



- Caregivers are at greater risk for **poor health outcomes**
(Shulz & Sherwood, 2008)
- Caregivers are more likely to have **impaired personal health behaviours** (Burton et al., 2003)
- Up to a third of caregivers view their own health as **fair or poor**
(Friedman et al, 2021)
- Caregivers self-report **worse health with increasing duration of caregiving** (Del Pino Desado, 2019)

Aligning caregiver support and inclusion with OHT priorities



Couchiching OHT



Aligning Caregiver Support within the COHT

September 23, 2026

**Shared Wisdom.
Better Care.**



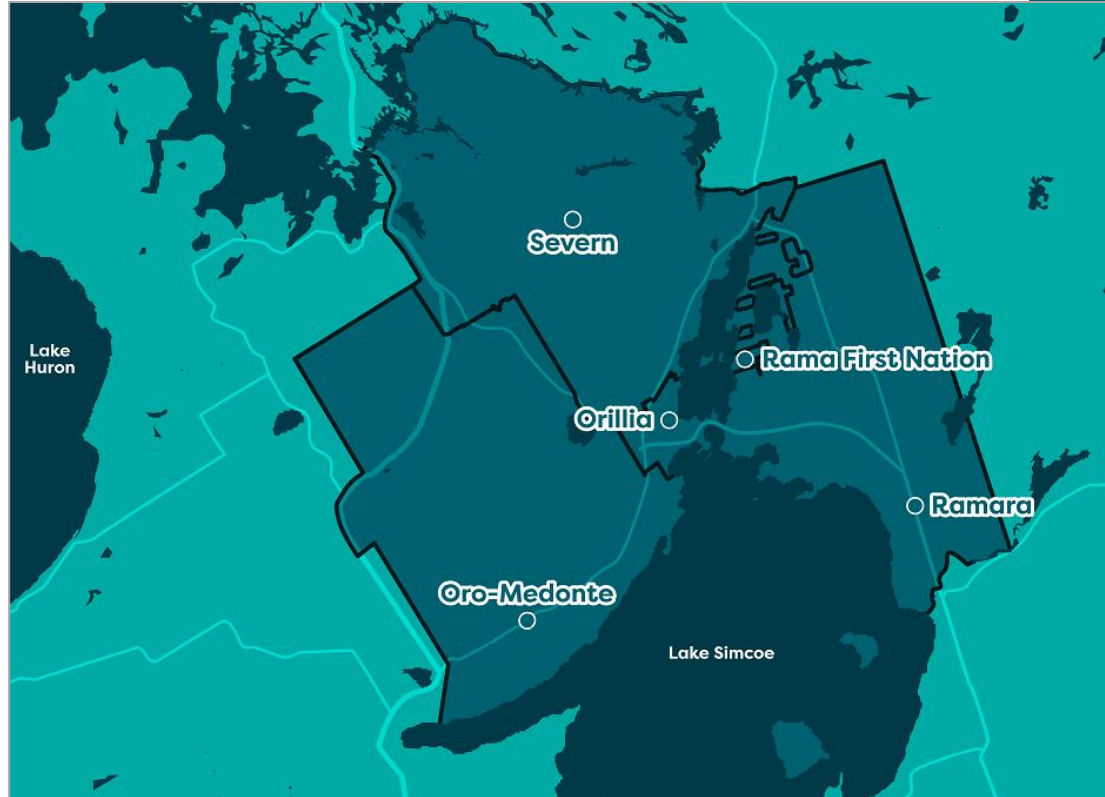
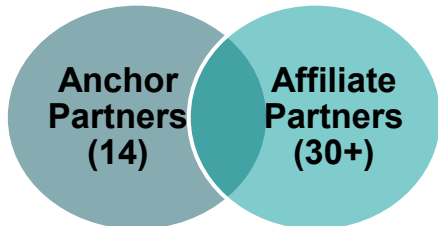
Who is the Couchiching OHT?



Our Ontario Health Team spans
across
Orillia, Oro-Medonte, Ramara,
Severn & the Chippewas of
Rama First Nation

Attributable population of:
~63,000

Geographical population of:
~100,000*



**Does not include influx from seasonal residents*

Our Joint Executive Team



Our Broader COHT Family



Our Ontario Health Team is made up of over 30+ community organizations that are committed and ready to inform our goals and objectives for integrated care for our community.



- Alzheimer's Society
- Barrie and Area Native Advisory Circle (BANAC)
- Bayshore Home Health
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Carepartners
- Central OHT for Specialized Populations
- Champlain Manor
- City of Orillia
- COHT Patient Family Caregiver Network
- Community Networks of Specialized Care
- Couchiching Family Health Team
- County of Simcoe (Health & Emergency Services)
- Crossfit Orillia
- Elizabeth Fry Society & Ethen's Place
- Empower Simcoe
- Entite 4
- Geriatric Outreach Team
- Green Haven
- Going with Gibb
- Health System Performance Network
- Healthline
- Helping Hands Orillia
- Huronia Nurse Practitioner Led Clinic
- Independent Living Services
- Lighthouse
- LOFT
- Mariposa House Hospice
- Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
- North Simcoe Muskoka Hospice Palliative Care Network
- Oak Terrace Nursing Home (Revera Inc.)
- Ontario Caregivers Organization (OCO)
- Ontario Health – Central Region
- Ontario Health at Home
- Ontario Telemedicine Network
- Ontario Osteoporosis Strategy NSM
- Ontario Works. County of Simcoe
- Orillia and Area Physician Recruitment & Retention Committee
- ParaMed
- Primary Care Network
- ProResp (North - Simcoe County & Muskoka)
- Rama First Nation
- Severn Township
- SGS
- Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU)
- Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital
- Telecare Distress Line
- Township of Oro-Medonte
- Trillium Manor
- Vital Aire
- VON

COHT Shared Purpose



We are one community that is committed to improving health and wellness. Together we will achieve our goal through system co-design, in a culturally safe and meaningful way.

All my relations – Tous lies – Mitakuye-Oyasin



Couchiching
Ontario Health Team

COHT Patient, Family, and Caregiver Network

**Shared Wisdom.
Better Care.**



Patient, Family, and Caregiver Network



Purpose

Through **co-design** and belief in our **shared purpose**, the Couchiching Ontario Health Team's (COHT) Patient Family Caregiver Network (PFCN) works with the COHT on the following:

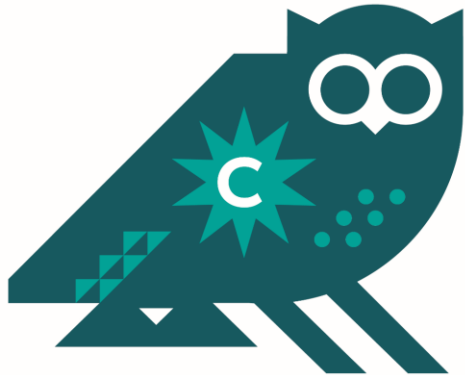
- Shaping and designing seamless healthcare services that meet the needs of patients, families, and caregivers
- Providing valuable recommendations on matters impacting the patient, family and caregivers of our region
- Giving voice to patients, families, and caregivers through equal voting membership on our Joint Executive Team (JET)
- Represent diverse experiences, lived experience, and a wide variety of backgrounds

Giving Voice to Caregivers



- Co-design with PFCN is at the heart of all our projects at the COHT
- As new initiatives and projects are proposed, we look to have the PFCN voice at the table from the start to ensure we are always considering our initiatives from the patient, family, and caregiver lens

**How does
integrating
patient, family
and caregiver
voices fit within
our COHT areas of
focus?**



Areas of Focus



**Making Couchiching
the place where
people want to live,
work and receive
care**



**Developing scaled and
sustainable care that
enables population
health and wellbeing
for our community**



**Strengthening collaborative leadership
and governance by committing to
shared priorities across each
organization and to achieve
population health impact**

PFCN Governance



- PFCN utilizes a co-chair model
 - The co-chairs have one vote at the Joint Executive Team table
- Two (2) PFCN members sit on all committees, which is recommended by Ontario Health

**Patient, Family,
Caregiver Network
(PFCN) Participation
in the COHT Tables**

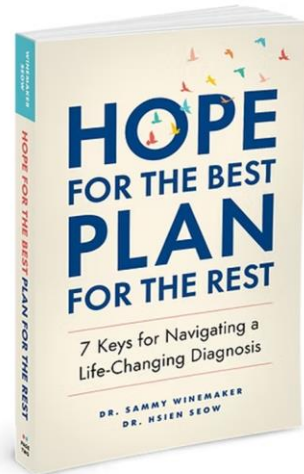


For details about the committee or workgroup and PFCN representation, see the specific terms of reference.

PFCN Initiatives

Waiting Room Revolution (WRR)

- The WRR is a patient empowerment social movement
- Based on the book Hope for the Best and Plan for the Rest, by Drs. Siow & Dr. Winemaker
- Education resource for patients, families, & caregivers to navigate the health care system with more confidence when facing a potentially life-limiting illness or chronic progressive condition
- Interested folks attend an Ambassador Training Program & then deliver the Program to Service Clubs & other groups in the Couchiching Area
- Co-lead by COHT PFCN and Hospice Orillia



PFCN Initiatives



OCO SCALE Together Program

- COHT PFCN is working alongside OCO to bring in-person SCALE Together groups to Couchiching
- Groups will be facilitated by 2 Social Workers from the following organizations:
 - Mariposa House Hospice
 - North Simcoe Muskoka Hospice Palliative Care Network
 - Alzheimer's Society of Simcoe County

PFCN Initiatives



Annual Caregiver Appreciation Day

- Variety of topics and useful tools to support and recognize the incredible work our caregivers provide
- In March of 2026, expanded to include Caregiver Awareness, bringing in caregivers and service providers to enhance learning and understanding

Chronic Disease Hub

- Co-designed a group program for new and existing patients and their caregivers
- Purpose is to ensure support along the chronic disease journey for both patients and caregivers. More to come from Thomas Jilek!

Integrating Caregivers into the Chronic Disease Hub Pathway

Couchiching Family Health Team



Chronic Disease Hub – Identifying the Need for Caregiver Integration

- High burden on caregivers to support their loved ones living with chronic diseases like COPD or heart failure
 - 69% of caregivers feel so burnt out they don't know if they can keep going
 - Many of the interactions with Hub clinical team members is with the caregiver!
- No formal pathway for caregiver identification and support navigation within Chronic Disease Hub

Chronic Disease Hub – Initiation of Caregiver Support

- In partnership with Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care, a mental health pathway project explored how to support patients AND caregivers
- Project took place between October 2024 and March 2025



Background: Run by the Couchiching Ontario Health Team (COHT), the Chronic Disease Hub (CDH) provides comprehensive and integrated care for patients living with Congestive Heart Failure (CHF) and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) within the Couchiching region in Ontario Health Central.

Project: Despite high prevalences of anxiety and depression in patients with COPF & CHF, no formal mental health support was in place at the CDH. The CDH endeavored to address this gap by collaborating with Mental Health Clinicians from the Couchiching Family Health Team and consultants from Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care starting in October 2024.

Depression is 3 times higher in patients with CHF than the general population³

25-40% of patients with COPD have depressive symptoms^{1,2}

20-55% of COPD & CHF patients have anxiety symptoms^{2,4}

Anxiety & depression led to a greater risk of mortality for patients with COPD & CHF and increase the likelihood of COPD patients being hospitalized^{5,6}.

32% of caregivers are not coping well and 72% feel so burnt out they are not sure how they will continue⁷

Integrated and comprehensive mental health care for patients with COPD & CHF and their caregivers is essential to reducing acute care use and improving quality of life.

Methods: The results below were realized using the following methods

1. Guideline review
2. Collaboration and co-design with patient representatives and staff
3. Environmental scan of similar programs & informational interviews with experts in chronic disease & mental health.
4. Literature review

Orientation session

- Co-developed orientation session to provide mental health and chronic condition education to all new patients and caregivers at the CDH,
- Created a resource package with 40+ community resources, a promotional flyer & 4 other documents to support the session

Results

Supports

- Recommended a basket of training options for staff to increase mental health knowledge and skills.
- Created a suicidality risk algorithm for staff to use, when indicated
- Proposed metrics and developed an evaluation plan

Pathway

- Made recommendations for updating anxiety and depression screening & identification using best practice and guideline recommendations.
- Developed an algorithm for staff to refer & navigate identified patients to appropriate and available resources.



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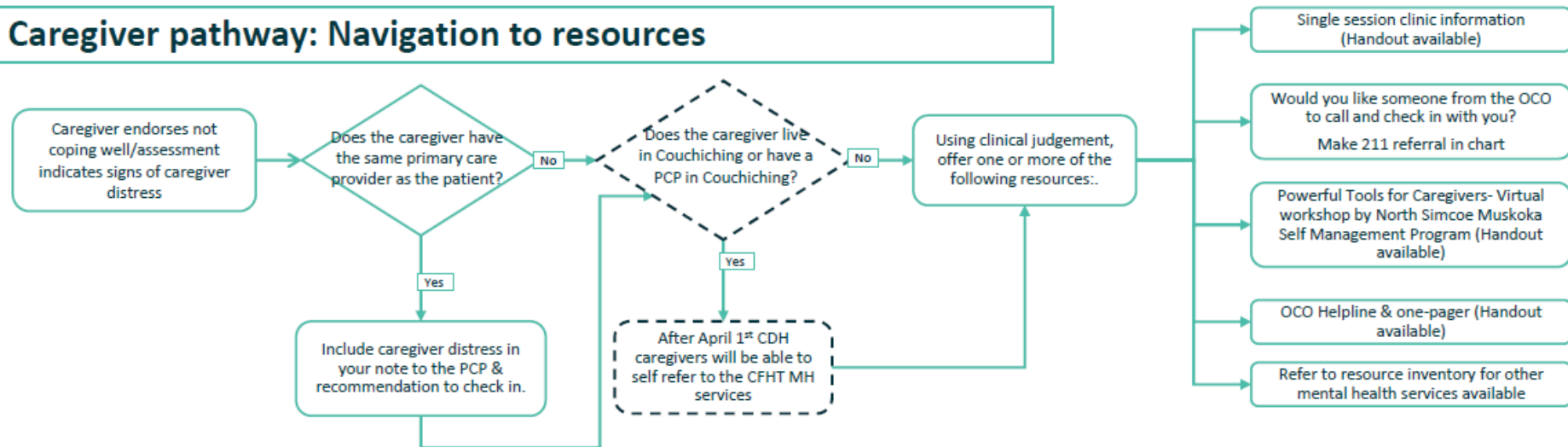
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Chronic Disease Hub – Caregiver pathway

Caregiver pathway: Navigation to resources



Chronic Disease Hub – Orientation Group

In-person and pre-recorded orientation for both patients and caregivers for COPD and Heart Failure



- Introduction to team members, clinic function, who & when to call
- Disease education and symptom monitoring to support patient
- Discussion of “action plan” to identify who to call when patient symptoms worsen
- Provide caregiver resource package, including OCO’s “I am a Caregiver” Toolkit and other local caregiver resources

Project outcomes

- Increased caregiver focus
 - Normalize asking "How are you managing/coping?"
 - Noticeable mindset shift – caregivers are part of the care team
- Increased awareness of caregiver supports through OCO and local programs to both staff and caregivers
- Adoption of caregiver integration across CFHT programs

Caregiver Focused Evaluations

Chronic Disease Hub caregiver statistics for April 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026:

- 383 caregivers identified accompanying patient in clinic appointments
- 78 caregivers accepted additional resources during appointments
- 16 caregivers attended in-person Chronic Disease Hub Orientation groups
 - Winter 2025: transitioned to pre-recorded sessions with linked provided to patients and caregivers

What did we learn?

Key Success Factors

- Involvement of local Patient, Family, Caregiver Network members in strategic plan and program co-design
- Smaller project groups and leadership buy-in dedicated to push the work forward
- Creation of practical caregiver supports and resources
- Increasing clinical team confidence and buy-in
- Integrated pathway within Chronic Disease Hub to simplify navigation

What did we learn?

Challenges

- Identifying and engaging caregivers, not all identify as needing support
- Balancing priorities and getting team buy in
- Determining scope and value of an organization specific caregiver resource
- Time and resources to design dedicated caregiver pathways
- Clinical team hesitancy with adopting caregiver pathway
- Clinical team awareness of available resources



What did we learn?

Lessons Learned

- Respond to emerging community needs with increasing support for caregivers
- Engage caregivers directly in program design earlier for more user-centered initiatives
- Map workflows and responsibilities upfront to streamline implementation
- Build structured evaluation measures from the start to track uptake and outcomes

What's next?

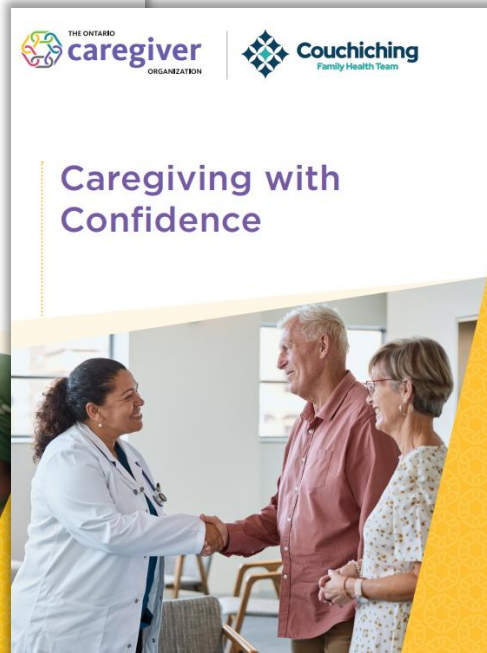
- Spread and scale of caregiver pathway work from Chronic Disease Hub to other programs
- Embedding caregiver identification into clinical pathways across all CFHT programs as standard process
- Continuing to revisit with a quality improvement lens to determine impact

Questions?



**We want to hear
from you. Type
your questions in
the chat box!**

Resources for OHTs



**Caregiver Support
Pathway Resource –
coming soon!**

[Visit Caregivers and Ontario Health Teams to Learn More](#)

Key Take-Aways

- **Meaningful engagement of caregivers**
- **Opportunities for early caregiver identification**
- **Enabling caregiver support**
- **Caregiver oriented events**
- **Connect with your community partners to implement caregiver support programs**



Contact OCO to help you integrate caregivers in your OHT Plans

Sign up for our OHT mailing list!



CONTACT US

Reach out to connect with us!
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www.ontariocaregiver.ca

@CaregiverON



THANK YOU!



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