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## **Estimated contribution made by unpaid caregivers in 2009 estimated at \$25 billion dollars.**

Researchers call for:

1. a review of supports family members need to continue caring for their loved ones
2. adequate resources to ensure a reasonable balance between the roles of unpaid caregivers and paid health care providers

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A study entitled "*Who Cares, and How Much: The Imputed Economic Contribution to the Canadian Health Care System of Middle Aged and Older Unpaid Caregivers Providing Care to the Elderly*" sheds important new light on these topics and was published in the journal *Healthcare Quarterly* today. The lead authors, Dr. Marcus Hollander a health policy researcher and Neena Chappell of the University of Victoria note that the findings in this study provide new and important information for policy makers on the contribution made by unpaid caregivers. They note that a conservative estimate of this contribution, for 2009, amounts to some \$25 billion dollars, if one were to directly substitute paid care for the unpaid care provided by family members and friends. They are, however, quick to point out that while unpaid caregivers make a significant contribution to Canadian society "they do so, by and large willingly." The authors note that while the study points to the economic contribution of unpaid caregivers it would not be appropriate to simply substitute paid care for unpaid care. Family members generally prefer to provide care themselves, rather than have paid care providers come into their homes and do it for them. Thus, it is noted that in light of the contribution made by unpaid caregivers, governments may wish to review the kinds of supports, such as respite care and additional home care services, which would allow family members to have the support they need to continue caring for their loved ones for as long as is both desirable and feasible. It is also important to stress that adequate resources need to be maintained in the formal or paid health care system to ensure a reasonable balance between the role of unpaid caregivers and paid health care providers, as the contribution of unpaid caregivers is already significant.

The findings of the study are based on the 2002 General Social Survey and the 2007 Labour Force Survey. Both surveys were conducted by Statistics Canada. Cost data were projected to 2009 to provide up to date estimates.

### **Additional background:**

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Recently, the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada presented the Caring Canadian Award to 37 volunteers from across Canada. These volunteers were truly deserving of this honour. There is, however, another group "the unsung of the unsung" who selflessly provide care day in and day out to family members and friends. They are referred to as family caregivers or unpaid caregivers. These dedicated individuals are often invisible and may include your friends, family members

or neighbours. They provide a range of services such as meal preparation, feeding, shopping, banking, bathing, toileting, and other such tasks, which allow seniors with longer term health care needs to function independently, and avoid institutionalization. While Canadians are aware of this type of unpaid caregiving, there is relatively little information about what services are provided, to what extent, and what contribution unpaid caregivers actually make to the Canadian health care system.

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## COMMENTS

**From Tom Closson**, President of the Ontario Hospital Association: "This research demonstrates how fortunate we are in Canada to live in such a caring society. Looking to the future, we need to clearly define the role government should play in supporting families and their friends as they care for their loved ones. "

**From Michael Decter**, Chair of *Saint Elizabeth* Health Care: "Valuable and fascinating research with real implications for home care and broader social policy."

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## SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

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**About *Healthcare Quarterly***

[\*Healthcare Quarterly\*](#) is a Canadian journal that focuses on best practices, policy, innovation, and applied research, in the administration of healthcare. Readers of the journal include governments, administrators, academics, insurers, suppliers and policy analyst. [\*Healthcare Quarterly\*](#) is edited by Dr. Peggy Leatt of the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

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