

Planning For What the Unknown Future Holds



**Family Caregivers
of British Columbia**

— Let us help —



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We don't have to like aging, illness and disability and what it may bring, but we can make caregiving more manageable with planning

Source author: Rick Lauber is a former co-caregiver, a published book author, and an established freelance writer. Lauber has written two books, *Caregivers Guide for Canadians* and *The Successful Caregivers Guide* as valuable resources for prospective, new, and current caregivers.

When it comes to caregiving, many of us regrettably fail to plan. We rarely imagine the day will come when the people we knew to be healthy and/or supported will suddenly require care. For this reason, many family members stumble awkwardly into their caregiving role, becoming overwhelmed by the sudden onset of unexpected caregiving responsibilities, and struggling to navigate their caregiving role as a result. This messy entry point into caregiving, however, doesn't need to be the norm. By examining our underlying belief systems and our relationship with aging, illness and death, we can open the conversation on these very normal, human experiences, and better prepare ourselves for when we'll need to step into a caregiving role.

Some of the reasons we end up unprepared for our caregiving role include:

- Stubbornness or denial (on behalf of an elderly person) to admitting their aging, weakening, or health concerns to their family.
- Discomfort (on a family member's behalf) to discussing sensitive subjects like aging, illness and end-of-life plans with their loved one.
- Awkwardness (from all involved) to ask for help from others. Asking for help often feels emotionally confronting as it can represent an acceptance or giving in to one's health concerns. This is challenging for the care recipient who is surrendering their identity of being a healthy and/or autonomous person, and often equally challenging for the family member or friend whose call for help in their caregiving role acknowledges the truth of their loved one's change in health and/or level of independence.
- Uncontrollable circumstances such as the sudden onset of a debilitating disease, accidents or unexpected health events, as well as social

determinants of health that may limit one's ability to prepare for a caregiving role.

The future is full of unknowns, and it's impossible to plan for everything, however by starting the conversation on care needs for an aging family member early on, we set ourselves up for a smoother transition into the caregiving role.

These important matters may be discussed verbally but writing them down as a formal plan can be more beneficial in the long run. While a well-written care plan can take some time and effort to create, it offers the opportunity to tailor the plan to the needs of the caregiver and care recipient alike, providing a roadmap for caregiving that offers the greatest support while minimizing emotional and physical stress.

Make a list of caregiving tasks and share those responsibilities – by creating a circle of care for caregiving one person doesn't have to do everything.

To get started it is often helpful to start with a rough outline. Consider brainstorming together with your family on the following topics:



Evaluating

What is wanted/needed? Is this realistic or achievable? Can something be done, adapted, and/or enjoyed in a different way than before? (Refer to the "Understanding Caregiver Needs" worksheet for help in evaluating caregiver needs.)



Applying

Once a care plan is in place, the next step is recognizing when it is time to implement it. Family caregivers often fail to recognize that they have begun taking on caregiving responsibilities, and so it is important to reflect regularly on any help you may have begun offering to your family member and whether it is time to implement some of the strategies laid out in your care plan. (Refer to the "Are you a Family Caregiver?" checklist to see what activities are associated with taking on a caregiving role.)



Working Together

Caregiving alone is rarely sustainable, and we encourage caregivers to consider the idea of creating a circle of care for caregiving. Think about which family members, friends, and community members can be invited to help with caregiving. It can be useful to identify specific roles that people can take on (such as help with shopping, appointments, meals, etc.) as well as someone other than the primary caregiver that can take the lead with organizing tasks and communicating with other members of the circle. It's also important to consider what supports from healthcare and community agencies will be available for when the need arises. Lastly, it's important to have a contingency plan of who to call or what to do if something were to happen to the caregiver.



Assessing

As you embark upon your caregiving journey it is important to have regular check-ins, with yourself, your circle of care for caregivers, and the care recipient. By monitoring results, you can determine whether the outcomes from following your care plan are satisfactory for everyone involved. Care plans are meant to be flexible, and so if you realize that there may be a better way of doing something, you can edit your care plan to better suit current needs. Flexibility is key, and by assessing your situation regularly you'll be able to successfully adapt to changing circumstances and maintain greater resilience in your caregiving role.

A caregiving plan should also feel attainable. By starting off with smaller, achievable goals you'll be able to build the confidence necessary to sustain your role. This is especially useful when learning to ask for help. Many of us worry about placing a burden on our family and friends, but by starting with smaller asks (such as help with groceries or a friendly phone call) we can learn that people are often very willing to help and are eager to support in other ways. By increasing our comfort level with asking for help, we'll be able to find greater success in establishing a circle of care for caregiving.

Finally, it's important to bring sensitivity and patience to the topic of caregiving. Everyone involved is being asked to take on a new identity and are stepping into new roles. For the care recipient, coming to terms with aging and

illness, along with their reduced sense of autonomy is a huge life transition. By keeping this in mind, caregivers can strive to communicate and honour the needs of the care recipient in a way that upholds their independence and brings meaning and purpose to their lives. Similarly, caregivers need to exercise patience and compassion with themselves. Caregiving is hard work, physically, mentally and emotionally. By being kind to yourself and making self-care a part of your care plan you can set yourself up for success over the long run. This also means knowing when to reach out to others, be it to assist with caregiving, for social connection, or to access more formal supports to help you maintain your mental and emotional wellbeing. At the end of the day, we don't have to like aging, illness and disability and what it may bring, but we can make caregiving more manageable with planning.



“In my own deepening understanding of myself I find my capacity to serve others is deepened as well. The better I am at self-care the more genuinely nurturing of others I am able to be.”

— Mary Anne Radmacher

We are here to support you.

For caregiving-related questions and support, [call our toll-free line \(BC\) at 1-877-520-3267](tel:1-877-520-3267). We are available Mon-Fri, 8:30 am- 4 pm. Depending on your situation and needs, the next steps could include further one-on-one support with a [Caregiver Coach](#) or Caregiver Specialist.

To receive news and information by email, [sign up](#) for our Caregiver Connect newsletter and monthly enews. Visit our online [Caregiver Learning Centre](#) for resources and tools to support you on your journey.

[Join a family caregiver support group](#). We are continually expanding our list of community caregiver support groups around BC. Call our toll-free Caregiver Support Line, to find one near you and get together with people who “get it”. Learn from other family caregivers and share your advice to help others.

Doing everything on your own can make you feel like you’re alone. It helps to have someone to talk to.

Family Caregiving: Don’t do it alone.

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Visit your online Caregiver Resource Centre:

www.familycaregiversbc.ca



Family Caregivers of British Columbia

— Let us help —

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We are grateful for the contributions from the **Caregiver Diversity Initiative Working Group** members:

