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Older Canadians

Worried about your health as you age? Create a care plan

A care plan helps families understand and budget for the different types of care an older adult may need.



As the population ages, more Canadians are concerned about their health and the well-being of their elderly loved ones.

According to the National Institute on Ageing (NIA), at Toronto Metropolitan University, the number of Canadians over the age of 85 is expected to reach 2.6 million by 2050, up from around 844,000 in 2021. Research from the NIA also projects that long-term-care costs will more than triple, to \$71 billion by 2050, compared to about \$22 billion in 2019.

According to a [Statistics Canada report](#), approximately one in four Canadians aged 15 and older care for or help someone with a long-term health condition, or a physical or mental disability, or someone who has problems related to aging.

While there are benefits to caregiving, such as getting closer to a loved one and giving back, the StatsCan report says it can also have "an impact on a person's physical and mental health, as well as their financial situation."

How a care plan helps

As more Canadians enter their senior years, it's increasingly important for them to have a care plan to help manage their lives and those of their loved ones.

A care plan is similar to a financial plan but with a focus on ensuring a person's care needs are met, according to their wishes, should they become seriously ill.

Planning helps ease the mental and financial burden for the person who is ill and for their care partners, says Audrey Miller, managing director of [Elder Caring Inc.](#), a care management company.

"Discussing options and costs allows a family to plan and be proactive in their aging journey," says Miller, who founded the company in 2004 after noticing a growing professional need to support families and their care partners. Elder Caring Inc. helps assess living situations for seniors and makes recommendations about living well, whether at home or in assisted-living settings.

"Anyone who's been through the aging journey themselves or with parents knows it's completely unpredictable," says Miller, who's a registered social worker and Canadian Certified Life Care Planner (CCLCP). "Many people don't know where to start. They don't know what resources are available."

Elder-care planning often begins when a loved one is diagnosed with a serious disease such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's and there's an immediate need to find care services to support them.

However, Miller says planning can and should begin much earlier—for instance, when a senior develops minor health issues. It can start with proactive steps such as bringing in an occupational therapist to ensure their home is as safe as possible. This can include removing tripping hazards or installing handrails in bathrooms and other necessary places.

Discussing care needs with a family helps to determine what type of assistance is needed, either from a family member, paid companion, personal support worker or nurse. Then as their condition worsens, whether aging in place continues to be an option.

"It's about presenting options to families, so they can make informed decisions," Miller says.

The aging individual in question should always be part of the planning process, when possible, Miller says. She encourages seniors to make their own care plans and share them with their adult children so they understand their parents' wishes if they develop a serious illness in the future.

"We're committed to providing our clients a high level of care from our advisors during their changing life stages," says [Leanne Kaufman](#), president and CEO, [RBC Royal Trust](#). "We want our clients to know they can come to us for sound, long-term financial planning. Focusing on a broader healthy aging strategy and partnering with Elder Caring Inc. enables us to do that."

Building an individualized plan

Most people have different care needs and wishes, which is why Miller recommends people develop plans that cater to their individual circumstances.

"I help my clients make sense of things—and what's right for one person's mother may not necessarily be right for someone else's," she says.

Miller suggests working with a professional elder-care specialist who understands and has experience with the healthcare system, including the various living and care options for seniors. These professionals can provide information and guidance in areas such as the benefits and challenges of aging in place and when it might be time to move a loved one to an alternate care setting.

Miller often discusses with clients what she refers to as "the three Cs"—care, cost and choice—when it comes to selecting the right retirement residence.

- **Care:** Looks at whether the loved one's condition is chronic, temporary, progressive or palliative, which will determine the type of care needed
- **Cost:** Considers all expenses that are included (and what's not included), as well as your own current living expenses
- **Choice:** This relates to the location, including proximity to family, friends, physicians, as well as whether the place caters to personal needs and tastes—for example if it's pet friendly or offers vegetarian food options.

Miller encourages families to visit the residences first and consider trial stays before uprooting a loved one.

"Too often, I receive calls a few short weeks or months after a move has been made that the facility can no longer accommodate the person," she says, which is stressful for the family and, of course, the older individual.

Combining health planning and wealth planning

Having a care plan also helps families understand and budget for the different types of care an older adult may need.

"Once you're in a crisis, you're reacting and not in the best position to be proactive," Miller says.

She recommends families have conversations about care needs with their loved ones and build a plan, long before it's likely to be needed.

"Talk about what's available, talk about costs, talk to other family members," she says. "Start the conversation—the earlier the better. It doesn't help to wait."

Health and wealth go hand in hand, says [David Agnew](#), chief executive officer at RBC Wealth Management Canada. "Now is the time to help our clients prepare for the healthcare and lifestyle costs associated with living longer, as well as the implications of wealth transfer to their partner or spouse and the next generation."

Having a plan also makes aging, or watching a loved one go through it, less daunting, adds Miller.

"It demystifies it a bit," she says. "People feel so much better when they've figured out that they have the beginnings of a plan. It helps people to know that there are some options."

Adds Miller: "Success for me comes at the end of a wellness consultation with a client and they breathe a sigh of relief and say, 'Thank you. I feel so much better.'"

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