

More than half of women provide care to children and care-dependent adults in Canada, 2022

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In 2022, more than half of women aged 15 and older (52% or almost 8.4 million women) provided some form of care to children and care-dependent adults, whether paid or unpaid. Regardless of whether they cared for children or adults, women were significantly more likely than men (42%) to provide care. Furthermore, women were more likely than men to report negative impacts from caregiving, such as feeling tired, worried or anxious.

Over the past several years, researchers, policy makers, and advocates have called for more attention to Canada's care economy—the sector of the economy that involves providing paid and unpaid care work to children under the age of 15 and adults with long-term conditions and disabilities. [Population aging in Canada](#) continues to put pressure on health and home care services, and the COVID-19 pandemic has shown the importance of the care economy to the health, well-being, and economic prosperity of Canadians. This is also a global issue, with the International Labour Organization estimating 2.3 billion people globally will need care by 2030. It is critical to understand and recognize the care economy's contribution to Canada's economy and how it affects individuals in Canadian society.

The sixth cycle of the Canadian Social Survey (CSS), released today, focused on well-being and caregiving. The data were gathered from July 25, 2022, to August 28, 2022. The results presented here highlight the experiences and challenges faced by those who provided care to children and to care-dependent adults in the previous 12 months, with a particular focus on unpaid care.

Just over 3 in 10 Canadians provide care to children, and almost one-quarter do so for adults with long-term conditions or disabilities

In 2022, just over 3 in 10 people in Canada were involved in looking after or providing some form of care to children under the age of 15 (31%). Specifically, 3% were involved in paid care work for children, while 29% were unpaid caregivers (1% provided care in both unpaid and paid settings).

At the same time, just under one-quarter of people in Canada aged 15 and older (23%) provided care to care-dependent adults aged 15 and older: 3% provided paid care and 21% were unpaid caregivers for adults (less than 1% provided care in both unpaid and paid settings).



Table 1
Proportions of people aged 15 and older who provided care in the past 12 months, by gender and type of care, 2022

	Total	Men	Women
	%		
Total care of children	31.3	27.2	35.3
Paid care of children	2.9	1.2	4.5
Unpaid care of children	29.3	26.4	32.2
Total care of adults	23.4	20.4	26.4
Paid care of adults	2.9	1.4	4.3
Unpaid care of adults	21.0	19.1	22.9

Note(s): Paid and unpaid care are not mutually exclusive categories.

Source(s): Canadian Social Survey (5354), Wave 6, 2022.

Women provide the majority of unpaid care

There were also gender differences among unpaid caregivers, with nearly one-third of women (32%) looking after or providing unpaid care to children and almost one-quarter providing unpaid care to adults with long-term conditions or disabilities (23%). These proportions were higher than those of men, with 26% of men looking after or providing unpaid care for children and 19% doing so for adults with long-term conditions or disabilities.

Furthermore, 6% of all those providing unpaid care are considered dual caregivers (also known as "sandwich caregivers"); that is, they are caring for both children and care-dependent adults at the same time. Again, women were more likely to provide dual care than men (7% versus 5%).

Unpaid care changes across the life cycle

Adults aged 25 to 54 were more likely than those in other age groups to care for children under the age of 15. The age group most likely to be providing such care was those aged 35 to 44 (60%). The next most likely age group to be providing care to children under the age of 15 was people aged 25 to 34 (34%), followed by those aged 45 to 54 (33%). In each of these age groups, women were more likely than men to look after or provide unpaid care to children.

When it comes to the relationship to the care receiver, unpaid caregivers of children were most likely to care for their own children (63%), followed by grandchildren (21%), nieces or nephews (8%), or the children of a friend or neighbour (6%).

As expected, the caregiver's relationship to the care receiver changed across the life cycle. Specifically, among adults aged 35 to 44, the vast majority of unpaid caregivers (94%) cared for their own children, but the proportion dropped to 16% among those aged 55 to 64. For older caregivers, the percentage caring for grandchildren increased. For example, 10% of caregivers aged 45 to 54 cared for their grandchildren, compared with 76% for those aged 55 to 64. Moreover, for those aged 65 and older, the vast majority cared for their own grandchildren (93%).

In terms of the unpaid care of adults with long-term conditions or disabilities, caregivers were most often aged 55 to 64 (34%) and 45 to 54 (26%). Once again, women were more likely to provide unpaid care to care-dependent adults than men in these age groups. However, among adults aged 65 and older, the gender gap closed—about 23% of men and 24% of women provided care to care-dependent adults.

Table 2
Proportions of people providing unpaid care to children and adults in the past 12 months, by age groups and gender, 2022

	Unpaid care of children			Unpaid care of adults		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
	%					
15-24	18.1	12.1	24.7	13.3	13.0	13.6
25-34	34.2	27.7	41.3	11.0	9.7	12.3
35-44	59.5	54.8	64.1	17.2	15.1	19.2
45-54	32.9	34.7	31.1	26.3	21.1	31.5
55 to 64	17.6	15.5	19.6	33.6	31.3	36.0
65 and older	16.7	15.7	17.6	23.5	23.3	23.6

Source(s): Canadian Social Survey (5354), Wave 6, 2022.

In Canada, unpaid caregivers of care-dependent adults were most likely to provide care and support for a parent (53%). This was followed by caring for a spouse or partner (18%), a friend, colleague or neighbour (15%), other family member (14%), an adult child (12%), or a sibling (7%).

Across the life cycle of those providing unpaid care for care-dependent adults, the relationship between the caregiver and the care receiver changed. As people aged, they were more likely to care for their spouses or partners as opposed to parents. For example, 70% of unpaid caregivers aged 45 to 54 provided care to a parent, while 9% provided care for a spouse or partner. In comparison, 14% of adults aged 55 to 64 cared for a spouse or partner, as did 38% of those aged 65 and older.

Men and women perform different types of unpaid care activities

The types of care activities provided for care-dependent adults tended to vary by the gender of the caregiver. For example, among those providing unpaid care to adults, men were more likely than women to participate in house maintenance and outdoor work (61% versus 46%).

Table 3
Proportions of unpaid care activities for adults in the past 12 months, by gender, 2022

	Total	Men	Women
	%		
Transportation	70.5	71.8	69.4
Meal prep, house cleaning, laundry	59.7	56.0	62.7
House maintenance, outdoor work	52.8	60.7	46.3
Personal care	35.6	30.0	40.1
Medical treatment	33.9	29.9	37.2
Scheduling/coordinating care	43.4	37.3	48.3
Managing finances	41.7	42.6	41.0
Emotional support	80.3	76.6	83.4

Source(s): Canadian Social Survey (5354), Wave 6, 2022.

In contrast, women were more likely than men to participate in caregiving activities that often need to be completed on a regular basis or set schedule, such as providing personal care (40% versus 30%), scheduling and coordinating appointments for the care receiver (48% versus 37%) and helping with medical treatments (37% versus 30%). Women were also more likely than men to provide emotional support (83% versus 77%).

Median hours spent on unpaid care activities for care-dependent adults are highest for those caring for a partner or an adult child

Along with the regularity of some caregiving activities, the intensity of care can be measured by examining the number of hours spent on care. In 2022, unpaid caregivers for care-dependent adults spent a median of 8 hours per week providing care or support to adults with long-term conditions or disabilities, with women providing 10 hours of care compared with 6 hours for men.

The median hours spent on unpaid care tasks for adults varied depending on the relationship to the care receiver. The lowest number of weekly hours spent on unpaid care involved those caring for a friend, colleague or neighbour, at four hours per week. However, that climbed to five hours for those caring for a sibling, and eight hours for those caring for a parent. Those caring for a spouse or partner or an adult child spent the most hours on care (20 hours per week).

Care duties leave more than half of unpaid caregivers feeling tired, with many feeling worried or anxious

Despite the possible rewards of being a caregiver, unpaid care often has an impact on a person's physical and mental health. Over half (56%) of all unpaid caregivers reported feeling tired because of their caregiving responsibilities, while 44% felt worried or anxious during the past 12 months. In addition, 37% felt overwhelmed, and 3 in 10 reported that their sleep was disturbed. In contrast, 30% of unpaid caregivers reported not experiencing any impacts on their physical or mental health.

In addition to women already being more likely to be unpaid caregivers, they were also more likely to experience health consequences from their caregiving responsibilities. The impacts were greater for women across several different health-related symptoms. For example, 62% of women who provided care felt tired, compared with 48% of men. Women were also more likely than men to feel worried or anxious (50% versus 37%), overwhelmed (45% versus 27%), short-tempered or irritable (35% versus 26%), and depressed (20% versus 15%) due to their caregiving responsibilities.

Table 4
Proportions of impacts of unpaid care on caregivers of children or adults in the last 12 months, by gender, 2022

	Total	Men	Women
	%		
Feel tired	55.5	47.8	61.9
Feel worried or anxious	44.0	36.8	50.2
Feel overwhelmed	36.9	27.3	44.9
Feel lonely	13.3	9.1	16.9
Feel isolated	14.1	10.3	17.2
Feel short-tempered or irritable	30.8	26.3	34.5
Feel resentful	13.5	10.2	16.3
Feel depressed	17.5	14.8	19.8
Loss of appetite	7.9	6.9	8.8
Disturbed sleep	29.1	25.5	32.5
None	29.5	36.9	23.2

Source(s): Canadian Social Survey (5354), Wave 6, 2022.

Caregiving responsibilities can also sometimes affect employment, in terms of the caregiver's work-life balance, career or benefits. For example, 16% of unpaid caregivers (of children or adults) had to adjust their work schedule in order to be more flexible with caregiving responsibilities. Furthermore, 7% had to reduce their regular weekly work hours, while 5% were unable to work a paid job.

In summary, improving people's knowledge of paid and unpaid care is critical. So many adults undertake care of children and care-dependent adults, and their work is often invisible, but it is a crucial part of the overall Canadian economy and society. Statistics Canada is committed to further research on paid and unpaid care in Canada, the impacts of caregiving, and understanding the magnitude of the economic contribution of the care economy.

Note to readers

The Care Economy Project

As part of the content modernization of the General Social Survey (GSS), Statistics Canada is developing and implementing a data strategy to define and measure the care economy. The care economy encompasses both paid and unpaid care work, which are important when estimating the total contribution of care to Canada's economy and the impacts on Canadian society. The agency developed a conceptual framework to guide future data collection, working with national and international experts, federal government departments and non-governmental organizations. To address data gaps related to the care economy, new content was added to Wave 6 of the Canadian Social Survey (CSS) covering paid and unpaid care work and the impacts of caregiving on Canadians.

Definitions

Care economy: The sector of the economy comprising the provision of paid and unpaid care work that supports the physical, psychological, and emotional needs of care-dependent groups.

Care work: Care work consists of the activities and responsibilities involved in meeting the physical, psychological, and emotional needs of care-dependent adults and children.

Unpaid care work: Unpaid care work is care provided to care-dependent groups without explicit monetary compensation. It is often provided because of a personal relationship to family or friends or through a voluntary organization.

Paid care work: Paid care work involves care work performed for profit or pay in the social care and childcare sectors of the labour market, which provide care to care-dependent groups. Paid care is provided across a variety of settings, including private households, not-for-profit or community settings, or public or private congregate care settings (e.g., daycares, long-term care facilities, hospitals).

Care-dependent adults: Persons aged 15 and older are considered to be care-dependent if they have long-term physical or mental conditions or disabilities. These are defined as limitations to a person's ability to independently perform activities of daily life and instrumental activities of daily life, lasting or expecting to last at least six months.

Care-dependent children: Children under the age of 15 years are considered to be care-dependent due to their developmental stage and legal need for supervision. Also included are children with long-term conditions or disabilities who may require additional care across ages and developmental stages.

Dual caregiving: Dual caregiving involves providing unpaid care to both care-dependent groups—that is, to both care-dependent children (under 15 years old) and care-dependent adults (15 years and older, with a long-term condition or disability). Dual caregiving is related to, but more broadly defined than, "sandwich caregiving".

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5354](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).