



CASL

Chamber for the Advancement of Senior Living · Toronto & the GTA

The Family Caregiver's Survival Guide

You cannot pour from an empty cup — a practical plan for the person doing the caring.

General guidance for Ontario families, prepared 2026. Programs, rules, and rates change — confirm current details with a qualified professional before acting.

One in four Canadians is a caregiver. Most became one gradually, without deciding to, and most run on guilt and adrenaline far too long. This guide is for you — the daughter, son, spouse, or friend holding it together.

Recognize the warning lights

- Sleeping badly even when you have the chance to sleep.
- Irritability with the person you care for — followed by guilt about it.
- Dropping your own appointments, friendships, and checkups.
- Feeling that no one else can do it "right."

Two or more of these, most weeks, is not weakness — it is a staffing problem. You are one person doing a job that residences assign to shifts of people.

Build your bench (nobody survives solo)

- Write the job description: list every task you do in a week. You cannot delegate what you have not named.
- Match tasks to people: the sibling far away can own bills and phone calls; the neighbour can own Tuesday groceries.
- Claim public hours: request a caregiver assessment through Ontario Health atHome — respite hours exist for exactly this.
- Book respite BEFORE the breaking point: a standing afternoon off each week beats an emergency month off later.
- Join one caregiver group (online counts). Fifteen minutes with people who get it is oxygen.

The conversations that lighten the load

With siblings: share the written task list and ask each to choose, rather than assigning. With your parent: frame help as keeping YOUR health strong enough to keep caring. With yourself: "good enough care, sustainably" beats "perfect care, until I collapse."

Your own maintenance schedule

- Your own doctor and dentist appointments — booked, not postponed.
- One thing each week that is only yours — a walk, choir, hockey, coffee with a friend.
- A named backup who can take over for 72 hours if you are sick — with keys, medication list, and routine written down.
- The Emergency Folder: diagnoses, medications, doctors, insurance, POA documents — one binder, one known location.

CASL tip: respite PSWs, adult day programs, and short residence stays all exist in our network. A free CASL consultation can build your bench in a single phone call.