

This symposium will report on independently conducted studies from across Canada that have examined how the pandemic and associated public health measures have influenced resource utilization by FCGs and the older adults for whom they provide care. McAiney et al's study examines the deleterious effect of reduced services on community dwelling FCGs and the wellbeing of their family member with dementia. Parmar & Anderson examined the effect of pandemic restrictions on FCGs of frail older adults and found they were experiencing increased distress and decreased wellbeing. Flemons et al report on the experiences of FCGs managing caregiving without critical services and the effect of restrictive visiting policies and the well-being of the caregiving dyad (FCGs and family member with dementia). Finally, McGhan et al will share how FCGs evaluated the efficacy of public health measures and the public health messaging about the pandemic.

PUBLIC HEALTH MESSAGING AND MEASURES DURING COVID-19: THE EXPERIENCES OF FAMILY CAREGIVERS

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To mitigate the effects of COVID-19, Health Ministries across Canada have enacted numerous public health measures. Our mixed methods study examined the effect of COVID-19 related public health messaging and measures for family caregivers (FCGs) of people living with dementia (PLWD). Of the 230 FCGs completing the survey, most frequently used information sources were television, family/friends, and websites. FCGs over 60 more often used television, newspaper and radio versus websites and social media. FCGs rated public health messaging as good-excellent (64%) especially messaging around the disease spread, symptoms, and finding information. 46% believe the restrictions in long-term care facilities went beyond necessary with 97% reporting restrictions have negatively impacted them. 84% were willing to undertake personal protective equipment and infection control training to ensure continued access to PLWD. Focus groups highlighted concerns about continued access to PLWD, quality of care provision, and increased social isolation's impact on dementia progression.

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON FAMILY CAREGIVERS OF PERSONS LIVING WITH DEMENTIA IN THE COMMUNITY

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COVID-19 public health measures have significantly impacted persons living with dementia (PLWD) and family caregivers (FCGs). Given the restrictions on in-person services, many PLWD were not able to access their usual supports and activities, resulting in FCGs stepping in to support exercise, leisure, socialization, spirituality, and activities of daily living. At the same time, FCGs' own support networks were significantly reduced or no longer available. We conducted

in-depth qualitative interviews with 20 FCGs of PLWD in the community to explore the impact of COVID-19 on their well-being. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Caregiving during COVID-19 was described as 'draining' and 'stressful', with the support needs of PLWD increasing at a time when fewer supports were available. Reaching out to others, using technology, and setting boundaries were strategies FCGs used to cope. Despite the considerable impacts of COVID-19, FCGs of PLWD demonstrated their resilience in supporting themselves and their PLWD.

THE IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON FAMILY CAREGIVERS' CARE WORK, ANXIETY, AND LONELINESS

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Our study examined the effects of COVID-19 pandemic and public health measures on family caregivers (FCGs) of frail older adults; specifically, their care work, anxiety, and loneliness all of which are associated with decreased wellbeing. Approximately 604 FCGs completed the survey and findings evidenced COVID-19 creating two solitudes. First, 73% of FCGs for individuals living with them were providing significantly more care during COVID-19. Second, those caring for residents in congregate settings were unable to care. Both situations, community-dwelling and congregate care, increased FCG distress and decreased wellbeing. Anxiety significantly increased from 36% pre COVID-19 to 54% during COVID-19. Loneliness increased from 46% to 85%. FCGs report their mental (58%) and physical (48%) health deteriorated. The detrimental impact of the pandemic and public health measures on FCGs caring at home and in congregate care, and their related needs, need immediate attention from both the health and social systems of care.

BEYOND THE LOCKDOWN BINARY: FAMILY CAREGIVER NEEDS FOR CREATIVE SOLUTIONS DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

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As COVID-19 lockdowns began in Canada last spring, family caregivers (FCGs) of people living with dementia (PLWD) found themselves facing a catch-22: they and their family members were often most at risk of severe outcomes should they contract the virus, yet the public health measures put in place also detrimentally affected their ability to continue providing care. To understand the nuances of caregiver experiences during the pandemic, we conducted 9 focus groups with 19 FCGs of PLWD in the Calgary region in summer 2020. Caregivers reported negative outcomes resulting from decreased services for both themselves and the PLWD, including increased isolation, poor mental health, and accelerated dementia progression. Caregivers also emphasized the importance thinking beyond the binary of either locking down or opening up; rather, we must find creative solutions to safely continue providing supports to caregivers. This presentation explores FCG suggestions for balancing COVID-19 risk against caregiver needs.