

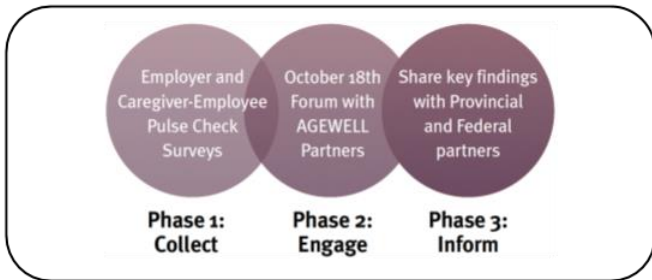


# Family care **IS** a current workforce issue

A major challenge faced by 5.6 million carer employees in Canada is maintaining employment alongside caring for an adult family member or friend with long-term health conditions, physical or mental disabilities or aging related needs. Assistive Technologies (ATs) offer potential solutions to the challenge of managing paid work alongside care work, but studies on adoption of ATs in Canadian workplaces are rare.

In the past year, the Connecting Working Caregivers (CWIC) pilot project engaged with AGEWELL partners as employers, and their carer-employees, to collect evidence about their experiences with and beliefs about how ATs can help them integrate, manage or balance paid work and care work roles.

## What did we do?



**Pulse check survey data** were collected from employers and carer-employees in 3 provinces (Alberta, BC & Ontario)

**Employers** from small to large health care, technology, professional services and non-profit organizations shared their perceptions of family care, and beliefs about and impact of ATs in the workplace

**Carer-employees** from these organizations shared their experiences juggling paid and care work and how technology could help them manage



A **knowledge mobilization** forum for stakeholders was held October 2016 at the AGE-WELL Conference with a focus on innovation for carer-friendly workplaces

# 5.6 million

There are 5.6 million caregiver-employees in Canada, making up 30% of the workforce; most work full-time.



## Our Pulse Check Surveys revealed...

- 89% of employers noted that their workplace/organization does not monitor whether any of their employees have family/friend care responsibilities
- Half of the employers in our survey underestimated the proportion of current employees that were providing family care (at less than 20% of staff)
- More than 80% of carer-employees reported working 30+ hours of paid work per week while managing family care responsibilities

## CWiC Key Messages

1. Family care **IS** a current workforce issue
2. There is a disconnect between employers' perceptions and carer-employees' realities
3. Assistive Technologies (ATs) in the workplace can support the management of paid and care work responsibilities
4. Creating carer-friendly workplaces is stakeholders' ultimate goal

# Disconnect between employers' perceptions and carer-employees' realities

According to Statistics Canada's 2012 General Social Survey on caring, 30% of the Canadian workforce are carer-employees. Yet surveyed employers estimated that less than 20% of their employees were also carers and misjudged the impact care can have on the workplace.

The lives of carer-employees are complicated and almost all rely on income from paid work in order to support their families. Carer-employees need supportive and accommodating workplaces in order to thrive.



## *Our Pulse Check Surveys revealed...*

- On top of working full-time, carer-employees reported spending an additional 10 - 19 hours per week caring for a loved one
- Carer-employees often care for more than one person and sometimes at a distance. Caregiving situations vary greatly.
- 60% of carer-employees felt their employers supported family carers only "a little"

"My employer still has the mindset that 'bums in seats' means you are working, and they were not supportive of me working remotely from my own home when commuting time and hassles were interfering in my ability to be a carer and worker in some kind of balance."

~ Carer-employee



## 3 disconnects between employers and carer-employees

1. Carer-employees are often afraid to disclose their family care situation to their employers for risk of discrimination or negative career impacts; yet employers need this information to plan accommodations
1. Only 30% of employers believed that their employees would be receptive to using ATs at work; yet 50% of carer-employees already use AT to balance job and care responsibilities
1. Most employers would "probably allow" carer-employees to use ATs at work; yet 40% of carer-employees feel that their workplace does not or would not support the use of ATs during regular work hours



## Strategies to bridge disconnects

- Improve communication between employers and carer-employees
- Educate employers, HR professionals and supervisors about family care as a workforce issue and the demands on carer-employees' time that may lead to work-family conflicts
- Recognize the valuable contributions carer-employees make to their workplaces, families and society
- Engage the media in raising the profile of balancing work and care and the potential role for technology

# ATs in the workplace have the potential to support carer-employees

**Assistive Technologies (ATs)** in the workplace have the potential to provide innovative solutions to help carer-employees balance, manage and integrate their care responsibilities while remaining productive employees.

“The AT is good - if my employer would let me use it more.”

~ Carer-employee



## *Our Pulse Check Surveys revealed...*

- 70% of employers believed that ATs have the potential to help their employees fulfill their dual roles as an employee and as a family/friend carer, although some felt it may lead to more distractions on the job
- Most carer-employees said they were “very interested” in using, or using more, ATs to integrate, manage or balance paid work and care work
- Carer-employees found communication and messaging technologies, calendar and scheduling apps, and access to the internet during breaks especially helpful in balancing paid and care work responsibilities

### **Top 3 Carer-employee barriers to using Assistive Technologies (ATs)**

1. Believing the person they care for would accept ATs
1. Not knowing what ATs are currently available
1. Not having enough time to learn about or how to use ATs

## **Current Perceptions of ATs**

**Carer-employees** reported experiencing, or expected to experience, several benefits from carer ATs including:

- Making caring easier and more effective
- Enhancing carer health and wellness while reducing stress
- Making the carer feel more connected to the care receiver and others in the care network
- Saving time and money

**Employers** reported that the use of ATs at work has or should have an overall positive effect on carer-employees’:

- Absenteeism
- Productivity/performance
- Customer service

However, some employers felt that use of ATs at work may also lead to more distractions on the job; impact on profitability was inconclusive.



## **Strategies to integrate ATs at work**

- Conduct a needs assessment of carer-employees
- Offer recommendations for, or access to, ATs for carers through Employee Assistance Programs
- Pilot the use of existing ATs for carers in select workplaces and evaluate its impact on productivity and employee well-being
- Encourage AT developers to collaborate with carer-employees to address barriers to adoption and help carer-employees integrate, manage and balance their paid and care work roles

Findings from the pulse check surveys and knowledge mobilization forum point to a unified goal among stakeholders of creating carer-friendly workplaces. Carer-friendly workplaces, including the ability to use ATs at work, have the potential to reduce negative consequences for carer-employees and the associated costs for their employers by increasing productivity, reducing recruitment and retention costs, reducing absenteeism and use of sick leave, reducing staff turnover, and improving morale while meeting business priorities and timelines.

“We want to keep our people if we can. We can’t afford to lose them. And we need to change the way we do business in order to do that.”

~ Employer, public sector

Drawing on the experiences of *Employers for Carers* (our UK partner), we know that innovating carer-friendly workplaces is not merely corporate philanthropy, it makes good business sense. Carer-friendly businesses have reduced avoidable costs including absenteeism, turnover, productivity and performance management. Interest in Canada is emerging. Future catalytic meetings on the issue should involve all stakeholders: carer-employees, employers, HR practitioners, unions, governments, NGOs, researchers, and technology developers.

Annual care-related productivity losses to employers are enormous:

**9.7 million** days of absenteeism

**256 million** fewer hours of paid work

**557,698**

caregiver-employees left their jobs to provide care



## Our Pulse Check Surveys revealed...

- Some employers said flexible work arrangements (job sharing, part-time work, staggered hours or remote work) or leaves are available to carer-employees
- Only one employer reported that their organization provided workplace supports, such as networking groups and information/ training sessions, specifically for employees with family care responsibilities
- Employers reportedly did not provide low or no cost practical support for carer-employees, such as access to private areas to make personal calls



## Strategies for creating carer-friendly workplaces

- Coach supervisors to respond compassionately to carer-employees before work-family conflict occurs
- Build the business case in Canada to show that supporting carer-employees makes good business sense and improves profitability/service quality
- Identify progressive Canadian employers who are champions in creating carer-friendly workplaces to use as case studies of organizational practices
- Create an inventory of best practice tools to help employers better understand and accommodate the growing needs of carer-employees by shaping future workplace practices