

Caregiver Benefit: its importance, evolution & future

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Earlier this year, the proposed provincial budget briefly put the Caregiver Benefit at risk.

While the suggested 20% cut to the benefit was reversed following strong public response, those few weeks of uncertainty highlighted two things: how quickly people can come together in support, and how many caregivers did not know this benefit existed.

A benefit that is both essential and under-recognized is a benefit that is fragile in practice, even when it appears stable on paper.

About the benefit

Introduced in 2009, the **Caregiver Benefit** provides **\$400/month** to eligible caregivers supporting an adult with a high level of disability or impairment, providing 20+ hours of care per week.

The Continuing Care Program assesses eligibility of both the caregiver and care recipient and administers the benefit.

ANNUAL INCOME	FAMILY SIZE and INCOME CATEGORY		
	1	2	3 or more
\$0 to \$31,661	A	A	A
\$31,662, to \$46,662	B	A	A
\$46,663 to \$56,663	C	B	A

Table: to qualify, care recipient's net annual household income should be within category A

While the amount often does not cover the full cost of caregiving, it makes a real difference. Caregivers decide how to best use the funds, depending on their situation – it can go towards medications, transportation, respite and more. It's a direct, ongoing support that does not interrupt care and recognizes the essential role caregivers play in our healthcare system.

The awareness gap

The challenge is that **many caregivers never receive it**. I still frequently meet caregivers who are unaware of its existence.

As of April 2025, 3,303 caregivers in Nova Scotia were receiving the Caregiver Benefit. A meaningful number, but still only a fraction of those providing care. If one in three Nova Scotians are caregivers (roughly 333,000 people), then **only 1%** are accessing this support.

Our goal as an organization is to change that, by making sure more caregivers know about this program and apply.

If you think you may qualify, contact **Continuing care** at **1-800-225-7225**

First in Canada

Nova Scotia was the first province in Canada to introduce the benefit in 2009. Since then, other Atlantic Provinces launched similar initiatives.

- **Newfoundland and Labrador** matched the amount of our benefit, but targeted caregivers supporting seniors (65+) with low income and high care needs (MAPLe score 5).
- **PEI** introduced a tiered benefit ranging from \$250 to \$1,500, depending on the care recipient's income.
- **New Brunswick** is currently developing a program that would provide \$250 a month to caregivers of aging parents.

Momentum building

Momentum is also growing nationally.

In 2024, the federal government committed to developing a National Caregiving Strategy, released the following year by the Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence (CCCE). Among the recommendations were a national caregiver allowance and improved tax measures to reflect the financial realities of unpaid care.

The future of the benefit

The progress made to date is significant, but far from finished. Continued advocacy remains essential as we work to protect, strengthen and expand the Caregiver Benefit. Recent proposals, such as the **Caregiver Benefits Act** introduced by the Nova Scotia NDP, signal the growing recognition that caregivers deserve sustained support.

The Caregiver Benefit remains one of the few direct financial supports available to unpaid caregivers in Nova Scotia. Our work is to make sure every eligible caregiver knows about it, and that the program evolves with the realities caregivers face, from rising costs of living to aging population.

Caregivers are carrying our healthcare system. The least we can do is make sure the system supports them, too.