



CAREGIVERS
NETWORK for East Kootenay Seniors

WE CAN HELP

Helping people care for seniors with higher complex needs in the East Kootenay.

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Family Caregivers of British Columbia



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RURAL AND REMOTE: CAREGIVER ISSUES



Supporting Caregivers in the East Kootenay and Columbia Valley

Caring for an elderly person can be hard work. Balancing life and family while juggling the role of caregiver can often lead to burnout, stress and isolation. Furthermore, navigating the system as a caregiver can be confusing and frustrating. That is why the Caregivers Network for East Kootenay Seniors believes that providing emotional support, information about community resources and help to navigate the system is essential to a caregiver's well-being.

The Caregivers Network for East Kootenay Seniors has been servicing and supporting caregivers in the East Kootenay region for over 17 years. Through funding from the Interior Health Authority and through the Family and Friend Caregiver support program funded by the Government of BC and managed by the United Way Lower Mainland our program helps and supports caregivers caring for seniors with complex higher needs. We support caregivers through our toll free telephone support line, our support groups for caregivers in six communities throughout the region, in person support visits and educational opportunities for caregivers.

Our experience in supporting caregivers has taught us that caregiving in our region carries with it some regional-specific challenges. We serve a mountainous region that is greater than the size of Switzerland but with a population that could probably fit within BC Place Stadium. As such, our region faces difficulty in delivering services in a cost effective manner to communities that are remote from one another.

The population in our region reside in either small communities or rural areas. Seniors wishing to remain in their home and stay active in their communities therefore face barriers not necessarily encountered in large urban settings. These barriers include limited support to facilitate independent living and limited housing and transportation options. Moreover, seniors – and their caregivers – often must travel far from their communities or even leave the region to access health services.



Not only is the travel a physical and logistical burden, but there is a financial cost as well.

Many caregivers in the East Kootenay and Columbia Valley have stated that a better system of homecare and support services is needed for the region's aging population. While seniors throughout the province need transportation to and from medical appointments, domestic help, and support from and for caregivers, the situation in our region is potentially more acute given both our geographic challenges as well as the fact the population of the region is older than the provincial average. Throw in the Canadian winters and mountainous terrain and service delivery becomes an even greater challenge.

Caregivers everywhere carry a heavy burden, but those in our region face some additional challenges that are specific to our context. These women and men soldier on with tenacity but should not be alone in caring for an elderly loved one. Outside assistance is essential, no matter the difficulty involved in connecting caregivers to support they need over a vast geographic area. The Caregivers Network for East Kootenay Seniors has done a great deal to establish these connections and we are committed to continuing to reach out and support caregivers and the seniors they are caring for.

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RURAL AND REMOTE: CAREGIVER ISSUES

CAREGIVERS NETWORK FOR EAST KOOTENAY SENIORS

Issues Facing Rural and Remote Areas

Impact on Family Caregivers

Geographical Remoteness and Weather Conditions

Family Caregivers are cut off from support services and face transportation issues accessing what does exist. This can lead to isolation, depression and lack of support.

Long Distances

Family caregivers must travel vast distances to get loved ones to their appointments. Often times there is no public transit and medical appointments can be several hours away by car or plane. This poses a heavy time constraint as well as financial burden on the family caregiver.

Low Population Density

Family caregivers face vast geographical areas and a thinly spread out population making service delivery expensive and difficult to provide. Family caregivers are relied upon to provide many of the services that would be available in urban centers, such as transportation, home care services like cleaning, grocery delivery, shopping, and snow shoveling.

Less Availability of Specialists and Medical Care

Family caregivers are responsible for getting their loved ones to medical appointments, surgeries and specialists. If transportation is provided, it is only for the person receiving care. Often times, these appointments are out of community. Family caregivers face separation from their loved one or a heavy financial and emotional burden due the cost and time involved in accompanying their loved one.

Limited Housing

Family caregivers face limited housing options. Allowing a loved one to remain in their own home can be dangerous due to lack of supports in rural and remote communities. Accessing assisted living or long term care can be equally difficult due to long waitlists and the 'first available bed' policy. This policy can be devastating in a remote and rural setting as it can separate families and communities in areas where no transportation exists.