



ALBERTA ASSOCIATION
ON GERONTOLOGY

Improving the Lives of Older Albertans

AAGmag

Winter 2024 Edition

"When it snows, you have two choices: shovel or make snow angels." —

Anonymous



What's New in AAG?

This issue dives into some of the most pressing topics and groundbreaking innovations shaping the future of aging, caregiving, and healthcare. Here's what you can look forward to:

1. Accelerating AgeTech in Alberta

Discover how the envisAGE Initiative is revolutionizing healthcare for older adults by integrating cutting-edge technology into real-world settings. Learn about exciting projects like the implementation of NurseGPT in long-term care and how it promises to transform caregiving and documentation.

2. Caregiver Burnout: Understanding and Prevention

Caregiving can be rewarding yet overwhelming. Explore practical strategies to prevent burnout and maintain balance while navigating the challenges of caregiving. This piece offers actionable tips to help caregivers prioritize their own well-being while continuing to support loved ones.

3. Innovative Patient Navigation Model for Older Adults

Don Juzwishin, an old friend of the Alberta Association on Gerontology, tipped us off to this research. Read about a new approach to care transitions at Sunnybrook Hospital, where community social workers are redefining post-discharge support. Discover how this model improves continuity of care and reduces hospital readmissions for older adults.

4. Navigating Senior Supports in Calgary

Then meet Alberta's innovative The Way In Network, a collaborative initiative simplifying access to essential resources for Calgary's seniors. From mental health services to food security and companionship, learn how local Calgary Community organizations are working together to meet the diverse needs of older adults and their families.

5. The Hidden Workforce: Supporting Family Caregivers

Family caregivers are the backbone of Alberta's healthcare system,

providing invaluable contributions often overlooked. Dive into strategies to empower and support these hidden heroes, fostering a more compassionate and sustainable healthcare future.

These articles shine a spotlight on the people, programs, and technologies that are making a difference. Click through the *AAGmag* to explore how these initiatives can inspire change and improve lives.

Sincerely,

Sharon Anderson

President, Alberta Association on Gerontology

Accelerating AgeTech in Alberta: The envisAGE Initiative and the ACTION™ Assessments

By Nicola McFarlane, Manager of the Alberta envisAGE Beachhead™ at Alberta Health Services

The Aging Alberta Population and AgeTech Adoption

In Alberta, the number of older adults aged 65 and older is projected to nearly double in the next 25 years ([Gov't of Alberta, 2023](#)). Without significant changes, current home care and facility-based support will struggle to meet the growing demand. Embracing technology-enabled solutions presents an opportunity to enhance the health, safety, and quality of life of older adults while fostering more sustainable healthcare systems ([AGE-WELL, 2019](#); [NIA, 2022](#)).

The current gaps identified by MEDTEQ+ and AGE-WELL in facilitating the adoption of health technology include insufficient co-design with end users,

awareness regarding available types of technologies, limited knowledge on how to utilize these technologies, and inadequate evaluative metrics for value-based decision-making by technology purchasers. These deficiencies have resulted in low uptake due to poor utility and missed opportunities for technology that could benefit older adults and/or their caregivers (formal and informal).

The envisAGE Opportunity

The [envisAGE initiative](#), co-led by MEDTEQ+ and AGE-WELL and funded through the Federal Government's Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF), aims to accelerate the adoption of AgeTech solutions designed to enhance the quality of life for older adults and caregivers. This initiative fosters partnerships amongst evaluators, real-world settings, and technology companies to promote streamlined, real-time evaluation of pre-commercial technologies.

Key Partners in the envisAGE Ecosystem

1. **The envisAGE Beachhead™**- Evaluates and measures the feasibility of implementation and the impact of technology solutions in real-world settings. The AHS Innovation, Evidence and Evaluation (IEEI) team has partnered with Provincial Seniors Health and Continuing Care (PSHCC) to establish an Alberta Beachhead™ as part of a national initiative, aiming to participate in projects over the next five years supported by the envisAGE initiative.
2. **The Community Lab**- Integrates and adopts the technology within real-world settings to address current program and service needs.
3. **The Small to Medium Enterprise (SME)** - Works to implement their technologies as solutions into real-world environments to respond to needs and to support older adults and caregivers.

Exciting Projects Ahead

envisAGE financial support will take the form of a partial reimbursement of incurred eligible expenses for an approved project. The projects align with Step 3 of the [AHS Innovation Pipeline](#): to assess implementation feasibility and impact within an Alberta site. The goal is to adopt effective technology solutions and care models that will enable the health system to adapt to meet the current and future needs of older Albertans.

The Alberta envisAGE Beachhead™ is excited to be part of the first project to begin in early 2025, in collaboration with Community Lab partner, the Dr. Barrie Strafford Centre for Learning, Innovation, and Quality (CLIQ), and SME partner, Carecorp (with technology solution, NurseGPT). Titled “Evaluation of the Implementation Feasibility and Impact of a Speech Recognition Technology (NurseGPT) in a Long-Term Care (LTC) Setting” this 18-month project aims to transform LTC documentation and provide a comprehensive impact assessment for the Brenda Strafford Foundation and Carecorp. See [here](#) for more details.

<p>Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct a needs assessment (ACTION™) to understand the needs of older adults in the area of quality aging• Source the best technology-enabled solutions to meet these needs and provide a framework for testing in care settings in Alberta• Use strong evaluation metrics to strengthen decision-making in evaluation and procurement• Identify long-term sustainable strategies to build beyond the envisAGE program	<p>End Goal</p> <p>Adopt the best technology solutions and models of care that enable the health system to adapt to meet current and future needs of older Albertans.</p>
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The Alberta envisAGE Beachhead™ Approach

The Alberta envisAGE Beachhead™ uses the existing frameworks outlined below to evaluate technologies.

1. Aligning Challenges to Innovation Opportunities and Networks (ACTION™) Assessment

To verify the needs of older Albertans, a needs assessment called the [ACTION™ \(Align Challenges to Innovation Opportunities and Networks\) Assessments](#) is being conducted by the IEEI and PSHCC teams in partnership with the University of Calgary (UofC). This will yield a series of reports beginning with summarizing grey literature on the challenges to achieving healthy aging, the type of AgeTech that might be useful in addressing challenge areas, and considerations for evaluating AgeTech. These summaries are developed in collaboration with faculty at the University of Calgary and a Master of Precision Health student and Mitacs intern, Inshirah Takrouri. The key challenges summarized from the grey literature scan include:

1. Addressing caregivers' needs and challenges
2. Improving lived environments to support healthy aging
3. Improving social environments and supporting emotional well-being
4. Ensuring healthcare services address older adults' health needs
5. Addressing health system communication and navigation challenges

The findings shared in the reports will be validated and refined through engagements and interviews with providers, caregivers, and older adults. This process will guide the selection of appropriate technologies for implementation and evaluation.

2. Community Lab Engagement

With the ACTION™ Assessment resources, we will engage with interested Community Labs (trial sites) to identify their needs that can be addressed through technology.

3. Matching the Technology Solution to the Need

Working with the envisAGE Network, the Alberta envisAGE Beachhead™ will assist Community Labs in selecting suitable technology solutions that meet their specific needs.

4. The Evaluation Plan

Utilizing the existing evaluation framework, the [AHS Innovation Pipeline](#), the Alberta envisAGE Beachhead™ will collaborate with the Community Labs and the SMEs to develop an evaluation plan to validate the implementation feasibility and impact of a technology solution in real-world settings. The Alberta envisAGE Beachhead™ role, in collaboration with the Alberta ecosystem and envisAGE is to support the project evaluation to understand the benefit of a solution including impact measurements, improved quality of care, health economic benefit, implementation feasibility, and health equity improvement. AHS innovation evaluation experience includes the recent evaluations of NanoTess, a wound care technology, CloudDX, a remote patient monitoring solution, SafeTracks GPS, a safety-focused GPS tracking system. These assessments gauge practicality, efficacy, and potential benefits within healthcare operations, primary care clinics, and private older adult organizations.

5. Promotion of Results

In addition to providing an impact report, that is both useful for the Community Labs and the SMEs, the envisAGE network and the Alberta envisAGE Beachhead™ are committed to promoting the outcomes of each project throughout Alberta and Canada, ensuring the benefits extend beyond the collaborative partnerships.

Interested in Knowing More?

The Alberta envisAGE Beachhead™ is interested in connecting with more potential Community Labs for projects. If you'd like to know more, email innovation@ahs.ca.

The developers of the ACTION™ Assessments are still seeking more interviews from their stakeholders (providers, older adults, and family caregivers). If you are interested, fill out an expression of interest form at [Transforming Healthy Aging in Alberta | Together 4 Health](#).

Acknowledgements - Thank you for the support of the following organizations that are making this work possible:

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Innovation Evidence
Evaluation and
Impact

Provincial Seniors
Health and
Continuing Care

Research Support:



What is Caregiver Burnout and What Can We Do About It?

Stephanie Muskat, MSW, RSW; Founder and Psychotherapist at Compassion in Caregiving

Most people I have worked with in private practice and the hospital setting (as a social worker and psychotherapist) only learn what caregiver burnout is once they are already very deep within it. Our society and the systems around us often follow a 'crisis' model rather than a model of prevention. Instead of preventing a negative outcome that could otherwise be mitigated, we have learned to repress and avoid only to end up in ultimate crisis, finding ourselves at a breaking point.

Before we dive into the concept of caregiver burnout, we need to define what it is. According to the Cleveland Clinic, caregiver burnout is a 'state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion that happens while you're taking care of someone else'. In my experience this can translate into something like the following: an adult daughter caring for her 2 young children and her mother with dementia is also balancing a corporate job. She does not feel she is able to incorporate any time for herself and resorts to pushing aside her own feelings and needs due to lack of time and increased pressures and stress in her daily life. Ultimately this adult daughter can no longer balance everything without also supporting her own needs and one day finds she cannot concentrate at work, is yelling at her children and not wanting to spend time with them and increasingly frustrated with her mother's care. She is now at a place of 'burnout'. Many who find themselves in this situation are left trying to get themselves out of it, often taking a leave from work, unable to continue with their caregiving and finding themselves at a standstill. Caregiver burnout can show itself as 'anger, anxiety, social withdrawal, exhaustion, difficulty with sleep and concentration', (American Heart Association, 2021). High levels of objective and subjective stress associated with caregiver burnout are found to be associated with an increase in poorer self-reported health, greater use of healthcare services, increased behaviour challenges in a care recipient and caregiver overwhelm (Son et al., 2007). Yet what if I told you this burnout is entirely preventable and caregivers do not need to wait until they hit this point?

Caregivers can implement strategies and preventative factors into their daily lives to prevent from going to '0-100' on a continuous emotional rollercoaster, whereby '100' is complete overwhelm and burnout.

Emotions and intuition of self are a typically newer concept for most, now commonly taught in school to younger aged children, but having rarely been discussed for adults over the age of 25 for those across many cultures and societies. Many of us in North America have been raised in households where we were told to 'do what is said' and not express much in the form of emotions and objections. Essentially, we were primed to 'listen and do' while not paying much attention to what was happening inside of us and learning to hold space for our feelings and sometimes our needs. Of course this is not the fault of those who raised us but the climate of the overall generation and culture in which we were raised. The outcome of this, however, can often result in adults who are uncertain how to recognize, identify and sit with emotions or recognize warning signs when we are getting to a place of no return with our anxiety, sadness, grief, guilt, etc.

Our needs and emotions can be thought of like water sitting in a cup. The more water we add without removing (or processing and working through) the water sitting in the cup, the higher the water level becomes. Eventually if we continue to add more and more water, the result is water all over the floor which will continue to flood unless we remove water from the cup. In other words, in order to prevent the water from pouring over, caregivers need to regularly create routine in their lives that are non-negotiable ways of protecting themselves and acknowledging how they feel to prevent burnout.

So how can caregivers begin to learn to identify feelings, stop pushing down their own needs and start to create balance in their lives?

Here are a few tangible things that can be initiated now to start to balance out 'the water':

- 1) Caregivers can create a realistic plan of something they enjoy each day, even if for only 10 minutes, that is separate from caregiving. This can look like: a brief walk around the block when they are present with themselves or with a podcast unrelated to caregiving; putting devices away as they pour a cup of coffee and watch the coffee drip into the machine and then enjoy the coffee; take ten minutes each morning to journal and write out what they are

grateful for and also some of the positive and negative emotions they may be feeling in that moment.

2) Check-in with themselves very briefly throughout the day. Questions they can ask themselves during these very short pauses can include: 'how do I feel right now (it is OK if the answer is not positive- the purpose is to start to connect with ourselves and acknowledge our needs), am I holding any emotions in my body and where?; do I need a break today?'

3) Caregivers can start to look at what they do in a day and see if there is anything they can remove from their plate (such as mindlessly scrolling on social media) to add some time for other, more fulfilling activities.

Caregivers are not alone in their feelings of burnout, but by raising awareness about how to mitigate, identify and prevent burnout, they will be better able to care for others, but more importantly be better able to care for themselves.

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New Research: A new patient navigation model of care to support older adults in transitions of care: Key considerations for implementation for policy-makers and health system leaders

A recent study published in the *Healthcare Management Forum* introduces an innovative Patient Navigation (PN) model aimed at supporting older adults during transitions of care. Conducted at Sunnybrook Hospital in Ontario, Canada, this program was developed in partnership with SPRINT Senior Care to address the complex health and social care needs of older patients.

The PN model employs community social workers, referred to as "community transitional leads," who are embedded within hospital teams. These navigators provide essential follow-up support to patients and their families for up to 90 days post-discharge. Their role includes assessing patient needs, facilitating connections to community services, and assisting with discharge planning, housing alternatives, and daily living activities.

The study utilized an implementation science approach to evaluate the program's effectiveness, gathering qualitative feedback from older adults, caregivers, and healthcare providers. Preliminary findings indicate high satisfaction rates among participants and underscore the importance of this model in improving continuity of care and reducing hospital readmissions.

As the PN model continues to evolve, the authors emphasize the need for further research to assess its long-term impact on patient outcomes. This study offers valuable insights for policymakers and health system leaders interested in enhancing care transitions for older adults, ultimately aiming to improve their overall health and well-being.

For more details, refer to the full article in the [Healthcare Management Forum \[DOI: 10.1177/08404704241288458\]](https://doi.org/10.1177/08404704241288458).

Spotlight on Alberta's Innovations

Navigating Supports for Seniors in Calgary: The Way In Network

Back in 2020, navigating support systems for seniors in Calgary could be overwhelming. An online search for “seniors supports Calgary,” yielded over 7.3 million results. The COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated challenges for older adults, including mobility limitations, language barriers, and social isolation, making access to essential resources even more critical.

To address these needs, the Calgary Seniors' Resource Society, Calgary Chinese Elderly Citizens' Association, Calgary, and Jewish Family Service Calgary collaborated to form **The Way In Network**. Each agency in the network brings unique expertise, from food security and mental health support to volunteer-led programs and outreach services. This collaboration helps seniors, and their families navigate Calgary's support systems, enabling seniors to access everything from benefit applications and groceries to online programming and companionship coordinated support to.

The Way In Network exemplifies how local organizations can unite to simplify navigation and meet the diverse needs of Calgary's senior community. For assistance, seniors can call **403-SENIORS (403-736-4677)** to access this critical support.

Calgary Journal <https://calgaryjournal.ca/2022/02/04/partnership-program-connects-isolated-seniors-with-supports-they-need/>

Calgary United Way <https://calgaryunitedway.org/blog/supporting-seniors/>

The Hidden Workforce: Optimizing Support for Family Caregivers

Caregiver-Centered Care Collaborative Working Group

"There are only four kinds of people in the world: those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers."

— Rosalynn Carter, Former First Lady of the United States, 1997

Join the Conversation: How should we support the Hidden Workforce, Alberta's family Caregivers?

Family caregivers are the backbone of Alberta's health, social, and community care systems, providing critical support for loved ones while often juggling work and personal responsibilities. Their contributions, valued at \$11 billion annually, are essential to the well-being of countless individuals and the sustainability of our care systems. Yet, caregivers frequently face burnout, financial strain, and inadequate support.

The Opportunity Alberta is poised to lead the way in transforming support for family caregivers. discussion paper highlights the need to:

- Recognize and partner with family caregivers as integral members of care teams.
- Foster caregiver-friendly workplaces for employees balancing professional and caregiving responsibilities.
- Implement practical solutions like caregiver-centered education, support networks, and workplace policies.

This is a call to action for all Albertans to contribute to systemic changes that elevate caregiver recognition, support, and integration into health, social, and community care systems.

Your Role —We invite all Albertans -- family caregivers, patients, clients, residents, citizens, policymakers, healthcare leaders, businesses, care providers, and Canadians nationwide - to be part of the co-design and co-production process of the Alberta Caregiver Strategy and Action Plan. Your voice is essential in creating a supportive environment where caregivers are recognized, valued, and empowered.

1. Read the [Invitation Letter](#) and the full 10 page report: [The Hidden Workforce](#)
2. **Engage in Meaningful Conversations:** Start discussions with leaders and colleagues in your organizations, communities, and social networks. Use the **Discussion Guides in Appendix B and C** to explore how we can better support caregivers, caregiving employees, and double-duty caregivers. Share these conversations with your colleagues, staff, family, chosen family, friends, and neighbours to broaden the impact.
3. **Share Resources:** Develop a shared repository of resources, articles, or tools related to family caregiving, allowing readers to contribute and engage with the content.
4. **Hold Employer Roundtables:** Facilitate discussions among employers to share best practices and strategies for supporting employees who are also caregivers, creating a collaborative environment for problem-solving.
5. **Provide your Input into Strategic Planning and Pathways:** Your insights and experiences are invaluable. Help shape strategies and care processes that truly reflects the needs of caregivers. Share your thoughts, ideas, and feedback on enhancing support for caregivers.
 - **Help to Co-produce the Leading the Way** Alberta Caregiver Strategy and Action Plan.
 - **Join the Caregiver-Centered Care Co-Design Team:** to provide advice, co-create solutions, and participate in developing the Alberta Caregiver Strategy and Action Plan
 - **Get More Involved** If you or your organization would like to play a more active role.

Together, We Can Lead Change

Caregivers are essential to the fabric of Alberta's care systems. By fostering collaboration and innovation, we can create a sustainable, inclusive care

model that uplifts caregivers and the Albertans with physical and mental illness, disabilities and frailty from aging.

Join us in building a future where caregivers are recognized, valued, and empowered. Together, we can transform caregiving in Alberta. Reach out to participate, share your insights, or explore collaboration opportunities. Let's shape a better care landscape for all.

Visit our website [www.caregivercare.ca] or contact us to learn more.

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Become an AAG member! It's still not too late to purchase membership for 2024/25. The new membership year begins April 1st, 2025.

[Membership Form](#)

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