

**Think City, Dream Vancouver:**

**Policy Brief**

**Eldercare and the Sandwich Generation:**

***Working Our Way Towards Stability in Senior Care***

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**February, 2008**

## **Executive Summary**

By the year 2026, one in every five Canadians will be over the age of 65. The challenges facing the ‘sandwich’ generation, those providing simultaneous family and eldercare, in the form of health problems related to stress, financial burdens incurred through the provision of care to elderly and ageing parents, and reduced working hours necessitated by eldercare responsibilities, will increase. Policies are required to ease the transition to societies comprised of families striving to balance a multitude of responsibilities, in order to remedy the work-life balance, health challenges, and financial burdens.

A number of options are available to address this policy problem, and three alternatives are addressed in this paper. Governments can legislate workplace policy designed to accommodate employees balancing family and eldercare responsibility. Changes to the Home Owners Grant and Tax Deferral programs in order to provide financial alleviation to those providing in-home eldercare would provide relief to those families that incur tremendous costs from providing this care. Lastly, improvements made to existing information on programs, policies, resources and health care issues would seek to meet a pervasive need for increased information sources.

As the following paper will address, these policy alternatives all imply various equity, administrative and cost-effectiveness challenges. However, as our population ages, governments need to adopt progressive policy designed specifically to accommodate the needs of a shifting societal dynamic.

## **Eldercare and the Sandwich Generation:**

### **Working Our Way Towards Stability in Senior Care**

#### **Policy Problem**

Projections for 2026 indicate that one in every five Canadians will be over the age of 65. This has implications for individuals who assume the simultaneous responsibility of raising children and caring for aging and/or ill parents and relatives. According to results of a 2002 General Social Survey cited by Statistics Canada in a report entitled *Perspectives on Labour and Income*,<sup>1</sup> almost 3 in 10 of those aged 45 to 64 with unmarried children under 25 in the home, or some 712,000 individuals, were also caring for a senior.’ Further, more than 8 in 10 of these individuals were employed, and their family dynamic forced them to either alter, or reduce their hours of work, thereby losing income. A total of 4 in 10 ‘sandwiched’ workers allotted income to the renting of medical equipment, or cellular telephones.<sup>2</sup>

Not surprisingly, the challenges associated with providing care for aging relatives increase in direct proportion with the amount of time spent administering this care. As the above mentioned study noted, ‘one-half of those spending more than eight hours per month, of the so-called ‘high-intensity caregivers’ had to change their social activities. Over one-third had to change their work schedule.’ More notably, ‘sandwiched workers are more likely to feel generally stressed. About 70% of them reported stress, compared with about 61% of workers with no child-care or

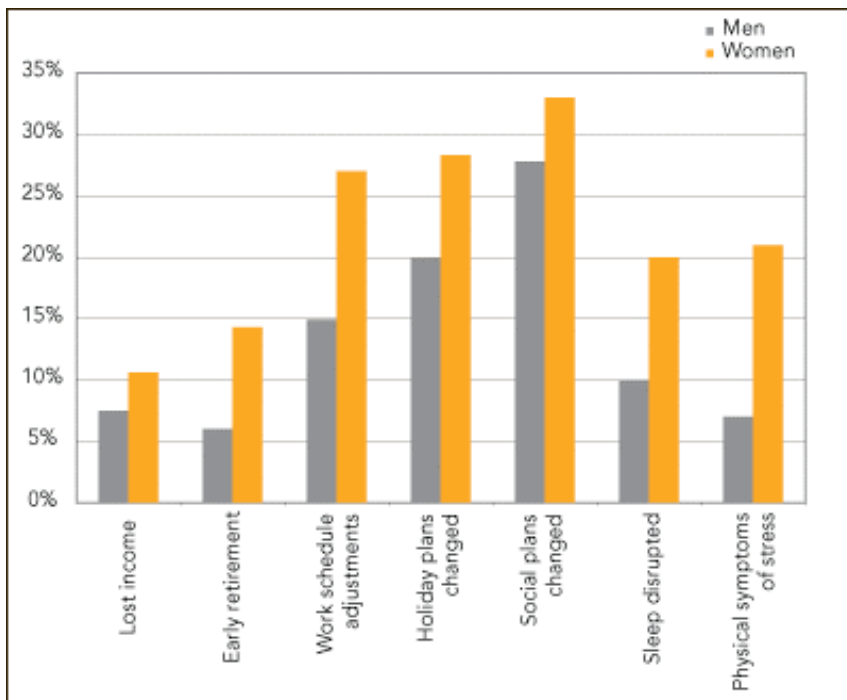
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<sup>1</sup> Williams, C. *Perspectives on Labour and Income – the Sandwich Generation*, Statistics Canada [Online] <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/040928/d040928b.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Williams, C. *Perspectives on Labour and Income – the Sandwich Generation*, Statistics Canada [Online] <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/040928/d040928b.htm>

elder-care responsibilities.’<sup>3</sup> The challenges associated with providing eldercare in addition to working and family responsibilities can lead the sandwiched generation to experience loss of income due to self-imposed shortened working hours, a lack of career advancement, and health problems associated with stress.

### Effects of eldercare on ‘sandwiched’ workers



While shortcomings in the provision of care for the elderly are not a new concern, the social and economic ramifications of the sandwich generation are anticipated to substantially increase in the next decade. The reasons for this are multiple. As was noted by Cara Williams in *Perspectives on Labor and Income*, ‘one reason is the aging of the baby boomers, which will result in a much larger proportion of seniors in the population.’ Projections for 2026 indicate that a total of one in

<sup>3</sup> Williams, C. *Perspectives on Labour and Income – the Sandwich Generation*, Statistics Canada [Online] <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/040928/d040928b.htm>

<sup>4</sup> *The obstacles to learning about caring for elders in Canada*. Canadian Council on Learning. [Online] [http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20070700\\_Learning\\_About\\_Elder\\_Care.htm](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20070700_Learning_About_Elder_Care.htm)

five Canadians will be 65 or older. This figure is up substantially from 2001 data that confirmed one in eight Canadians being in this age range. Low fertility rates are also contributing to and compounding this problem, which, as Williams articulated, ‘may mean fewer adults to care for the elderly.’ The third reason often cited as influencing this problem is ‘a delay in family formation (marriage and childbirth), resulting in older family members requiring care when children are still part of the household.’<sup>5</sup> It should also be noted that the bulk of the burden typically falls to women, whom, as Statistics Canada noted, devote a total of 30 hours a month to providing care to elderly parents, whereas men allot substantially less time, at roughly 13 hours per month. Overall, according to a report entitled, *Eldercare and the Workplace, the Role of Business, Labour and Government*, issued by the Parliamentary Research Branch of the Government of Canada, ‘Eldercare has taken on increased significance with the rapid aging of Canada’s population, particularly the major increase in those aged 75 years and over. Eighty percent of this care is provided by family members. Women are disproportionately represented in the caregiver group at a time when they are increasing their participation in the paid labour force. Workers across Canada struggle to meet the needs of respective employers and those of family members including, increasingly, aging relatives as well as dependent children. To meet these diverse needs successfully, employees may require assistance.’<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Williams, C. *Perspectives on Labour and Income – the Sandwich Generation*, Statistics Canada [Online] <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/75-001-XIE/10904/art-1.htm>

<sup>6</sup> *Eldercare and the workplace: The role of business, labour and government*. Parliamentary Research Branch, Government of Canada. [Online] <http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/MR/mr128-e.htm#C.%20Government>

## **Think City: Dream Vancouver – Working our way towards stability in senior care**

At the Think City conference, held in Vancouver on October 21, 2007, citizens had an opportunity to organize themselves into break-out groups in order to define and discuss issues of critical concern to the development and prosperity of their city. A group that focused on the provision of care for Vancouver seniors identified the following questions as being in need of consideration by policymakers, all levels of government, families and individual citizens: Firstly, how do we define a senior? A transparent definition is integral to creating services and writing policy that will target a direct portion of the population. How do we promote a healthy transition to ageing? How do we accommodate seniors who wish to remain in their homes, past the point where this is physically and emotionally practical? How do we address issues of pensions and retirement? As was noted in a study entitled, ‘Catching up to Reality: Building a New Social Model,’<sup>7</sup> life expectancy for both men and women has increased dramatically, and income security guaranteed to seniors is no longer sufficient to accommodate longer lives. How can we investigate the possibility of housing for seniors that incorporates services? How do we implement graduated housing models for seniors to help ease their transition from independent living to dependent living? How can we recognize and accommodate cultural differences in the provision of care for seniors and ease the burden of families who bear the financial cost of providing full-time, in-home care for an elderly, elderly/ill parent?

The group took the added step of communicating ideas, some feasible, others perhaps more challenging, that would address some of these questions.

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<sup>7</sup> Catching up to reality: Building a case for a new social model. *CPRN Social Architect Papers* [Online] [http://www.cep.cl/UNRISD/References/Ref\\_Brasil/New%20Social%20Model.pdf](http://www.cep.cl/UNRISD/References/Ref_Brasil/New%20Social%20Model.pdf)

Of foremost concern to the group was a need to address issues pertaining to seniors without concern paid to which level of government is technically responsible for the area. Conference participants expressed strong levels of frustration with a lack of progression in potential policies that would tackle some of the problems seniors are facing and felt a collaborative, cohesive approach to the issue on behalf of municipal, provincial and federal governments would prove effective in moving forward quickly. The following points were addressed:

- A need to break down boundaries in order to provide services where the population warrants a need. Location of services not to be predetermined by political concerns.
- Senior centres to be funded in a way designed to break the isolation experiences by seniors.
- Increase funding to encourage increased interaction between youth and seniors.
- Allow for leaves of absence for parents working full-time, raising a family and providing eldercare.
- Promote 'healthy ageing-in-place' so that seniors are not required to uproot from their homes and communities in order to access the services they require.
- Integration of technology and an e-health model into existing health care services for seniors.

Building on the concepts and concerns of the Think City group and consulted literature, the following three policy alternatives will be evaluated in terms of their ability to address the plight of the 'sandwich generation' – men and women simultaneously providing care for children and elderly, elderly/ailing parents. Three policy alternatives designed to address this problem will be considered and evaluated: the reorganization of work schedules, revamped models of in-home care for children providing shelter and care to elderly/ailing parents, and a community-based,

social care system designed to provide relief to both the elderly and the children who care for them.

### **Policy Alternative #1: Implementation of Family-Friendly Workplace Policy**

In a paper published by the Institute for Research on Public Policy entitled, '*The Use of Family-Friendly Workplaces in Canada*,' the prevalence of two-earner families, and the inevitable shifting demands imposed on governments, employees and employers by this changing dynamic, were considered. While the paper largely addresses the implementation of policies on a national level, it addressed a number of measures that could be taken on a federal, provincial and municipal level in order to alleviate the pressures families are facing to accommodate a new and challenging work-life balance. The paper considers changing family demands in relation to work as the 'New Economy' and evaluates the impact of family-friendly benefits extended to working families. While the paper notes that, 'issues of work-family conflict and their influence on worker and firm outcomes, as well as their potential resolution, are at the forefront of the policy agenda,'<sup>8</sup> the fact remains that 'government's involvement in the provision of family benefits typically consists of the regulation of leave, pregnancy related insurance and the regulation of and subsidies for schooling/care for children.' The paper further acknowledges companies have at their disposal several different options to facilitate the work-life balance of their employees which can be classified into three categories: Facilitating leave from work for family reasons, facilitating changes in the work schedule, and family support policies, which 'offer practical help with child/elder care assistance, including access to services, referral services or financial aid.'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ferrer, A, Gagne, L. The Use of Family Friendly Workplace Practices in Canada. *Institute for Research on Public Policy*. September, 2006. [Online] <http://www.irpp.org/fasttrak/index.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Ferrer, A, Gagne, L. The Use of Family Friendly Workplace Practices in Canada. *Institute for Research on Public Policy*. September, 2006. [Online] <http://www.irpp.org/fasttrak/index.htm>

While the implementation of such policies by individual firms is, as the IRPP noted, entirely voluntary, it must be noted that a substantial amount of the BC population is employed by the provincial government, and a not insignificant amount of Vancouver's population is employed by local governments. According to, *A Guide to the BC Economy and Labour Market*, the total number of jobs in local government increased by 6.9% and employment in the provincial government increased by 9.5%.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, provincial and municipal governments should spearhead the implementation of family-friendly labour market policies by setting a city standard that will in part serve to accommodate employees who are effectively members of the 'sandwich generation.' The policy would additionally serve as a standard that other cities and employers would effectively emulate in order to attract and retain good employees.

This can be done in several ways. Employers can accommodate employees providing simultaneous child and eldercare with flexible hours, the possibility of telework, and family support, whereby employers extend support to employees in the domains of childcare, eldercare, and other types of family support.

### **Policy Alternative #2: Modest Changes to Home Owners Grant, Tax Deferment Programs**

The New York Times recently reported the findings of a study undertaken by the U.S.-based National Alliance for Caregiving who found, 'the out-of-pocket cost of caring for an aging parent or spouse averages about \$5,500 a year,' which translates to 'more than the average American household spends on health care and entertainment combined.' It was further reported that 'these caregivers, spending on average 10 percent of their household income, manage the

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<sup>10</sup> A Guide to the BC Economy and Labour Market [Online]  
[http://www.guidetobceconomy.org/major\\_industries/public\\_administration.htm](http://www.guidetobceconomy.org/major_industries/public_administration.htm)

financial burden by taking out loans, skipping vacations, dipping into savings or ignoring their own health care.’<sup>11</sup> Costs incurred by individuals who choose to provide full-time, in-home eldercare can be disproportionately high, as home renovations for wheelchair compatibility, alterations made to washrooms, etc, can be extremely costly.

In British Columbia, local governments rely primarily on property taxes to fund the programs and services they offer. While applicants must apply annually, BC citizens can apply for a Home Owners grant that can reduce the amount of taxes they are required to pay. The maximum reduction for the grant is \$479, with an additional \$275 grant available to both seniors and permanently disabled persons.<sup>12</sup> In Vancouver and Victoria more specifically, citizens can take advantage of a tax deferment program, if they are the owner of their own home. Several changes can be applied to this current structure that would provide partial relief of the financial burden incurred by individuals providing in-home eldercare. Firstly, in the instance that a senior is being accommodated full-time in a private home, regardless of whether or not the child providing the care owns the home, he or she should be eligible for the full grant of \$479. Additionally, the availability of the \$275 grant should be extended twice to a senior who is physically or mentally disabled, bringing the total amount of the grant to \$550. Lastly, the tax deferment program, currently available to home owners and those over the age of 55 only, should also extend to those providing in-home eldercare, and of any age, in order to assist them with the financial burden of this increased care. Such changes, arguably modest in nature, would provide immediate, financial relief to individuals who elected to provide in-home eldercare, and are bearing a large

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<sup>11</sup> Gross, J. Study Finds Higher Costs for Caregivers of Elderly. *The New York Times*. November 19, 2007. [Online] [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/19/us/19caregiver.html?\\_r=3&hp&oref=slogin&oref=slogin&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/19/us/19caregiver.html?_r=3&hp&oref=slogin&oref=slogin&oref=slogin)

<sup>12</sup> Summary of Comparative Local Government Tax Information. [Online] <http://www.halifax.ca/taxreform/documents/SummaryofLocalTaxInformationJanuary07.pdf>

financial burden as a result. As the book entitled, *The Chronically Limited Elderly: The Case for a National Policy for In-Home Care*’ aptly noted, ‘The social policy goal should be to encourage, and not to punish or ignore, the families who choose to care for elderly relatives in need of long-term care.’<sup>13</sup>

### **Policy Alternative #3: Provision of Accessible, Comprehensive Information on Services, Resources and Programs Available to Assist Those Providing Eldercare**

According to a report by the Canadian Council on Learning entitled, *Lessons in Learning: The Obstacles to learning about caring for elders in Canada*, eldercare providers have a multitude of unmet needs that include, ‘access to counseling, respite care, flexible work schedules, help with practical tasks, such as housework and personal care, as well as support via telephone, newsletter, support groups, or the internet. In addition, many of these Canadians express an important unmet learning need: about half of the caregivers surveyed in a Statistics Canada study wanted more information about how best to do the tasks required of them and on the specific ailments afflicting their elderly relatives.’<sup>14</sup> This is fairly intuitive, especially when we take into account that the provision of eldercare will inherently imply a need to consider what are often complex medical problems, and a lack of substitute care.<sup>15</sup> The Canadian Council on Learning identified in their report the following as obstacles to accessing sufficient information on providing care for seniors, and summarized them in a table:

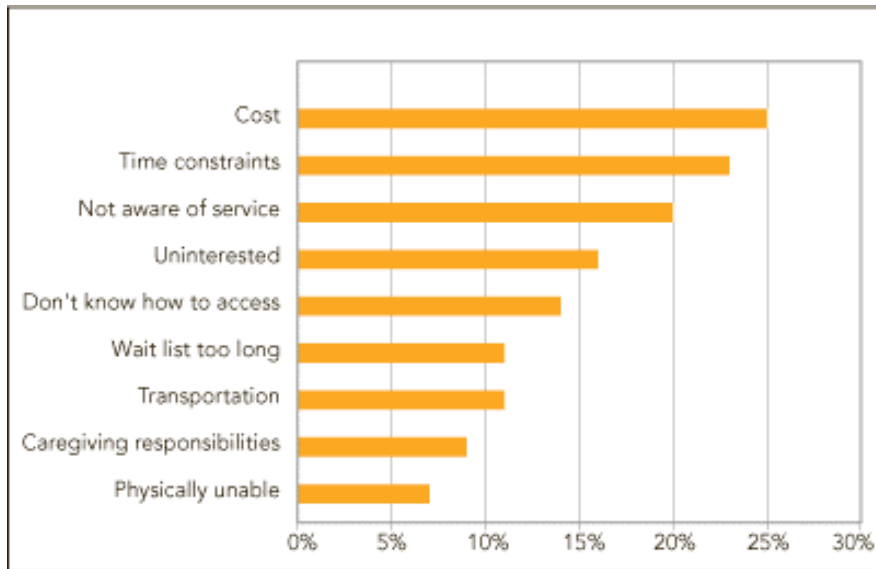
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<sup>13</sup> Palley, H, Oktay, J. *The Chronically Limited Elderly. The Case for a National Policy for In-Home and Supportive Community-Based Services*. [Online] [http://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Vi4F7h4z3\\_wC&oi=fnd&pg=PP8&dq=policy+responses+sandwich+generation+vancouver&ots=wTaPLJ3FCT&sig=86S5g3NbnKLGITdFGT6nJFICoIA#PPA35,M1](http://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Vi4F7h4z3_wC&oi=fnd&pg=PP8&dq=policy+responses+sandwich+generation+vancouver&ots=wTaPLJ3FCT&sig=86S5g3NbnKLGITdFGT6nJFICoIA#PPA35,M1)

<sup>14</sup> *The obstacles to learning about caring for elders in Canada*. Canadian Council on Learning. [Online] [http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20070700\\_Learning\\_About\\_Elder\\_Care.htm](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20070700_Learning_About_Elder_Care.htm)

<sup>15</sup> *Eldercare and the workplace: The role of business, labour and government*. Parliamentary Research Branch, Government of Canada. [Online] <http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/MR/mr128-e.htm#C.%20Government>

## Barriers to access of information on eldercare



If 80% of eldercare is being provided by family members, who, arguably, are for the most part not health care professionals, cost *cannot* be the predominant barrier in allowing these care providers to access the information they need to proceed in a physically and emotionally stable environment. There are many low-cost ways to provide helpful, accessible information, but care must be taken to guarantee that this information is being provided in a way that will be the most helpful to those who will use it. As the Canadian Council on Learning noted, ‘the internet is a significant source of health information for Canadians, and is used by about half of the people who do the most informal eldercare.’<sup>16</sup> This is not an insignificant amount of the population, and this should be taken into consideration when crafting suitable materials. Additionally, as the report noted, ‘the abundance of health information on the internet can be a problem for users,

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<sup>16</sup> *The obstacles to learning about caring for elders in Canada*. Canadian Council on Learning. [Online] [http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20070700\\_Learning\\_About\\_Elder\\_Care.htm](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20070700_Learning_About_Elder_Care.htm)

however, as many lack the critical-thinking skills to appraise the quality of information they find.<sup>17</sup>

The report highlighted the fact that low literacy levels pose serious barriers to accessing information on senior care. Health literacy is even more of a barrier. That four in ten Canadians have ‘such weak literacy skills that meeting the demands of everyday life is a challenge,’ simply cannot be overlooked. Therefore, while physician’s offices, senior, community and volunteer centres typically have information on the provision of eldercare, and in a variety of formats, it must be acknowledged that, as the Canadian Council on Learning aptly noted, ‘much of this material is inaccessible to the very population requiring it.’ The report highlighted that, ‘one study found that the reading level of 75% of the pamphlets in a Montreal primary-care clinic, were written for an audience with a Grade level of 11.5, well beyond the grasp of those with low literacy levels.’

This is particularly problematic when considered in a Vancouver context, where 2001 Census data confirmed that Chinese is the leading mother tongue in the city, with allophones accounting only for 38.4% of the Vancouver population.<sup>18</sup> Comparatively, Chinese represented 39.6%. That more than 65% of the web’s content is provided in English only,<sup>19</sup> compounds the problem even further.

Additional problems surrounding access to information involve the inability to generate computer search terms that will produce useful results, a lack of culturally-sensitive material

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<sup>17</sup> *The obstacles to learning about caring for elders in Canada*. Canadian Council on Learning. [Online] [http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20070700\\_Learning\\_About\\_Elder\\_Care.htm](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20070700_Learning_About_Elder_Care.htm)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/Products/Analytic/companion/lang/highlights.cfm#Vancouver>

<sup>19</sup> *The obstacles to learning about caring for elders in Canada*, Canadian Council on Learning. [Online] [http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20070700\\_Learning\\_About\\_Elder\\_Care.htm](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20070700_Learning_About_Elder_Care.htm)

(particularly problematic in culturally-diverse Vancouver), poor language quality, lack of pictures and diagrams to help clarify text and a failure to attribute projected costs to proposed solutions.

There is a clear need for standardized, accessible, culturally-sensitive and relevant information providing eldercare providers with the tools to connect with the resources they need. While no shortage of material exists, this information, in its various forms and degrees of accessibility, needs to be reformatted in a cohesive, approachable format that will engage eldercare providers and meet their needs.

## **Criteria for Assessment**

### Equity

One of the most salient criteria required to evaluate policy alternatives designed to alleviate pressures on the sandwich generation, is equity. Will the policy target the population it is designed to reach, and will that population be able to easily access and benefit from it? Will the policy have a negative impact on those not benefited by it?

### *Implementation of Family-Friendly Workplace Policy*

With reference to the implementation of family-friendly workplace policies, research has indicated that oftentimes, those who take advantage of family-friendly workplace policies are those who do not necessarily require them. Further, women are much more likely to take advantage of the availability of such policies, and dual access has not proven to be a substantive reason for low usage rates of flexible hours or workplace policies. Based on these findings, the provision of family benefits would need only extend to one member of the family, however, the

decision on who is to receive the benefit should not be determined on the basis of gender alone, and cultural sensitivities must be accounted for. Potential difficulties with equity may also arise around the fact that employees not providing simultaneous eldercare and family care are not targeted by the policy, but may have other challenges that such a policy would help them address.

Further, the implementation of family-friendly workplace policies could also serve to reinforce existing gender roles. As the IRPP study noted, women are already more likely to work from home, to work less overall hours, and are less likely to accept a position that does not offer the availability of work alternatives such as flextime and telework. It is indeed possible that setting in motion family benefits designed to mitigate the challenges associated with simultaneous work and family demands will prompt a situation whereby women are encouraged to place less emphasis on career and more on family. However, as such choices are those of individual families, and a host of cultural dynamics comes into play as a result, regulating the availability of such policies on the basis of gender is not something that can reasonably be considered by government.

#### *Changes to Home Owners Grant and Tax Deferral Programs*

In terms of making changes to the Home Owners Grant and the Tax Deferral programs, the possibility of dishonesty in the application process must here be considered. While limiting the changes in the above mentioned policies solely to individuals providing eldercare can conceivably be considered discriminatory, it would likely be helpful to extend the availability of the policies to family members only, though not necessarily immediate family. While the amount of additional income that would result from a successful application is, tenably modest,

applications made to the Tax Deferment program must be made on the basis of need, and effort will need to be directed to ensuring honesty in this process. However, due to the inherently temperate nature of the policies, the amount of fraudulent applications is not anticipated to be high. As was noted above, they are designed to provide immediate relief to a select population, and can reasonably be expected to accomplish this goal. However, once again, potential issues with equity may arise, as the policies seek only to benefit a select, albeit increasing in number, portion of the population.

*Provision of Accessible, Comprehensive Information on Services Resources and Programs available to Assist those Providing Eldercare*

As was addressed above, the medium through which information is delivered might imply equity issues with regards to different literacy levels and an ability to access the material. It should firstly be noted that information does not necessarily have to be provided in written form. As the Canadian Council on Learning report noted, a program offered through non-profit groups, hospitals and local governments agencies that has been widely implemented in the United States called Caring for You/Caring for Me, ‘aims to develop a broad range of caregiver strengths and abilities that can be adapted to any situation.’ This is accomplished through a total of five, two-and-a-half hour workshops and ‘brings together both professional and informal caregivers.’ One of the workshops is entirely devoted to providing caregivers with the skills to access information, resources, and surpass barriers.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *The obstacles to learning about caring for elders in Canada*, Canadian Council on Learning. [Online] [http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20070700\\_Learning\\_About\\_Elder\\_Care.htm](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20070700_Learning_About_Elder_Care.htm)

Further, it cannot be guaranteed that those requiring information regarding how to provide eldercare will access it through typical channels of websites, pamphlets made available at hospitals, clinics, community and volunteer centres, etc. As the IRPP study noted, one of the largest impediments to a lack of knowledge and understanding of issues surrounding eldercare is a lack of time to avail oneself of potential information. Therefore, for those individuals facing such severe time constraints, changes made to available information will not benefit them. However, for those who do seek out information, the opportunity cannot be missed to provide them with easily accessible, informative material that will answer their questions and in the instance that this cannot be accomplished, that they are pointed in the right direction to obtain the further information they require.

In terms of focusing on web-based or printed materials, local government agencies need to take responsibility for reorganizing existing material into a coherent format that acknowledges the city's diverse needs. Aboriginal groups could potentially be consulted for their success with the creation of health education materials designed specifically for their communities, in which evidence-based western medicine was combined with Aboriginal traditional practices and perspectives on health.<sup>21</sup>

### **Administrative Complexity**

The implementation of any new policy will inherently imply administrative manpower. In order to assess the administrative complexity associated with each policy alternative, the degree to which increased administrative capacity or work would be required is assessed.

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<sup>21</sup> *The obstacles to learning about caring for elders in Canada*. Canadian Council on Learning. [Online] [http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20070700\\_Learning\\_About\\_Elder\\_Care.htm](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20070700_Learning_About_Elder_Care.htm)

### *Implementation Family-Friendly Workplace Policy*

Implementing family-friendly workplace policies on a municipal level will indeed require complex administration. Employees should be consulted in order to determine which family-friendly benefits should be made available in each, individual workplace in order to best meet their needs. Further, government workplaces should monitor who is taking advantage of the policies in order to ensure they are benefiting those who most require them. Indicators such as absenteeism, job productivity and job turnover can be assessed in order to determine whether or not the implementation of policies designed to alleviate work-life conflicts have proven to be helpful. While these measures are necessary, it will be a fairly involved process to implement them and will require additional administrative capacity.

### *Changes to Home Owners Grant and Tax Deferment Programs*

In terms of making changes to the Home Owners Grant and Tax Deferment Programs, as applications for both programs can be made each year, communication of the availability of the changes is crucial in order for their benefits to be realized as quickly as possible. The degree to which this is successful can be assessed on the basis of how many applications were made, and further, who they were made by, i.e. did the population the policy was seeking to help, avail itself of the policy? While participation in a 'feedback' program cannot within any reasonable limitations be mandated, should an individual apply for both programs two years in a row, it can be assumed, to some degree that the policies were helpful. Also, along with the application forms, participants could be requested to confirm to what degree they deemed the policy beneficial to their current situation. While the logistics might prove slightly more difficult, and people may be less likely to reveal information of such a personal nature, applicants could additionally be

requested to confirm exactly how the policy transformed into direct improvements, i.e. to account for how they spent the increased funds. General response categories such as ‘home improvements,’ or ‘medical supplies,’ could be provided. This would likely require additional administrative capacity. The extension of the tax deferral program to individuals providing in-home eldercare would not require any additional administrative capacity, as applicants would not be required to provide proof of home ownership, but rather that a senior is living with them, instead.

*Provision of Accessible, Comprehensive Information on Services Resources and Programs available to Assist those Providing Eldercare*

In terms of focusing on web-based or printed materials, local government agencies could reorganize existing material into a coherent format that acknowledges the city’s diverse needs. Reorganizing and improving information targeted to those providing eldercare in Vancouver could be accomplished with relative ease, requiring a fairly minimal amount of coordination of local government agencies, hospitals and non-profit organizations. This policy alternative would likely not require further administrative capacity in order to be implemented.

**Cost-effectiveness**

As the targeted population for the three suggested policy alternatives is large, the costs associated with policies that will directly address the policy problem could potentially be large. Therefore, in order to measure cost-effectiveness, the policy alternatives will be evaluated on the basis of whether the cost of implementing it outweighs the benefits.

### *Implementation of Family-Friendly Workplace Policy*

As the IRPP work noted, while an employer may initially anticipate usage rates of the new policies to be detrimentally high, studies have shown that this has not historically been the case. Further, while the study notes that policies surrounding concepts of telework, for example, may not be of extensive use to employees with preschool children, for example, such inherent drawbacks would not extend to employees providing eldercare. It should also be taken into consideration that studies have indicated women base their job selection largely on the availability and provision of alternative work schedules such as flextime and telework. Therefore, making such policies available may be extremely beneficial from a cost perspective, as the potential to draw women into the workforce who would otherwise not enter, becomes possible.

It should also be noted that on a local level, employer Vancity Credit Union has already taken steps to accommodate employees with conflicting work-family demands, through the implementation of ‘care days’ which permit workers to benefit from a paid day off in order to deal with ill children or parents, as opposed to forcing them to phone in sick themselves, or use a vacation day. Once again, while the tendency to view the provision of such flexibility as a tremendous corporate cost is there, research indicates that productivity in fact increases when employee family and eldercare needs are accommodated in the workplace.

Further problems may arise with the possibility of employees who do not necessarily require the availability of family-friendly workplace policies taking advantage of them regardless, which could be costly. While this touches upon a much larger topic, this should not immediately be viewed as latently problematic. Studies have indicated that the availability of alternative work

schedules through the use of flextime and telework have similar benefits related to increased productivity and reduced absenteeism, regardless of whether or not the employee avails him or herself of the alternatives due to family pressures.

#### *Changes to Home Owners Grant, Tax Deferral Programs*

As was noted previously, the proposed changes to these programs are arguably modest in nature. However, as was also noted above the out-of-pocket costs incurred for eldercare in the U.S. averages roughly \$5,500 a year. With the implementation of these proposed changes, an individual providing in-home care to an elderly parent could potentially access close to \$1,000 per year, which, in light of the costs incurred, would provide substantial relief. It should also be noted that individuals choosing to provide in-home care are not tapping into public sources of health care in the form of nursing homes, or long-term hospital stays, which arguably saves a substantial amount of money. Therefore, the implementation of these changes would directly benefit the targeted population financially, while potentially saving the province money from costs not incurred through full-time public care.

#### *Provision of Accessible, Comprehensive Information on Services, Resources and Programs*

##### *Available to Assist Those Providing Eldercare*

As access to material that suits the literacy levels of the general population has proven problematic and needs to be improved, an assessment of newly created materials and how they have changed in this regard should be undertaken. While hospitals, public clinics, non-profit organizations, community centres, etc, will require a sufficient amount of lead-time to update their materials, (internet information could arguably be updated with relative ease and in a

shorter period of time) communication will need to be made with these institutions in order to inform them of new requirements pertaining to their information sources. Feedback forms incorporated into WebPages would be a simple, cost-effective way to determine whether or not the updated information has resonated with users. Further, an evaluation of material can be undertaken to determine if culturally-sensitive information has been made available to target populations. Funding for workshops provided through community centres, volunteer organizations and hospitals would be marginal, and capital for these programs could potentially be redirected from printed materials that have proven to pose substantial barriers to those who require them. As was noted previously, those providing eldercare cited a lack of information as one of the biggest barrier to feeling confident in their ability to provide this care. Due to the relatively low cost and potentially high benefits, this policy has a solid cost-benefit ratio.

### **Recommended Solution**

While the best possible solution would be a combination of the three suggested alternatives, it is logical to start at the beginning, and concentrate on the provision of accessible, comprehensive information on services, resources and programs available to assist those providing eldercare. Without sufficient information, individuals providing eldercare arguably won't make informed decisions regarding an array of issues, including but not limited to the benefits of alternative work schedules, Tax Deferment and Home Owners grants. (It should also be noted that improvements made to materials providing information on eldercare could, conceivably, inform readers of changes made to other policies affecting them).

It is important to note a crucial, observed distinction highlighted in the report compiled by The Canadian Council on Learning, which confirmed in their survey that individuals currently not

providing eldercare, but who expected to provide it in the future, perceived their ability to learn about eldercare to be greater than those currently providing care, who felt many of their needs surrounding this issue were not being met. Therefore, it is of vital importance to connect with those preparing to provide eldercare in order to supply them with the tools they will need in order to carry out this substantial task to the best degree possible, as well as connecting with those individuals already providing care who are in need of resources to alleviate their emotional, financial and at times, physical burdens.

Studies further indicate that there is a lack of planning and preparation on behalf of those who will be providing eldercare in the future. According to a report entitled *The Caregiving Crisis: New Survey Shows Lack of Planning for Eldercare*, ‘almost half (46%) of adults who report they will be providing care or companionship for an elderly relative within the next five years have not taken any action to plan for this care. Seventy-six percent have not spoken with other family members about this topic and 70 percent have not directly spoken with the elderly relative who may need this care to see what his/her wishes will be.’ More notably, ‘eldercare experts warn that a lack of preparation and family discussion can lead to a crisis should the relative need care sooner than expected.’<sup>22</sup> In order for families to plan future eldercare sufficiently and efficiently, adequate information resources need to be made readily available. The provision of accessible, coherent, comprehensive information on programs, services, counseling, health and support systems are an essential prerequisite to both providing care, as well as the implementation of any subsequent policy that may follow: in order to fully understand what government policies might be enacted in order to provide relief to the current situation, that situation must be fully understood.

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<sup>22</sup> *The Caregiving Crisis: New Survey Shows Lack of Planning for Eldercare* [Online]  
[http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi\\_0199-1296192/The-Caregiving-Crisis-New-Survey.html#abstract](http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-1296192/The-Caregiving-Crisis-New-Survey.html#abstract)

## **Post-word**

We are facing what has aptly been referred to as a ‘crisis’ in eldercare. As the Think City group noted, in order to address this problem and remedy the factors contributing to it, a collaborative approach is critical. Therefore, while the policy alternatives suggested in this brief were articulated within a municipal government context, it must be noted that federal and provincial policies on pension reform, revamped models of in-home care and solid, financial relief for families providing both in-home and distance eldercare are crucial components to fully addressing this issue.

## **Heather Lynch**

Originally from Montreal, Heather Lynch relocated to Vancouver, BC to pursue a Master of Public Policy at Simon Fraser University in 2007. Prior to doing so, she worked for three and a half years as an editor at a magazine entitled, '*Pulp & Paper Canada*.' She holds an undergraduate degree in Journalism from Concordia University and has a wide range of volunteer experience on several boards of directors for HIV/AIDS and violence against women-related organizations. She currently works as a researcher for the BC-Alberta Research Alliance on the Social Economy. While she is in the early stages of her degree, her area of research interest lies in social policy, primarily in issues surrounding eldercare and the implications of the sandwich generation.