

Submission to the Ontario Human Rights Commission

ON FAMILY STATUS



AMAPCEO

ONTARIO'S PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES

Executive Summary

- Since the release of the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC)'s 2007 Cost of Caring Report, Ontario's landscape has shifted significantly, particularly as post-pandemic return-to-office (RTO) mandates have reversed flexibility and disproportionately harmed caregivers by intensifying the conflicts between work, commuting, and caregiving responsibilities.
- Research and contemporary policy guidance strongly support flexible, hybrid, and remote work options; individualized accommodations; and expanded caregiving supports as essential to retaining talent and ensuring equity.
- Two decades after the publication of the Cost of Caring Report, systemic barriers persist, and AMAPCEO calls for enshrining flexible work, ensuring timely accommodation processes, and increased funding for childcare and supportive services.

Background

- Since the publication of the 2007 Report, there have been several changes to the work and policy landscapes in Ontario that directly and/or indirectly affect caregivers.
- The COVID-19 pandemic changed the state of work for everyone, particularly caregivers.
- During the pandemic, most AMAPCEO members working in the provincial public service pivoted to 100 per cent remote work, which continued until the three-day [RTO mandate in April 2022](#). This was followed by increases to four in-office days in October 2025 and five in-office days in January 2026. While fully remote work may not be every worker's preference, the across-the-board mandate disproportionately harms working caregivers through the compounding time and energy constraints of care work, paid work, and commuting time ([Dilmaghani, 2021](#); [Shirgoakar & Lanyi-Bennett, 2020](#); [Samuels, 2023](#)).
- With women comprising over 60 per cent of AMAPCEO's membership, and with caregiving responsibilities disproportionately borne by women, AMAPCEO is acutely aware of these impacts on its membership. Legitimate concerns are being dismissed by employers who are eager for workers to return to the office. In extreme cases, this has manifested as [company leaders insinuating working mothers cannot effectively manage their care and work responsibilities from the home](#).
- With women continuing to shoulder the bulk of caregiving duties, [underfunded childcare programs](#) have indirectly led to [a turnover rate for women under RTO policies that is three times higher than that of men](#). Relatedly, in the U.S., the gender wage gap [is continuing to widen](#) for the second year in a row after years of steady progress toward pay equity.
- In 2025, AMAPCEO asked members in the Ontario Public Service (OPS) to provide feedback on how the return to five days in-office would affect them. Responses collected from members in caregiving

roles reflect these disparities and demonstrate the importance of flexible work.

- Respondent 1: “I have two young children and we live in a rural community that has no childcare services available for before or after school. Remote work allows me to safely get my children on and off the bus daily, while still meeting the requirements of my position [...] A mandatory five-day in-office week means that I may have to reduce my work hours to part time in order to meet the needs of my family.”
- Respondent 2: “As a parent of two children with special needs, access to remote work has been essential in balancing my caregiving responsibilities with my professional duties. Since the OPS introduced remote work, I have earned two promotions based on performance alone, with consistently positive feedback from clients, leaders, and managers.”
- Respondent 3: A single parent and caregiver for an elderly mother, one respondent had to move further away from their workplace when they could no longer afford to live in the city centre. Remote work helped them keep their job and keep up with their caregiver responsibilities, and they are concerned that losing the ability to work remotely will risk that.

Recommendations

- The recommendations outlined in the 2007 Report guidelines regarding equitable employment qua family status stand: flexible hours, compressed work weeks, reduced work hours, childcare and elder care services, and telework remain essential supports for working caregivers.
- Given that RTO mandates are eroding the flexibility gains of the pandemic-era work landscape, a heightened focus on flexibility is appropriate for a 2026 update.
- Recent policy guidelines from comparable organizations affirm this. The Canadian Standards Association, in collaboration with

a technical committee composed of representatives from various universities, unions, and relevant research and advocacy organizations across Canada, published [a set of standards on career-inclusive and accommodating organizations](#) in 2017, which was later reaffirmed in 2021.

- These standards highlight proactive and reactive approaches by organizations to provide necessary accommodations for worker-carers, including support and educational services; flexible and customizable work arrangements, such as telecommuting and flex time, where possible; financial assistance and relief; and leave from work for caregiving responsibilities and with gradual return policies. Such solutions are best implemented on a case-by-case basis and customized to each worker's specific needs.
- The advocacy group Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence submitted [results from a roundtable on supporting caregivers in the workplace](#), with a stronger focus on employers' concerns.
- The roundtable emphasized flexible work arrangements as caregiver-friendly policy, noting that remote and hybrid work and paid leave benefits are increasingly important for attracting and retaining talent.
- One pertinent case study focused on the City of Vancouver and its employees. After the City's Equity Office invited interested staff to create voluntary, employee-led Employee Resource Groups (ERG), a Working Caregiver ERG was established. Its objectives included fostering community connection, offering learning and development opportunities, and raising organizational awareness for opportunities to support caregiving staff to facilitate their optimum performance and experience at work. Soliciting employee-led ideas specific to caregiving is important, but the ERG found that, as working caregivers, having time to fully engage in ERG activities can be difficult. Thus, the onus of caregiver support cannot be fully shouldered by employees, and having formalized policies in place for flexibility is much more effective.
- There must be an emphasis on workplace supports as a case-by-case condition to accommodate intersectional issues in caregiving. One recent study, for instance, showcased [the additional strain on moth-](#)

[ers of children and the impact on their employment, financial status, and well-being.](#)

- The study out of Wilfred Laurier University surveyed 902 mothers of children with autism and found they earned an average of 66 cents for every dollar earned by their male spouse—significantly lower than the national gap within the broader workforce (89 cents). These women face pressures to leave the workforce, be terminated, or undertake part-time work to accommodate their caregiving duties. The authors of the study concluded that inflexible employment coupled with a lack of wraparound services, including affordable and accessible childcare, was driving these women to make these choices.
- This study recommended that employers offer more flexible, hybrid, and remote work arrangements, as well as a commitment to adjust workloads. In terms of services, the authors called for better funded childcare centres, before- and after-school programs that are equipped to accommodate children with complex needs, adequately funded schools that are able to support children after school hours, and well-funded respite programs.

Conclusion

- The key findings from the employment sections of the OHRC’s “Cost of Caring Report” in 2007 note a marked “lack of adequate social supports for families with caregiving responsibilities, together with rigid and non-inclusive workplace structures, creates systemic barriers in the workplace for persons identified by family status. These barriers are reinforced by inadequate legislative provisions with respect to hours of work, overtime, and leaves of absence.”
- Two decades later, these observations remain true. In fact, in many respects, conditions have deteriorated. AMAPCEO therefore recommends enshrining flexible working conditions and significantly increasing provincial funding for childcare and other essential support services.

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AMAPCEO is the union for Ontario's professional employees.

Established in 1992, AMAPCEO represents more than 17,000 professionals working in the public interest in Ontario. Our members work in every ministry in the Government of Ontario and in a growing number of provincial agencies, boards, and regulators.

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