

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

April 10, 2020

Public Health Recommendations for Informal Caregivers

This brochure is intended to assist informal caregivers by providing information and directing them to resources that are likely to support them.

The current status

The World Health Organization has officially declared a COVID-19 pandemic. Here in Québec, the spread of the coronavirus and COVID-19 disease is under control for now, but the coming weeks will be critical to our efforts at overcoming them. On March 13, 2020, a public health emergency was declared throughout Québec. That exceptional measure gave the Government of Québec powers required to implement all measures that are needed to slow down the rate of contagion.

While these measures are designed to protect the health of the population and save lives, some of them are restrictive and may be difficult for informal caregivers to comply with.

Take care of yourself

It can be very rewarding and gratifying to help a friend or family member, but this comes with responsibilities that may affect your own life. This means **that it is essential to take care of yourself as well**. As much as possible, try the following:

- Keep to healthy living habits such as a balanced diet, rest, physical activity and relaxation time.
- Allow yourself time for enjoyment: Take a warm bath, read, listen to music ...
- Maintain social contact with people that do you good; renew comforting activities with your family, friends or a self-help group. Meditate. But always abide by social distancing instructions
- etc.

The current coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented reality for most of us, one that can cause stress and anxiety. You may also feel depressed. The following is especially important:

- Remain attentive to your feelings, emotions and reactions and allow yourself to talk about them with someone you trust, write them down or do physical activities ...

- Pay special attention to clues of exhaustion that include difficulty in carrying out your daily tasks, falling and remaining asleep, physical health issues, frequent episodes of sadness, significant mood or behavioural changes, tension between you and the person you provide care to, unusual loss of appetite or weight, concentration and/or memory loss, etc.
- Delegate and accept help from others. By remaining alone you run the risk of becoming exhausted, sick or no longer being in a position to help the person you provide care to.

Getting help

It is important for you to set up a support network that is adapted to this situation, so as to preserve your health and quality of life. Your entourage, community organizations, the health and social services network and some government programs can all offer support. Don't wait until you become exhausted or in a crisis to ask for help and receive services. This is especially true amid the pandemic.

Your entourage

- Identify the members of your entourage who could offer support (family, friends, neighbours, etc.)
- Make a written list of everything you do and identify your needs, which could include keeping your spirits up, doing physical activities, staying organized and on top of your finances, acquiring supplies, etc.
- Agree to delegate tasks such as going to the supermarket, preparing meals, searching for information, etc.
- Know and share your limits, clearly express your needs, ask for help and accept it when offered by your entourage in this unprecedented situation

Community organizations

Some services such as live self-help groups may be suspended amid the pandemic, but community organizations pursue their activity, adapting to meet public health directives and providing new services for needs expressed by informal caregivers. These might include the following:

- Moral support options, listening to you and counselling you through supportive telephone calls, meetings and group sessions using a variety of technologies.

- Services to support you in your role like meals on wheels, grocery delivery, time off, help with housework, information on available government programs and others
- Explanations of how they follow public health directives while taking appropriate steps to protect the health and welfare of their employees, volunteers and the people they help

Are you having trouble coping? **Contact Info-aidant (1-855-852-7784 or info-aidant@lappui.org)**. Their professional services are confidential, free and available 7 days a week from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Their goal is to:

- Listen to you with compassion and empathy, based on your personal situation
- Direct you to community organizations and resources in your region
- Offer psychosocial support when you call, for example if you feel overwhelmed by events
- Provide information about the services and programs that are available to informal caregivers

The health and social services network

Amid the pandemic, a number of institutions have put into place alternatives for mitigating the impact of the suspension of some services deemed non-essential and focussing on those who may display vulnerability, such as informal caregivers. The following steps may be of help:

- **Call 811** (Info-Social) if you are not receiving services from the health and social services network or are in crisis and/or are simply looking for information about available services. Psychosocial professionals are on hand to offer you support and share information and/or counsel you depending on your needs.
- **Contact your designated social worker** if you are already receiving services from the health and social services network but feel the need to receive more support.

Other government programs and support measures

Various support and relief measures are available to facilitate the lives of people affected by the unprecedented COVID-19 situation. Here are a few examples:

- Revenu Québec has implemented relief measures to help taxpayers meet their fiscal obligations.

- Assistance programs are available for Québec workers, residents and businesses losing income due to COVID-19.
- Suspension of student loan debt repayment, meaning that you will have no payments to make for the next six months. Additionally, no interest will be counted or added to your balance.

Stay connected with friends and family

Use distance socialization strategies to stay connected with friends and family amid physical distancing and the banning of visits to some living environments. You might think about doing the following:

- Maintain and even increase the frequency of communications with your friends and family.
 - Regular communications will help create a comforting routine
 - Renew contact with people that you have not spoken with for a long time, if you so desire
- Choose alternative direct or indirect means of communication.
 - Direct: telephone, video, SMS/text messaging, social networks, digital apps like Whatsapp, Skype and other technologies
 - Indirect: voice messages or recorded videos; letters, postcards, digital photos, etc.
- Clarify the preferences of your friends and family and your own regarding preferred means and frequency of communication.
- Show creativity and imagination in choosing original distance socialization methods that work for you. This may include drawings, crafts, photomontage, shared distance reading, intimate Skype suppers, etc.
- See this time of confinement as a great opportunity for learning how to use the potential of technology and never hesitate before asking your entourage to help you learn how to use it.
- Contact the CHSLD where your friend or family member lives. Workers in these institutions have been designated to contact friends and family on a regular basis to provide information on the health and welfare status of residents.

Do not minimize the positive effects of distance socialization. Maintaining social relationships has a positive impact on the health of the person you are assisting, as well as on your own.

Most people who have COVID-19 recover on their own. Yet the disease may also lead to the death of someone you hold dear. As such, the following may be of importance to you.

- Know that bereavement is undoubtedly one of the most trying ordeals you will ever go through in your life.
- Give yourself as much time as you need to recover. The healing process can take months, or even years.
- Be proactive about healing. It will help move the mourning process along in spite of its challenges.
- Don't hesitate to ask for help from your friends and family, community organizations and/or the health and social services network if you feel the need to share your feelings or are overwhelmed.

Protect yourself from COVID-19

We suggest that you read the [Self-Care Guide - COVID-19](#) to help you take the best possible decisions for the health of your friends and family and your own amid the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. You will learn:

- the best ways of protecting yourself
- how to take care of yourself
- basic care to provide to your entourage
- when and who to consult if you need care and services

This brochure is available at Quebec.ca/coronavirus. The information it provides is based on a rapidly evolving situation and is subject to change. Pay attention to government notices and instructions disseminated by television, radio, Internet and print media.

Useful links

Taking care of yourself

- [Stress, Anxiety and Depression Associated With the Coronavirus COVID-19 Disease](#)

Help is available

- Info-Aidant: 1-855-852-7784 or info-aidant@lappui.org
- [Support](#)
- [Info-Social 811 \(Find a resource\)](#)
- [Revenu Québec — Relief Measures for Individuals and Businesses](#)
- [COVID-19 assistance programs](#)

- [Repayment of a Student Debt](#)

Never stop connecting with your family and friends

- [Socializing at a distance: people in care and informal caregivers](#)
- Information sheet: [I am in bereavement for one or more people who lost their lives in the pandemic](#)
- Bereavement hotline: 1-888-533-3845

Protect yourself from COVID-19

- [Self-Care Guide - COVID-19](#)

If you have questions or concerns, call 1-877-644-4545 (toll free) or the TTY number for the hearing impaired: 1-800-361-9596 (toll free).

NB: This information sheet was produced by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux and is based on current coronavirus knowledge as of April 10, 2020. It will be updated as needed.