



Western Reserve

Area Agency on Aging

WRAAA Monthly Digest: National Family Caregiver Month 2024

November is National Family Caregiver Month, a time to honor and celebrate the love and sacrifices of Americans providing care and support to their loved ones.

An estimated **53 million Americans provide unpaid care** to a spouse, an older parent or relative, or a special-needs child, which has an economic value of more than \$470 billion. Family caregivers are vital in helping older adults and individuals with disabilities remain at home. **They provide hands-on assistance with activities of daily living**—from bathing and eating to getting up and around the home and assisting with medication and housework.

These caregivers devote an average of 26 hours per week to caregiving, and nearly a quarter of them do so while working full-time. Over half (56%) of these working caregivers are women, and 24% of all caregivers are considered "sandwich generation caregivers," or individuals caring for aging parents and children simultaneously.

By providing care to others, individuals can boost their self-esteem, acquire new skills, and strengthen family relationships. They may also experience psychological benefits, such as feelings of pride and a sense of purpose. In some cases, caregivers may even enjoy a longer lifespan.

However, **this work can also come at a cost**. Caregiving can be physically and emotionally challenging, potentially leading to chronic stress and depression. Caregivers might also face negative impacts on their relationships, financial stability, and overall quality of life.

Supporting family caregivers is crucial for their well-being and the quality of care they provide. Some effective ways to offer support include:

- **Advocate for Caregiver Rights:** Support policies and initiatives that promote caregiver rights and protections to ensure they get the recognition and support they deserve.
- **Check-in Regularly:** Regularly check in with caregivers, either by phone or in person, to see how they're doing. This shows them they're not alone and provides an opportunity for them to share their feelings.
- **Listen and Validate:** Sometimes, caregivers just need someone to listen to their challenges and feelings. Empathy and validation of their experiences can help alleviate stress.
- **Provide Respite Care:** Offer to take over caregiving duties for a few hours or even days. This gives caregivers a much-needed break to recharge and tend to their own needs.
- **Offer Practical Help:** Assist with daily tasks such as grocery shopping, meal preparation, or household chores. Even small gestures can make a big difference.
- **Encourage Self-Care:** Remind caregivers of the importance of taking time for themselves. Encourage them to pursue hobbies, exercise, or relax, which can help combat stress.
- **Share Resources:** Connect caregivers with support groups, counseling services, or educational resources where they can find advice and share experiences with others in similar situations.

The WRAAA Family Caregiver Support Team helps connect caregivers to resources through the Family Caregiver Support Program. When appropriate, WRAAA Care Coordinators may help caregivers create and implement a respite plan. Our information, assistance, and care planning are **provided at no cost** to anyone requesting help. As part of our services, we also make referrals to other agencies as appropriate.

To get help today from WRAAA's Family Caregiver Support Team, please call **216-586-3441**.

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