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# Survival Coalition, Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network, Wisconsin Family and Caregiver Support Alliance: November is Family Caregiver Month, it's time to fight the invisible epidemic

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An invisible epidemic has been slowly raging across Wisconsin affecting approximately one in five Wisconsinites (1.18M people) who are estimated to be an unpaid caregiver. During November we recognize family caregivers who provide 80 percent of all care for people with disabilities, older adults and others throughout Wisconsin. Conservative estimates show 1 in 4 caregivers providing more than 40 hours of unpaid care a week (with many underreporting). The total value of this care is estimated at $490 million.1

This November the state recognizes the contributions of family caregivers while also pleading with policymakers for relief. Disability and aging advocates are unveiling a new video – *Wisconsin's Family Caregiver Crisis: The State's Invisible Epidemic* – featuring the stories of family caregivers throughout the state. Watch the trailer here.

Many caregivers want to provide this care, but it is increasingly challenging. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated strain on family caregivers who have been forced to leave their jobs or put their own health at risk to continue providing care. Half of caregivers report cutting back their work or volunteer hours. If they continue to work, they often take lower-level positions to fit around their caregiving

responsibilities.2 This puts a caregiver's financial future at risk; lost income due to family caregiving is estimated to be a staggering $522 billion each year.3 Family caregivers spend an average of nearly $7,000 a year of their own money to support their loved one.4

1 https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2020/05/full-report-caregiving-in-the-united-states.doi.10.26419- 2Fppi.00103.001.pdf

2 https://www.caregiver.org/resource/caregiver-statistics-work-and-caregiving/

3 2020 RAISE Family Caregiver report; (Chari, Engberg, Ray, & Mehrotra, 2015).

4 https://www.aarp.org/research/topics/care/info-2016/family-caregivers-cost-survey

"When family caregivers do not have training, support, and opportunities for rest and self-care, their own health, well-being, and quality of life suffer," says Janet Zander, Advocacy and Public Policy Director for the Wisconsin Aging and Advocacy Network (WAAN).

"It is time our policymakers recognize the value of family caregivers," says Lisa Pugh, Co-Chair of the Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations. "This care impacts our economy when valuable workers can't stay in the workforce, work to their full potential, and harm their own financial futures."

"Family caregivers help loved ones daily with meals, bathing and dressing, medications, doctor appointments and more," says Zander. "When caregivers decide they can no longer provide care people are forced to place their loved ones in nursing homes and other state-funded institutions and that is extremely costly for all of us."

States that value the contributions of caregivers provide targeted caregiver supports and are seeing savings of $20 million annually in taxpayer dollars, mostly due to delayed nursing home placement. States also save lost revenue when caregivers are able to stay in the workforce.5

"COVID-19 has made the direct care workforce crisis worse, and many people can't find any paid help to give them a break," says Lisa Schneider, Co-Chair of the Wisconsin Family and Caregiver Support Alliance (WFACSA). "Some families are providing full-time care that impacts their own health and finances. We need to

strengthen the fragile safety net of family caregiver contributions that our families and the long-term support system depend on."

Among solutions advocates want policymakers to enact include:

- Expanding family caregiver supports at Aging and Disability Resource Centers
- Implementing a Family Caregiver Tax Credit
- Expanding the state Family Medical Leave policies
- Investing in caregiver assessments and related supports to identify and support caregivers' mental and other healthcare needs

For more information on policy solutions to support family caregivers go here: https:/bit.ly/wicaregiver

Watch the trailer for the caregiver video: Wisconsin's Caregiving Crisis: The Hidden Epidemic Read the Governor's Proclamation for Caregiver Month.

For more information on Family Caregiver Month events go here:

https://wisconsincaregiver.org/wfacsa-in-the-news