

IL Department on Aging Recognizes National Family Caregivers Month

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Springfield - November is National Family Caregivers Month, and the Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA) would like to recognize the almost 600,000 Illinois family caregivers providing an estimated 670 million hours of unpaid care during any given year. With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and holiday season quickly approaching, it is an important time to highlight IDoA's Caregiver Support Program and the resources available for people who are caring for older Illinoisans.

Specifically, Illinois' 600,000 caregivers join the estimated 53 million Americans across the nation who are caring for loved ones with illnesses, disabilities, and other physical, cognitive, and mental health conditions. From helping with shopping and transportation to providing complex medical care in their own homes, these family caregivers are a vital component of Illinois' Aging Network and a critical resource for older Illinoisans facing the devastating toll of social isolation exacerbated by the COVID-19 epidemic.

Although there tends to be an average profile for caregivers, they are greatly diverse representing both genders and all races, cultures and ages. Caregivers experience difficult emotions along their journey and can also experience many losses including loss of privacy, freedom, money, identity, and work. For many family caregivers, routine tasks are made more difficult as a result of trauma in the lives of the people they are caring for.

“Caregivers are a lifeline to the outside world and source of hope for better days ahead. Caregivers need support themselves, or they risk putting their own health and well-being at risk. I cannot stress enough that help is available,” said Paula Basta, Director of IDoA. “Caregiving is a rewarding experience, but it also comes with challenges. I would like to remind everyone to keep an eye out for friends and family who are caregivers and take a moment to support those who support others.”

IDoA’s 13 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) stand ready to help and provide caregiver support services. The use of respite assistance is not a new concept, and under the recently reauthorized federal Older Americans Act Section 217, emphasis was placed on identifying specific needs and barriers to caregiving, eliminating funding caps. Last year, our AAAs served 55,098 caregivers through our programming, providing 267,208 units of service; which are diverse throughout the state. [Find a Caregiver Resource Center near you.](#)

At the same time, we all know someone who is providing care for someone else. Caregivers give of themselves without expecting anything in return, and they rarely think of themselves first. Now, more than ever, we should all reach out to someone we know in that caregiver role and offer some small kindness. Can you run an errand for them? Provide a meal? Maybe give them an evening off while you supervise? Even a small encouraging note or gift would brighten their day. Support those who support others, and join us as we [#RAISEcaregiving](#) awareness with these tips:

- **Recognize** - The warning signs that someone needs help, physically, emotionally, or mentally.
- **Assist** - The caregiver and give them a break. Everyone deserves a chance to relax.
- **Include** - The caregiver, and make sure that they are not isolated or feeling alone. A phone call to a caregiver just to check in, sending a note, or stopping by for a visit can make a significant difference and help them feel supported. Almost 1 in 10 caregivers said they had no one to talk to about private matters and 1 in 5 said they had no one to call for help.

- **Support** - By being a good listener. Caregivers are rarely expecting you to solve their problems, but they sometimes need to vent their frustration. Pretending to listen rarely fools anyone.
- **Engage** - Don't exclude the caregiver because they often must decline invitations, but don't hound the caregiver with invitations that you know can't be accepted. Offer invitations that can conceivably be accepted. At the same time, don't lay guilt on the caregiver for declining. Sometimes caregivers are simply too fatigued to want to do anything at all, but that does not mean that they don't want to be remembered.

The Caregiver Support Program, managed by IDoA in partnership with the Area Agencies on Aging and local community-service providers, provide information to family caregivers about available services, individual counseling, support groups or caregiver training; assistance in gaining access to services; as well as supplemental services on a limited basis, to complement the care provided by family caregivers. All the resources are meant to provide respite care to a family caregiver. For more information on the Caregiver Support Program, visit www.illinois.gov/aging, and click on the Caregiver Support Program tab.