

Valuing Family Caregivers: America's Essential Economic Engine

Contributions, Costs, and the Case for Investment

April 2026



The Scale of Caregiver Economic Contributions

More than 63 million Americans – 1 in 4 adults – are family caregivers providing ongoing, complex care for older adults, people with serious illnesses, or disabilities. That represents a nearly 50% increase in family caregivers over the past decade, an indicator of how caregiving is becoming a central economic and social role in families nationwide. While federal funding to support family caregivers has increased, this funding has not kept pace with the increasing number of caregivers, their needs, and the needs of their care partners.

Family Caregiving is a quiet but powerful force shaping the U.S. economy. Family caregivers provided roughly 36 billion hours of unpaid care in 2021 alone, valued at approximately \$1.01 trillion. This unpaid labor would cost hundreds of billions of dollars to replace if delivered through formal services. This care keeps millions of Americans in their homes and communities, averting far more expensive institutional care.³ Typical nursing home costs exceed \$80,000 per year per resident, and the services provided under programs like the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) help caregivers sustain this home-based model.

\$1.01 Trillion

Estimated annual value of unpaid family caregiving labor¹

63+ Million

Americans serving as family caregivers²

27.3

hours per week

Average weekly hours of care provided per caregiver²

Ripple Effects Across the Economy

The consequences of unpaid caregiving reverberate through the U.S. labor market and public systems.

\$25 – \$28 Billion

Annual lost work productivity dues to caregiver absenteeism.⁴

5x

increase

Projected growth in productivity loss costs from \$26 billion today to more than \$102 billion by 2060.⁵

16%

of GDP

Share of U.S. economic output represented by unpaid care, if valued at federal minimum.⁶

\$295,000

Estimated lifetime earnings loss for mothers who provide unpaid care due to reduced work and career interruptions, which also depresses long-term savings and retirement.⁷

90%

Deficit

Potential retirement savings shortfall by age 65 for caregivers who begin duties at a younger age.⁸

\$28.3

Billion

Annual added healthcare costs from caregiver health deterioration.⁸

¹Houser, A., Caldera, S., Flinn, B., & Choula, R. (2026). Valuing the Invaluable 2026. <https://doi.org/10.26419/ppi.00402.001>

²AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving. Caregiving in the US 2025. Washington, DC: AARP. July 2025.

<https://doi.org/10.26419/ppi.00373.001>

³Economic Impacts of Programs to Support Caregivers. (2020, February 10). ASPE.

https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/economic-impacts-programs-support-caregivers-final-report-0?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁴Gallup.com

⁵Innovation in Aging

⁶thecareboard.org

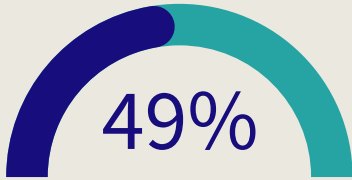
⁷Forbes

⁸Columbia/Otsuka, 2024

The Economic Toll on Caregivers

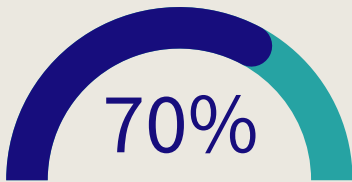
Family caregivers contribute enormous value to the economy, but they bear significant personal financial and workplace burdens and consequences ultimately diminishing their personal long-term economic stability.

Nearly half (49%) of caregivers experience at least one negative financial impact.



- **31%** of caregivers stopped saving money
- **24%** used up short-term savings because of caregiving
- **23%** of caregivers took on more debt due to caregiving responsibilities
- **19–20%** faced difficulty paying bills on time or left bills unpaid

While 70% of family caregivers report working while caregiving, most experience negative work impacts.



- **56%** of caregivers report having needed to go in late, leave early, or take time off
- **18%** reduce their hours
- **16%** take a leave of absence or stop working altogether – either by giving up work (**9%**) or retiring early (**7%**)

Source: Caregiving in the U.S. 2025.



Disease-Specific Caregiver Economic Impact

Family caregivers providing care for specific diseases or conditions can face extreme economic consequences. This chart highlights examples of how different disease states can drive financial strain for caregivers, including lost income, reduced work hours, and significant out-of-pocket costs.

Disease	Caregiver Economic Burden	Key Detail
Alzheimer's & Dementia	\$413.5B	~12 million unpaid caregivers provided 19.2 billion hours in 2024. Total indirect costs including unpaid care and productivity loss estimated at \$832B. 70% of lifetime care costs (~\$405K) borne by families. ^{9, 10}
Schizophrenia	\$104.6B	Unpaid caregiver wages (\$104.6B) plus other caregiver impacts (\$60.4B) = 45% of the \$366.8B total annual societal cost. Estimated cost per diagnosed person: \$119,436/year. ^{11, 12}
Cardiovascular Disease	\$64.3B	Informal caregiving costs represent ~11% of total CVD healthcare and productivity costs. Total CVD costs projected to grow from \$616B (2015) to \$1.2T by 2035 when caregiving is included. ^{13, 14}
Cancer	\$44B	Estimated \$44B in costs from caregiver absenteeism and job loss. ~6.1M cancer caregivers average 33 hrs/week. 25–29% made extended employment changes; ~60% of working-age survivors report financial hardship. ^{15, 16}
ALS	\$669K per patient	In-home caregiving is the single largest cost per ALS patient (\$669K of \$1.43M total). 51% rely entirely on informal care; caregiving hours reach up to 130/week in later stages. ^{17, 18, 19, 20}

Why it Matters

Family caregivers are not a cost to be managed – they are the single largest source of long-term care in the United States. Their unpaid labor subsidizes health systems, keeps individuals out of costly institutional settings, and sustains communities. Yet this workforce is under-resourced and economically penalized for the care they provide. Federal investment in caregiver support is an investment in the nation's health infrastructure, workforce stability, and long-term fiscal sustainability.

⁹Alzheimer's Assoc., 2025 Facts & Figures

¹⁰Fox et al., Value in Health (2024)

¹¹Krasa et al., JAMA Psychiatry (2026)

¹²Schizophrenia & Psychosis Action Alliance

¹³AHA Presidential Advisory, Circulation (2018)

¹⁴Dunbar et al., Circulation (2018)

¹⁵Kent et al., Seminars in Oncology Nursing (2019)

¹⁶NCI PDQ®, ACS (2024)

¹⁷Obermann et al. (2015)

¹⁸AJMC (2025)

¹⁹JMCP (2024)

²⁰Lewin Group/MDA