

Caring Across the Miles

Resources for Long-Distance Caregivers



Connecting You to Community Services

1 (800) 677-1116
eldercare.acl.gov



Am I a Long-Distance Caregiver?



If you can answer “yes” to any of the following questions, you may be caring for someone long-distance.

- Do you help a relative or friend who lives more than an hour away? Help may include arranging medical appointments, managing finances or coordinating their care in the home or in a facility.
- Are you frequently worried that you won't be there when a relative or friend needs you?
- Do most of your caregiving activities take place over the phone or computer rather than face to face?

Introduction

Chances are, you have or will care for a relative or close friend to help manage their health and wellness. As the population of older adults continues to grow, more and more people find themselves providing care to their family or friends. Whether it is arranging transportation to a medical appointment, helping with finances or chores, or coordinating hands-on assistance with personal care tasks like showering, dressing and meal preparation, caregivers fulfill many needs in the lives of their loved ones.

Providing care and support for a relative or friend who lives nearby can be challenging, but providing care to a someone who lives far away has additional challenges. Long-distance caregivers face unique obstacles, including lengthy travel time, extra costs, an inability to attend medical appointments and questions about how to find help in a different state.

Fortunately, Area Agencies on Aging and other community-based resources can make life easier for both care recipients and long-distance caregivers. Through its website and national Call Center, the **Eldercare Locator**, a public service of the U.S. Administration for Community Living, connects long-distance caregivers to Area Agencies on Aging and other resources that can provide much-needed assistance where it is needed most—in the care recipient's state and community.

Tips for Caregivers

When caring for someone who doesn't live nearby, it is important to:

- **Plan ahead.** Learn about your relative or friend's medical wishes and contact information for doctors, as well as important financial and insurance information.
- **Research community options.** Many older adults need a little help to stay healthy and independent. Home and community-based services are designed to meet those needs and include transportation, personal care services, nutrition, home modification and/or repair services, legal services, falls prevention programs and much more. Benefits and eligibility vary from state to state so do your research!
- **Care for yourself.** It's hard to find time for self-care, but taking care of yourself makes it easier for you to support and care for someone else. Find the caregiver support program in your area to access trainings, support groups and other help through the Eldercare Locator.

Planning Ahead for Long-Distance Caregiving

Do you have the information you need to provide long-distance care? It's best to plan ahead and secure the following types of information—before there's an emergency.

- **Health information.** Medications being taken, contact information for physicians, Medicare/Medicaid number, Medicare prescription drug coverage, any other insurance information. In some cases, you may need authorization to view health information (such as through a health care advance directive, medical privacy authorization or other document).
- **Financial information.** Bank account information, location of any safe deposit box, list of local utilities, Social Security Number and other identifying information. Use caution in storing this information to prevent fraud.
- **Estate planning documents.** Durable power of attorney, living will, living trust, revocable trust, health care advance directive. You may need to contact an elder law attorney for assistance with creating these documents.
- **Contact information for trusted friends and neighbors.** Learn about the connections and supports the person you care for has in place. Introduce yourself, collect phone numbers, mailing and email addresses and any other relevant information. If your relative or friend lives in a disaster-prone area, get the contact information for the local emergency preparedness office.

The Growing Role of Technology in Caregiving



As it becomes more affordable and accessible, many caregivers use technology to help meet the needs of their family members or friends.

From financial and medication management to arranging transportation to and from medical appointments, secure websites and apps have made it possible for long-distance caregivers to better connect with—and support—loved ones who do not live nearby. Technological solutions can be especially useful when there are several long-distance caregivers working together to support a loved one.

To find technology tools that might be a good fit for your situation, start with the medical team that supports the person you care for—there may be existing free or low-cost tools available through the doctor's office, such as patient and caregiver portals. Identify what your needs are and how technology can better help.

Questions from Long-Distance Caregivers

Despite the distance, long-distance caregivers have similar concerns to caregivers who live closer to their family member or friend. All caregivers wonder where they might find information on programs that provide financial support for the cost of care and ways to balance work and caregiving responsibilities. Some of the most common questions the Eldercare Locator receives are addressed below. Contact the Eldercare Locator to find any of the resources described below.

- **Where can I get help understanding Medicare and prescription drug assistance programs?**

State Health Insurance Assistance Programs (SHIPs) offer no-cost, unbiased health insurance counseling and education to help people to make informed decisions.

- **Where can I find information on in-home care (bathing, dressing, preparing meals), transportation and other local aging services?**

Your local Area Agency on Aging can connect you to information about all home and community-based services, and can help determine whether your care recipient is eligible for any public programs such as Medicaid. They can also provide information about local programs that support caregivers, so don't forget to take care of yourself, too.

- **I am concerned about the rights of a friend or relative who lives in a nursing home or assisted living facility. Where can I go for help?**

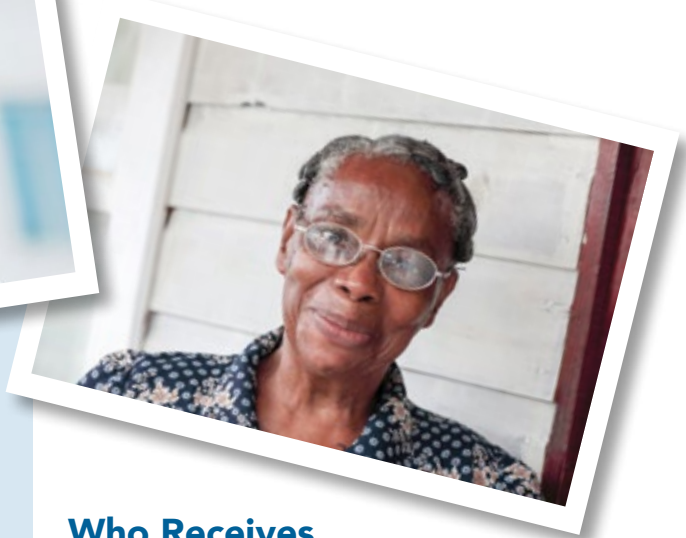
Contact your state's Long-Term Care Ombudsman program.

- **Can I get paid for caregiving?** Some states have programs (sometimes called "Cash and Counseling") that provide funding to family caregivers to offset the cost of care. The eligibility and reimbursement policies for these programs vary by state. In addition, caregivers of veterans may be eligible for a financial stipend through the VA Caregiver Support Program.

- **Can I work with my employer when I have to take time off of work for caregiving responsibilities?** Some states allow caregivers to take paid or unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act or other paid family and medical leave programs. Talk with your employer's human resources department or employee assistance program to learn about available programs to help balance work and caregiving responsibilities.



Answers to these and additional questions are available in the Caregiver Corner section of the Eldercare Locator's website at eldercare.acl.gov.



Who Are Long-Distance Caregivers?

While caregiving experiences vary broadly, long-distance caregivers generally share the following characteristics.*

- Average age of 47, indicating that the caregiver may be mid-career or also balancing care for others in their life, like children at home
- Nearly 7 out of 10 (67 percent) are female
- Most (94 percent) provide care to a relative
- Perhaps due to the difficulty in connecting over long distances, 39 percent visit the care recipient less than once a month. Despite these challenges, more than half of long-distance caregivers visit more frequently—once a week (33 percent), once a month (14 percent) or a few times a month (13 percent)
- Many caregivers report higher levels of financial strain and emotional stress than caregivers who live close to, but not with, the care recipient

* Data provided courtesy of the National Alliance for Caregiving

Who Receives Long-Distance Care?

A snapshot of the “typical” person who receives long-distance care and support from a family member or friend.*

- Average age of 73
- More often women (73 percent)
- More than half (65 percent) live in their own homes
- The reasons that someone needs care can vary, including having a short-term physical condition (32 percent), a long-term physical condition (61 percent), a memory problem (28 percent), or a behavioral or mental health issue (24 percent)

* Data provided courtesy of the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP from the *Caregiving in the U.S. 2015* study.

For additional information and support, many national organizations provide helpful materials and resources to caregivers. In addition to the partners that produced this publication (listed on the back panel), some of these organizations include:

- AARP (aarp.org/caregiving)
- Family Caregiver Alliance (caregiver.org)
- National Institute on Aging (nia.nih.gov/health/caregiving/long-distance-caregiving)



Connecting You to Community Services

Eldercare Locator

1 (800) 677-1116 (Monday–Friday, 9:00 am – 8:00 pm ET)
eldercare.acl.gov

Launched in 1991, the Eldercare Locator is the only national information and referral resource to provide support to consumers across the spectrum of issues affecting older Americans. The Locator was established and is funded by the U.S. Administration for Community Living, and is administered by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a).

The Eldercare Locator’s website features a **Caregiver Corner**, which includes answers to questions caregivers ask the most often when they contact the Eldercare Locator. The website also contains a number of helpful publications that can assist long-distance caregivers as they coordinate support for their loved ones. Topics include **medication management, elder abuse prevention, accessible transportation options, falls prevention, preventing financial exploitation** and more.



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National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) n4a.org

The mission of n4a is to build the capacity of Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI Native American aging programs so they can better help older adults and people with disabilities live with dignity and choices in their homes and communities.



National Alliance for Caregiving caregiving.org

Established in 1996, the National Alliance for Caregiving is a nonprofit coalition of national organizations focusing on advancing family caregiving through research, innovation, and advocacy. Recognizing that family caregivers provide important societal and financial contributions toward maintaining the well-being of those they care for, NAC supports a national coalition of 60 organizations, a network of more than 80 state and local caregiving coalitions, and serves as Secretariat for the International Alliance of Carer Organizations.

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