

Improving Access to Caregiving Resources  
through Creation of

# Caregiver Friendly Communities

A report of the Area Agency on Aging 1-B  
Advisory Council Caregiver Friendly  
Communities Committee

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# Unpaid Caregivers are the Backbone of our Long-Term Care System

**8 in 10**

caregivers could use more information on caregiving topics<sup>3</sup>

**41%**

had not used caregiver resources & were interested in using them<sup>4</sup>

An estimated 34.2 million American adults have served as an unpaid caregiver to someone age 50 or older in the prior 12 months<sup>1</sup>. This equates to over 259,500 unpaid caregivers to older adults in Region 1-B, where approximately 8.5% of older adults over age 65 are living with a disability that includes self-care difficulty<sup>2</sup>. Caregivers of older adults are often family members and come into the role without proper training or knowledge on resources available. Too often when individuals are thrust into a caregiver role, or when caregivers face new challenges that require care decision making, they do not know where to turn for help. When caregivers are surveyed about their needs, access to information needed to make caregiving decisions, including information about local community resources, is consistently identified as one of the top needs.

While there are an abundance of caregiver resources and information available, there is no well-known place to start looking for help, and caregivers are often unaware of what services their care recipient or themselves are qualified to receive. More than 8 in 10 caregivers of someone 50+ say they could use more information or help on caregiving topics; most often information on keeping their loved one safe at home and about managing their own stress<sup>3</sup>. Only 27% of dementia caregivers used caregiving resources in the past year, and 41% of the dementia caregivers who had not used caregiving resources indicated an interest in using them<sup>4</sup>. Communities in which caregiver resources and information are readily available and easy to access can benefit the caregiver, the care recipient, and the community.

## Key Resources to Support Caregivers

The Area Agency on Aging 1-B (AAA 1-B) Advisory Council Caregiver Friendly Communities Committee identified the following resources that are currently available to caregivers in the Region 1-B service area.

### Region 1-B Local Resources

- Area Agency on Aging 1-B:
  - ✦ Information and Assistance: certified Resource Specialists provide free access to resources and in-depth information
  - ✦ Solutions for Family Caregivers Expo: free annual community event
  - ✦ Caregiver Connections: bi-monthly digital newsletter
- County caregiver resource fairs, county websites, printed senior resource guides
- Education programs: Creating Confident Caregivers and Powerful Tools for Caregivers
- Local caregiver support groups
- Local senior centers

### Online and Telephonic Resources

- 211 telephone information line: dial 211
- Alzheimer's Association 24/7 helpline: 1-800-272-3900
- AARP: [www.aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/](http://www.aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/)
- Caregiver Resource Network: [www.caregiverresource.net/](http://www.caregiverresource.net/)
- Family Caregiver Alliance: [www.caregiver.org/](http://www.caregiver.org/)
- National Alliance for Caregiving: [www.caregiving.org/](http://www.caregiving.org/)
- National Council on Aging Benefits Check: [www.benefitscheckup.org](http://www.benefitscheckup.org)
- Today's Caregiver: [www.caregiver.com](http://www.caregiver.com)

## Despite Availability, Caregivers Often Struggle to Connect with Resources

Since 74% of caregivers of someone 50+ live within 20 minutes of their loved one<sup>5</sup>, it is important for municipalities to recognize the importance of providing adequate local support to caregivers and their loved ones. Local access to necessary services and programs can help caregivers and their loved ones maximize quality of life through improved physical and mental health support, while reducing caregiver burden. In addition, it may potentially delay or prevent institutionalization of the care recipient. By recognizing and addressing caregiver needs, municipalities would help retain older adult residents who may otherwise move to other areas with more resources available.



74% of caregivers live within 20 minutes of their loved one<sup>5</sup>



66% report caregiving interferes with ability to take care of themselves<sup>6</sup>



Over 1.8 million hours of unpaid care was provided to AAA 1-B participants in FY 2017

78% of dementia caregivers find caregiving to be stressful, and 66% report that caregiving interferes with their ability to take care of themselves and their daily activities<sup>6</sup>. To better support caregivers and care recipients, counties and municipalities are encouraged to develop plans to establish themselves as Caregiver Friendly Communities. By educating themselves on the needs of caregivers, identifying what the ideal caregiver friendly community would look like, and investing in appropriate infrastructure, local communities would provide caregivers with better access to necessary caregiving information, support, services, and resources. The result may be more seniors aging in place in their communities and caregivers providing better care with fewer struggles and a better work-life balance. These possible results should increase the overall quality of life in local communities as the number of caregivers and care recipients continues to grow.

## Recommendations to Close the Caregiver Resource Gap

1. Design a self-assessment tool that can be used by local governments and municipalities to self-assess their level of support for family caregivers. The self-assessment tool will assist in benchmarking the community's support to family caregivers and provide a foundational reference point to aid in making progress toward becoming more caregiver friendly.
2. Partner with a local municipality or county government to test the effectiveness of a caregiver friendly community assessment tool
  - A. Educate the community on the specific needs of caregivers
  - B. Score the municipality based on self-assessment tool criteria
  - C. Encourage local government to invest in infrastructure updates to identified caregiver support systems and resources
  - D. Create or update municipality's printed and online community resource guides

# Acknowledgements

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# Footnotes

1. National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP. (2015) Caregiving in the U.S. 2015 - Focused Look at Caregivers of Adults Age 50+
2. U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (Table B17001)
3. National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP. (2015) Caregiving in the U.S. 2015 - Focused Look at Caregivers of Adults Age 50+
4. National Poll on Healthy Aging, University of Michigan. (2017). November 2017 Report: Dementia caregivers – Juggling, delaying, and looking forward
5. National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP. (2015) Caregiving in the U.S. 2015 - Focused Look at Caregivers of Adults Age 50+
6. National Poll on Healthy Aging, University of Michigan. (2017). November 2017 Report: Dementia caregivers – Juggling, delaying, and looking forward