

An Echo Press Editorial: Family caregivers help millions of older adults live at home

Alexandria, MN

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From the editorial: Report finds 840,000 family caregivers of adults in Minnesota contribute 480 million hours of care annually.

Echo Press Editorial



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Opinion by Alexandria Echo Press Editorial Board

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Let's hear it for all the hardworking family caregivers in Minnesota that need more support. A new AARP report shows that the economic value of family caregiving in Minnesota has reached \$11.1 billion annually. The report also found that 840,000 family caregivers of adults contribute 480 million hours of care annually.

“Most of this work is unpaid, yet it forms the backbone of the nation’s long-term care system that is essential to helping millions of older adults live independently at home,” according to news release issued by AARP last week.

Why does this matter? Without family caregivers, many more Minnesotans would rely on expensive institutional care, driving significantly higher costs for taxpayers and public programs.

“Family caregivers are a major economic force that fill critical gaps in our health care system,” said Cathy McLeer, state director at AARP Minnesota. “The economic value they provide now exceeds \$11.1 billion annually, yet this care often comes at significant cost to caregivers’ health and financial security, and well-being. AARP is elevating this important issue and fighting to save family caregivers time and money.”

Here are some key findings from the report, valuing the invaluable 2026:

- 840,000 Minnesotans are caregivers of adults, providing care for older parents, spouses, neighbors, and other loved ones, contributing 480 millions hours of care annually, work that would be valued at \$11.1 billion per year if paid in the marketplace, based on a value of \$22.94 per hour.
- Across states, the estimated value of caregiving ranges from \$14.12 per hour in Louisiana to \$27.05 per hour in Washington, reflecting regional differences in wages and the cost of care.

National findings:

- 59 million Americans are caregivers of adults, providing care for older parents, spouses, neighbors, and other loved ones, contributing 49.5 billion hours of care annually, work that would be valued at \$1.01 trillion per year if paid in the marketplace, based on a value of \$20.41 per hour.
- The 49.5 billion hours of care provided each year is the equivalent of nearly 24 million full-time workers, roughly 17% of the entire U.S. full-time workforce.
- The value of family caregiving exceeds total federal, state, and local Medicaid spending nationwide, and almost doubles all out-of-pocket health care spending.

Caregiving has become more demanding and complex as chronic illnesses rise and more care shifts into homes. According to the report::

Family caregivers are spending more time providing care, averaging 27 hours each week.

More than half, 57%, now provide high-intensity care meaning; they spend more hours helping with daily tasks like bathing and dressing as well as complex medical and nursing tasks like wound care and administering injections.

According to AARP, two main forces driving higher long-term care costs include rising hourly wages for care workers and the increasing intensity of older adults' care needs, which often translates into needing more hours of assistance, according to AARP.

“As long-term care becomes less affordable, caregiving increasingly shifts to family members to fill the gaps,” said Alan Weil, senior vice president at the AARP Public Policy Institute. “More families have no choice but to step in themselves, often providing care beyond what they realistically have the time, resources or capacity to handle.”

Through its advocacy, AARP helped secure Paid Family and Medical Leave in Minnesota, giving family caregivers the ability to be there for their loved ones without sacrificing a paycheck or their job.

This new benefit recognizes the essential role caregivers play in supporting families, workplaces, and communities. AARP said it will continue to fight for commonsense solutions that help caregivers balance work, family and financial security.

AARP also helps families navigate caregiving challenges by connecting them to trusted resources. AARP Minnesota's resource guide helps family caregivers access key programs, services and agencies right in their community. To find out more, visit www.aarp.org/caregiving.