



## Caring Every Day: Honoring the nation's caregivers

**Madison** - "Over 60 percent of today's adult population either is or expects to be a family caregiver," says Mary Brintnall-Peterson, University of Wisconsin-Extension program specialist in aging.

November is National Family Caregiver Month (NFC Month), which seeks to draw attention to the many challenges facing family caregivers, advocate for stronger public policy to address family caregiving issues, and raise awareness about the community programs that support family caregivers. NFC Month is a time to thank, support, educate and advocate for the more than 50 million family caregivers across the country.

This year's theme, Caring Every Day, encourages family caregivers to take three steps every day to make their lives easier, improve care and raise awareness about their continued love and commitment. The three steps are: Believe in Yourself, Protect Your Health, and Reach Out for Help.

According to the National Family Caregivers Association (NFCA), in any given year over 50 million people provide some level of caregiving services. More than 25 million people provide, on average, 20 hours of care a week, or more, for a loved one. Those services are valued at more than \$257 billion dollars a year. Family caregivers provide more than 80 percent of all home care services. Of today's family caregivers, 46 percent provide some level of nursing support and 52 percent provide help with daily living activities such as dressing and toileting.

UW-Extension educators work with caregivers throughout the state. Chris Kniep, Winnebago County Family Living Educator, works with growing numbers of people who find themselves in a new version of the sandwich generation.

"There may be four living generations of a family," Kniep says, "with adults in the middle generation caring for their own children and their grandparents. Many times the parents of these adults are in good health, but unable to provide the kind of care the grandparents need."

The role of caregiver is an evolving one, often beginning with little things, like helping with shopping or driving the older adult to appointments. The "helping" usually increases over time to more regular care, like daily visits and personal care tasks. This slow progression often goes unnoticed.

"The care provider may not see him or herself as a caregiver," says Kniep, "They may just consider these tasks as part of their role as a spouse, son or daughter. However, as more hours are spent in providing care, the role becomes more complex. And, as most caregivers are also working outside the home, meeting the demands of providing care at home also becomes a workplace issue."

There are many resources available to help family caregivers in Wisconsin find a healthy balance that benefits both caregiver and care recipient. County and tribal aging offices are an excellent local resource, advocating on behalf of older adults and coordinating community services to meet their needs. For the location of your county or tribal Aging Office, consult [www.dhfs.state.wi.us/aging/contacts/COAGOF.HTM](http://www.dhfs.state.wi.us/aging/contacts/COAGOF.HTM) or call the state Bureau of Aging and Long Term Care Resources at 608-266-2536.

Another good resource is the Wisconsin Alliance for Family Caregivers, a network of organizations and family caregivers providing education, resources and support to family caregivers statewide. Visit the web site at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/caregiving/> to learn about regional networks and the training and resources available. Also check out the caregiving reading list, which contains hundreds of fact sheets on caregiving topics at

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/caregiving/careres/readinglist.html>

You can also contact your local UW-Extension county office. For the location of county offices, see <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/>. For county specific family caregiving data, consult the family caregiving demographic publication on the University of Wisconsin-Extension web site at: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/demographics/caregiving/index.cfm>

To learn more about National Family Caregiver Month, contact NFCA at 800- 896-3650 or visit [www.thefamilycaregiver.org](http://www.thefamilycaregiver.org)

“Our goal for NFC Month is to move from awareness to action,” said Suzanne Mintz, NFCA president and co-founder. “This year we are encouraging people to literally reach out and help family caregivers to improve their quality of life. There are so many ways to help, such as preparing a meal or providing a ride to church. NFC Month recognizes that caregiving is more than a one-person job.”

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