

# Caregiving: When our Parents Need Us

by Nancy King

If you are providing assistance to an aging parent, you are not alone. In Colorado, there are over 600,000 people over the age of 65. The “Baby Boomer” generation—those who were born between 1946 and 1964--began turning 65 in 2011, and the leading edge will turn 70 next year.

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There’s a good chance that Boomers will live longer than the generations that came before them. Thanks to medical advances, life expectancy has increased by more than 50% in the last 100 years. As a group, older adults want to age with dignity, staying in their own homes and communities as long as possible. This wish has enormous implications for families.

According to the advocacy organization “Boomers Leading Change”, 78% of senior households are financially vulnerable because they depend on Social Security for all or most of their income. Most will rely on unpaid family caregivers, who provide care valued at \$6.6 BILLION each year in Colorado. While most unpaid family caregivers have received little to

no training, 46% of caregivers perform medical or nursing tasks for loved ones and 78% manage medications.

Caregiving can take a toll on the caregiver and his or her family. Some have to stop working to provide care to their parents, 40% have stopped saving for their own retirements, and 62% provide financial support. There are also physical, emotional, and social consequences.

## RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE

Luckily, there are some resources available in the Arkansas Valley and High Plains regions to support family caregivers. Senior Centers provide social activities, meals, and educational opportunities for seniors, and help seniors stay active and fit. There is a full range of independent living options available for people who don’t need nursing home-level care, but require extra support. Local hospice organizations also have respite care programs that provide in-home support with cooking, cleaning, shopping and bathing. For seniors who have few assets and qualify for Medicaid or Medicare, nursing home care is an option that won’t bankrupt the family.

Caregivers who are trying to manage the stress and strain of daily life while caring for an aging parent also need support. Family Caregiver Support Program services for family caregivers are provided



through local area agencies on aging (AAAs) and include information, assistance, individual counseling, support groups, caregiver training, respite care, and limited supplemental services such as transportation and home modifications. To be connected to your local AAA within Colorado, call (888) 866-4243.

Southeast Health Group (SHG) is also a resource to seniors and their family caregivers. SHG provides comprehensive outpatient health care services, including mental health, substance use disorder, primary care and wellness services. Offices are conveniently located throughout the Arkansas Valley and High Plains regions. If you know a caregiver who is experiencing depression or anxiety, or whose health is comprised from the stress of caregiving, please call 1-800-511-5446 to schedule an appointment.