



spotlight on health

The Economic Value Of Caregiving

(NAPSA)—The contribution made by caregivers may extend well beyond the individuals they look after. A recent study by AARP has found that family caregiving saves the country's health care system hundreds of billions of dollars annually by delaying or preventing more costly institutional care.

Family members and other unpaid caregivers provide by far the majority of long-term services and support received by persons with disabilities of all ages.

Many believe that the contributions made by caregivers to loved ones and friends are more than a key element of the nation's long-term care system. They also play an important role in the U.S. economy, with an estimated economic value of about \$350 billion in 2006.

That year, there were between 30 million and 38 million adults caring for older family members such as parents and grandparents.

These caregivers provided an average of 21 hours of care per week. The "typical" caregiver in the U.S. is a 46-year-old female who works outside of home and spends more than 20 hours per week providing unpaid care.

Unfortunately, caregivers can experience serious economic losses due to changes in work patterns, including lost wages, loss of health insurance and other job benefits, and lower retirement savings and Social Security benefits, as a result of their caregiving activities.

Experts argue that even the most conservative assumptions and estimates indicate the value is huge, dwarfing the value of paid home health care and nearly matching the total national



Family caregivers account for as much in health care costs as traditional health care.

spending on home health care and nursing home care—as much as \$371 billion by some counts. By contrast, federal and state governments spent \$311 billion on Medicaid in 2005.

For both economic and health reasons, it is essential to prevent family caregivers from being overwhelmed by the demands placed upon them. The cost of funding more services and support for caregivers is minute compared to the value of their contributions.

One option is to implement family-friendly workplace policies such as flextime and telecommuting, referral to supportive services, and caregiver support programs in the workplace.

In addition, AARP urges preserving and expanding the protections of the Family and Medical Leave Act, which allows individuals who work for employers with 50 or more employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for themselves, a child, spouse or parent in the case of serious illness.

Learn more at www.aarp.org.