NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR CAREGIVING

NAMI
National Alliance on Mental Illness

Caregiving in the US:
Insights for Action Issue Brief

Mental Health Impacts of Family Caregiving

March 2026

Family caregiving can take a profound toll on mental health, often leading to elevated stress, anxiety, and depression as individuals balance care responsibilities with work, relationships, and self-care. The emotional labor of supporting a care partner can exacerbate feelings of isolation and burnout. Recognizing these challenges is essential for developing effective interventions and supports that protect caregiver well-being. Data from Caregiving in the US 2025, a project of the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP, provides a current snapshot of caregiver experiences and needs, offering critical insights to shape policies, resources, and supports that truly address the mental health impacts family caregivers face.

Caregiver Mental Health: Data Summary

Data from Caregiving in the US 2025 shows the emotional landscape of family caregiving and reveal profound challenges and unexpected resilience. Nearly two-thirds of caregivers experience moderate to high emotional stress, while one in four reports feeling alone- a concerning increase from 21% in 2020. The mental health impacts vary across populations, with female, LGBTQ+, and Hispanic/Latino caregivers facing particularly high rates of emotional strain. Yet amid these difficulties, many caregivers discover meaning in their role. Half say they find a sense of purpose through caregiving, with Hispanic/Latino caregivers (58%) and those caring for nonrelatives (63%) especially likely to experience this positive dimension. Perhaps most critically, the circumstances of becoming a caregiver shape the entire experience: those who felt they had no choice in taking on their role report nearly twice as many poor mental health days and are three times more likely to feel isolated than those who chose their path.

The Hidden *Weight* of Caregiving

A look at the emotional toll, the impact of choice, and the disparities shaping caregiver mental health today

THE EMOTIONAL TOLL

Most caregivers carry a heavy emotional burden — and nearly 1 in 4 feel alone.

Report moderate to high emotional stress.

Report feeling alone.

Meet Caregiver, Yang, transplant caregiver for her son.

> “When my son went to college across the country, I was remotely caring for a college kid with special needs, and it made me feel very vulnerable. He contracted a virus that sent him to the ER, and he had nobody there for him. He didn’t have me for the first time. It was very difficult for both of us. I almost had a mental breakdown – all the worry and helplessness – the mental and physical are so connected. The mental breakdown started to make me feel sick myself. I wish there was someone I could go to and say, ‘this is my situation, can I please get help?”

WHO FEELS IT MOST

Loneliness hits some caregivers harder than others.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

GENDER

51%

Yet more than half say caregiving gives them **a sense of purpose** or meaning in life — even amid the strain.

7.0

average days per month when mental health was not good

4.1

average days per month when poor mental or physical health kept caregivers from usual activities

THE CHOICE FACTOR

Having a choice in becoming a caregiver changes everything.

56%

of caregivers felt they had no choice in taking on their role

NO CHOICE IN CAREGIVING

8.0

poor mental health days / month

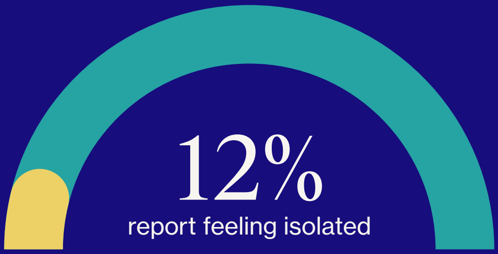
34%

report feeling isolated

HAD CHOICE IN CAREGIVING

4.5

poor mental health days / month



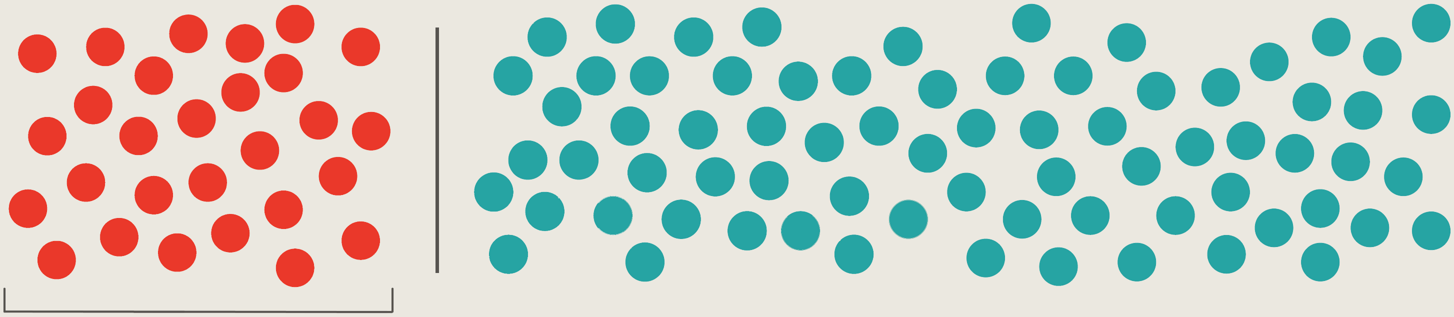
12%

report feeling isolated

THE FULL PICTURE

The people being cared for carry their own mental health challenges.

More than **1 in 4 care recipients** have emotional or mental health issues — compounding the psychological weight on their caregivers.



28%

of care recipients have emotional or mental health issues

Recommendations: Promoting the Mental Health of Family Caregivers

The data reveal significant mental health challenges among family caregivers but also point to meaningful opportunities for intervention and support. With nearly two-thirds experiencing moderate to high emotional stress and one in four reporting feelings of isolation, the need for targeted mental health promotion is clear--especially for family caregivers of people living with mental illness. Recommendations include:

Meet Gabe, a youth caregiver for his grandpa.

> “I think a lot of the time people think of the person being cared for, and not the family members or the friends caring for that person. There should be some kind of help for those family and friends – it should be known that mental health is bigger than people think. It's not just a few people here or there experiencing poor mental health, it's something like one in four. It should be talked about. We all need to help each other, we're all a community.”

Leveraging Choice and Autonomy

The profound impact of choice in caregiving presents a critical intervention point. Caregivers who felt they had no choice in their role experience nearly double the poor mental health days (8.0 vs. 4.5) compared to those who chose their path. Programs that enhance caregiver autonomy— even within existing caregiving relationships— could significantly improve mental health outcomes. This might include decision-making tools, respite services that provide temporary relief, and counseling that helps caregivers identify areas where they can exercise control.

Fostering Support and Connection

Family caregivers may benefit from structured support, especially by connecting with other caregivers. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) offers Family Support Groups in hundreds of communities; internal evaluations shows that over 90% of support group participants report that the groups are helpful and help them have hope for the future.

Building on Purpose and Meaning

Despite challenges, half of caregivers find purpose in their role, with rates even higher among Hispanic/Latino caregivers (58%) and those caring for nonrelatives (63%). Mental health interventions that help caregivers connect with and articulate this sense of purpose could serve as protective factors against depression and anxiety. Approaches such as meaning-centered therapy and peer support groups that celebrate caregiving contributions while acknowledging difficulties show promise.

Addressing Workplace Mental Health

With 70% of working-age caregivers employed, the workplace represents a crucial setting for mental health promotion. The data show working caregivers experience higher rates of isolation (25% vs. 21%) and financial strain. Moreover, more than half (56%) of caregivers reported needing to take time off, while nearly one in ten had to give up working entirely. Employers could implement targeted mental health benefits such as counseling services that address caregiver-specific stressors, flexible work arrangements that reduce role conflict, and employee assistance programs trained in caregiving issues.

Technology-Enabled Support

The dramatic increase in technology use among caregivers—with remote monitoring jumping from 13% to 25% since 2020—suggests digital platforms could effectively deliver mental health interventions. Mobile apps offering stress reduction techniques, virtual support groups, and teletherapy specifically designed for caregivers' schedules and needs could reach those unable to access traditional services.

Targeted Interventions for High-Risk Groups

The data identify specific populations experiencing disproportionate mental health impacts: female caregivers (26% report feeling alone vs. 20% of men), LGBTQ+ caregivers (32% feel alone), and younger caregivers managing short-term conditions and mental health issues. Culturally tailored mental health programs that address the unique stressors of these groups—such as stigma, discrimination, and competing life demands—could yield significant benefits.

Policy-Level Opportunities

Caregivers express strong support for policies that could indirectly improve mental health: 39% would find respite services helpful, and many want professional assessment of their needs (33%). Expanding access to respite care, implementing routine caregiver mental health screening in healthcare settings, and ensuring parity in insurance coverage for caregivers' mental health needs represent critical systemic approaches to prevention and early intervention.

- **Simplified Government Disability Processes:** Streamlining and improving disability determination for people with serious mental illness would significantly reduce caregiver burden. Current systems require excessive paperwork, annual renewals, and are notoriously complex, forcing caregivers to become unpaid legal advocates and benefit navigators. These challenges are compounded by rigid HIPAA interpretations that often prevent caregivers from accessing or sharing essential medical information, even when they are responsible for coordinating care, leading to redundant documentation, delays, and avoidable administrative hurdles.
- **Case Management Services:** Providing funded case management services for all caregivers of people with serious mental illness would ensure they don't navigate complex healthcare, insurance, housing, and legal systems alone. These services should include support for medication management, financial planning, and treatment coordination.

By recognizing both the vulnerabilities and resilience of family caregivers, these recommendations offer pathways to meaningful mental health promotion that honors their essential contributions and supports their wellbeing.

Source: AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving. Caregiving in the US 2025. Washington, DC: AARP. July 2025. https://doi.org/10.26419/ppi.00373.001

ABOUT THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR CAREGIVING

Since 1996, the **National Alliance for Caregiving** (NAC) has been a catalyst for change, transforming how the United States recognizes, supports, and values our 63 million family caregivers providing complex care. Through our nationally recognized research and our advocacy for the first-ever National Strategy to Support Family Caregivers, we drive the policy, system, and culture change needed to make family caregivers a national priority. With more than 50 members, we build partnerships across aging, disability, healthcare, philanthropy, and the private sector to make caregiving more sustainable, equitable, and dignified.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS

The **National Alliance on Mental Illness** (NAMI) is the largest grassroots mental health organization in the U.S., founded in 1979 to provide advocacy, education, support, and public awareness for individuals and families affected by mental illness. NAMI is dedicated to improving the lives of people affected by mental health conditions and works through a nationwide network of over 650 local affiliates to fight stigma/discrimination and provide free, confidential resources and support.

Caregiving in the U.S.: Insights for Action is a series of issue briefs examining the diverse experiences, challenges, and needs of family caregivers. Leveraging data from the Caregiving in the US 2025 report, each brief dives into critical topics such as caregiver health, workplace flexibility, financial security, and access to support systems. By translating nationally representative data into actionable insights, this series aims to inform the policy, system, and cultural change needed to better support our nation’s 63+ million family caregivers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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