

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Caregiving— How Technology Will Help

---

### INTRODUCTION

With the number of Americans ages 65 and older projected to more than double from 46 million today to over 98 million by 2060<sup>1</sup>, the demand for family caregiver assistance will increase exponentially.

Family caregivers will continue to face tremendous challenges, including money, medication management, time constraints, stress, senior living, transportation, and safety, to name a few. As our society advances, no doubt there will be other issues not even conceived today.



What is important to caregivers and how can we help them *right now*? Connected health company GreatCall recently surveyed its nearly 4,000-strong [Caregivers Connect Facebook Group](#) to learn more about family caregiver attitudes and insights, needs, responsibilities, challenges and consequences from their role.

GreatCall's caregiver-focused Facebook community was created to bring a voice to family caregivers caring for a parent, spouse, or older adult as well as industry professionals. Caregiver Connect members on Facebook share personal stories and feelings, ask for, or offer, advice and strategies, learn about resources and tools – but more than anything, provide support for one another.

“Surveying this group helps us further gain insight into caregiver responsibilities, stressors, and tools used to lighten the burden,” said David Inns, CEO, GreatCall.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Media-Guides/2016/aging-unitedstates-fact-sheet.aspx>

Here are the main GreatCall survey findings:

**59%**

Think virtual assistants can help

**2/3**

Use technology at least once a day

**43%**

Need, but lack, financial support

**96%**

Have forgone vacations or activities

**64%**

Suffered physical problems

**77%**

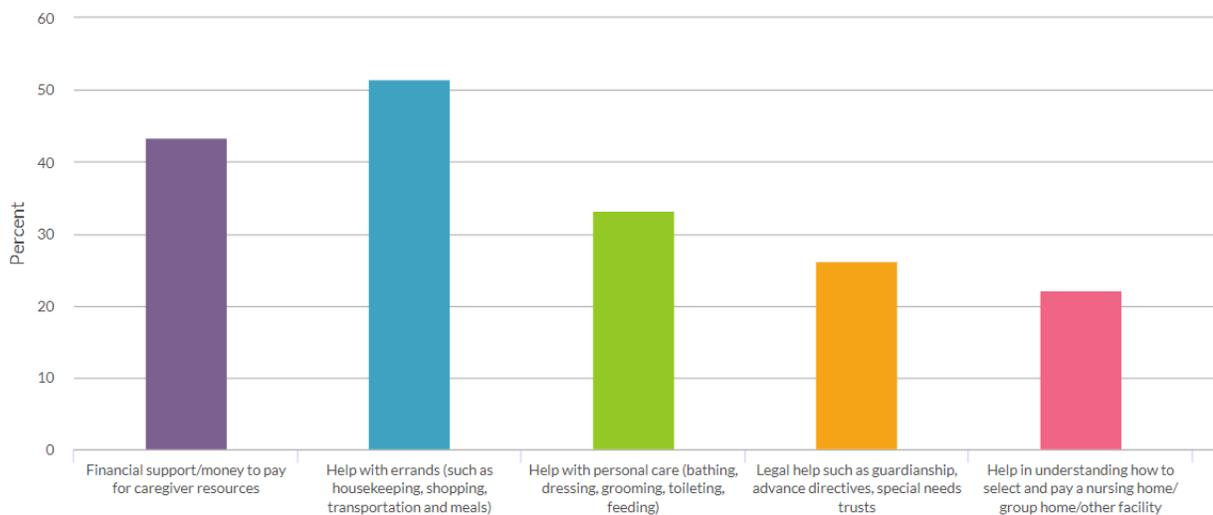
Feel overwhelmed, isolated

- **59 percent of caregivers think that virtual assistants can help with caregiving by becoming more mainstream.** Caregivers want easy-to-use options to help them. (Virtual assistants already help caregivers with scheduling, creating reminders and staying in touch with others. The new market of Voice First technologies will also continue to grow and will put virtual assistants in more demand.)
- **Two-thirds of caregivers use technology at least once a day for support.**
- **43 percent of respondents say they need, but lack, financial support or money for caregiver resources, while 51 percent need help with tasks such as housekeeping, shopping, transportation and meals**
- **96 percent have forgone vacations, hobbies or activities due to caregiving responsibilities**
- **64 percent of caregivers have suffered physical problems or illness because of caregiving**
- **77 percent say they feel overwhelmed, isolated or abandoned by others**

## BIG RESPONSIBILITIES, LIMITED SUPPORT

Deciding when a person needs ongoing help isn't always clear. A bad fall can result in long-term or permanent damage for an older adult. These events are rarely predictable, and rush people into caregiver roles unexpectedly. Other times, caregiving doesn't happen immediately – with Alzheimer's patients, for example, there can be months or years between a diagnosis and the need to pursue care services.

Many family caregivers do not get a choice on whether they want their new role. It goes without saying: caregiving is a big responsibility, in terms of time and money. (Remember, 43 percent of Caregiver's Connect survey respondents need but don't already have, financial support/money to pay for caregiver resources and 51 percent need help with errands such as housekeeping, shopping, transportation and meals. See Figure 1.)



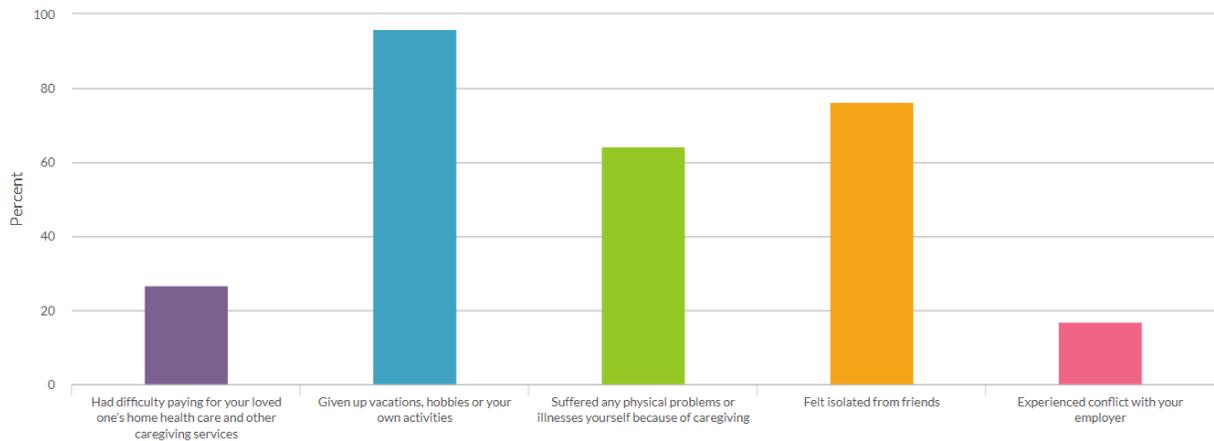
**FIGURE 1:** Resources needed but do not have as a caregiver

A recent survey from the Caregiver Action Network found that **caregivers spend on average 54 hours per week providing care. Fifty-nine percent of caregivers help family members with at least one Activity of Daily Living (ADL), most commonly getting in and out of beds and chairs.** Additional tasks include helping the recipient eat, bathe, dress, use the toilet and walk.<sup>2</sup> Caregivers also help with Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL) like transportation, grocery or other shopping, housework, managing medications and using the phone.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2015/caregiving-in-the-united-states-2015-report-revised.pdf>

## CAREGIVING STRESSES AND STRAINS

With so much time spent on caregiving, there is little left over for personal activities, self-care, and professional work. A lack of self-care can lead to great stresses and strains on the caregiver. (The Caregiver's Connect survey showed that **96 percent of caregivers have given up vacations, hobbies or their own activities** due to their caregiving responsibilities. See Figure 2.)



**FIGURE 2:** Experiences due to caregiving

*“Take care of yourself first. Don't give in to guilty feelings for doing this. If you don't you will ruin your health and your financial well-being. Then you won't be able to take care of anyone. We have to remember to love ourselves first.”*

– Caregivers Connect respondent

### Physical

Long hours on your feet, heavy lifting, commuting, housework (cooking and cleaning) and stress can become physical issues. (In the 2017 Caregiver's Connect Survey, **64 percent of caregivers have suffered physical problems or illnesses because of caregiving.**)

### Mental Health

Caregiving may also lead to mental health risks, including social isolation, loneliness, depression, anxiety, guilt and trauma, among others. Many caregivers are lonely or increasingly stressed because of their caregiving responsibilities and excessive time spent on them.

**(Seventy-seven percent of Caregiver Connect survey participants found that caregivers feel overwhelmed, isolated or abandoned by others.)**

Those most vulnerable to mental health impacts include: higher-hour caregivers; caring for someone with a mental health issue; being a co-resident caregiver; performing medical/nursing tasks; and serving as the primary caregiver<sup>3</sup>.

It can be painful to watch an aging parent or relative battle terminal illness and cognitive decline, and result in feelings of helplessness, despair or trauma. Caregiving may also strain sibling relationships. The burden of care for an aging parent may be unequally distributed among adult children, leading to resentment and even estrangement.

### Professional Work

Families financially unable or unwilling to use resources such as professional caregivers or assisted living facilities must provide free care. Time spent caring for an aging or ill relative means time away from work (and family).

According to a [Caring.com](https://www.caring.com) survey, **13 percent of caregivers had to leave their job due to caregiving duties, while 65 percent reported being distracted on the job, and 60 percent having to change their work schedules due to caregiving**<sup>4</sup>. These employees can suffer setbacks in their career, missed opportunities to build savings and gaps in their resumes.

### Financial

In addition to working fewer hours at a paid job, caregivers often financially support their family member by paying for medical and other expenses. **Long-distance family** caregivers said that they often experience the same concerns and pressures as local caregivers, but with out-of-pocket commuting expenses.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2015/caregiving-in-the-united-states-2015-report-revised.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.caring.com/articles/cost-of-caregiving-2016>

## TECHNOLOGY IMPACTS CAREGIVING

AARP found that **71 percent of caregivers are interested in technology to support their caregiving tasks but only 7 percent use it**<sup>5</sup>. This contrasts with results from the GreatCall Caregiver Connect group survey. It found that **two-thirds of caregivers use technology to support activities at least once a day** (see Figure 3): One factor: This online group uses a Facebook community for support, making them inherently more comfortable with using technology. And, according to a Caregiver Action Network survey, **on a scale from 1-10, caregivers rate their comfort with using technology as 8.3**.



**FIGURE 3:** How often technology is used to support caregiving activities

The impact of technology on social isolation is an area increasingly being explored. Recent research from the Massachusetts eHealth Institute reported that **nearly half of caregivers who feel isolated because of caregiving responsibilities found technology that could connect them to other caregivers very appealing; nearly two-thirds felt the same about a tool to help them balance caregiving and the rest of life**.<sup>6</sup>

Connectivity is critical. A PEW Research Center study found that **more than half of caregivers with internet access believe that online resources have helped them cope with the stress of being a caregiver**.<sup>7</sup> This is validated by the volume and activity of the Caregivers Connect Facebook Group, with one member saying, “I can really share my caregiver joys and struggles here without concern over wounding those near us. It also gives me balance, ideas and an outlet to reach into the worlds of others here.” More and more, caregivers realize the benefits technology can have on their wellbeing and looking for ways to implement it.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/home-and-family/personal-technology/2016/04/Caregivers-and-Technology-AARP.pdf>

<sup>6</sup>

<http://www.mehi.masstech.org/sites/mehi/files/documents/MeHI%20Caregivers%20and%20Digital%20Health%20Report%202017.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/06/20/family-caregivers-are-wired-for-health/>

## Virtual Assistants and Voice Commands

A range of emerging technologies can support caregiving, including the rapid growth of voice-enabled (“Voice First”) technologies which can reduce stress for the caregiver and help a family member maintain independence. (According to the Caregiver’s Connect Survey, **nearly two-thirds of caregivers think virtual assistants could help with caregiving by becoming more mainstream.**)

Such technologies help caregivers manage scheduling, booking medical appointments, coordinating meal delivery and communicating when tasks are completed. They can alleviate uncertainty and offer peace of mind.

The Caregiver Action Network survey shows that **caregivers are looking for alarm reminders for medications, moving, eating, and help with entertainment such as a voice activated TV remote.** Increasingly popular devices like Amazon Echo and Google Home promote independence, allowing care recipients to search by text themselves. Research from Morning Consult suggests that 18.8 million Amazon Echo devices and 15.7 million Google Home devices have been sold, indicating widespread adoption that will only continue to rise.<sup>8</sup>

As virtual assistants and Voice First technology gain in popularity, technology innovators have begun creating tools with seniors in mind. Laurie Orlov, founder of Aging in Place Technology Watch, notes that, “In the boomer-senior segments, hardware has emerged with Voice-First interfaces, including [LifePod](#) and [Nucleus Life](#). In addition, software add-ons multiply, including the Amazon Skills library of 26,000 (as of November 2017), and the [Orbita Engage](#) for Care Coordination. [AskMarvee](#) has introduced a training program called [Aging with Alexa](#) to help caregivers and older adults familiarize themselves with the technology.”

---

<sup>8</sup> [https://morningconsult.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/170603\\_crosstabs\\_Brands\\_v3\\_TB-1.pdf](https://morningconsult.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/170603_crosstabs_Brands_v3_TB-1.pdf)

## MOBILE, REMOTE MONITORING AND OTHER TECHNOLOGY

### Smartphones

Of course, technology that can be adapted for caregiving includes more than voice. The use of smartphones to help caregivers, for example, is on the rise. **Eighty-seven percent of U.S. caregivers own a cell phone; over one-third say they have used their phone to look for health or medical information online.**<sup>9</sup>



Personal Emergency Response Systems (PERS)  
According to the Caregiver Action Network technology survey, **37 percent have considered using a medical alert or alarm pendant**—you press a button or talk into it to summon help-- and **25 percent have either purchased or downloaded information about a medical alert.** These devices, especially the mobile versions, support independence for older adults while giving caregivers peace of mind 24/7.

### Sensors and Remote Monitoring

Sensors and home monitoring systems are also having an impact on the caregiving market. Tools can detect a fall and a person's daily habits so if the user is having an out-of-the ordinary sleep pattern or hasn't moved or been active for an extended period, it will be flagged. Many systems analyze this data and notify family members if the older adult needs immediate help. And then there's predictive analytics technology, which can help detect, and even prevent, a possible adverse health event in the future.

Smartphone apps can also provide caregivers with immediate updates. In fact, **more than one-third of consumers say they are more likely to use sensor technology when caring for others than on themselves.**<sup>10</sup> This statistic suggests that caregivers are more likely to use telemedicine and remote monitoring technology than non-caregivers.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/06/20/family-caregivers-are-wired-for-health/>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/3164\\_Technology-enabled-health-care/Technology-enabled-health-care.pdf](https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/3164_Technology-enabled-health-care/Technology-enabled-health-care.pdf)

## **Progress Inhibitors: What is limiting widespread adoption of technology for caregiving?**

According to the Massachusetts eHealth Institute, **just 20 percent of caregivers say they don't like or are against technology**<sup>11</sup>. So, what factors are limiting the widespread adoption of caregiver technology for the other 80 percent?

The Internet already serves as a resource for caregivers; **96 percent of caregivers go online at least daily and 40 percent are online "nearly constantly."** But beyond the Internet, finding the right tools, apps and devices can be challenging.

### Some Final Tech Talk:

- The largest barrier to using technology --take care coordination--is that caregivers don't know which technology is best. And then there's the question: What will the senior be willing to adopt?
- Without clear guidance, choosing an app, device, or software platform can become a burdensome task instead of a tool that will help simplify care, not to mention, your life.
- Caregivers can read reviews from such sources as technology sites, customer testimonials, caregiver forums and more. Sharing positive experiences and describing what caregiving challenge the technology helped mitigate will be helpful to overwhelmed daughters, sons, spouses and friends.
- The challenge is to educate caregivers about products that can help them, as well as easily identify the right product. Resources abound, from the [FamilyCaregiverCouncil.com](http://FamilyCaregiverCouncil.com) to The Caregiver Action Network's new technology section—[caregiveraction.org/tech](http://caregiveraction.org/tech), to [AARP](http://AARP) and more.

---

<sup>11</sup> [Massachusetts eHealth Institute](http://Massachusetts eHealth Institute)

## **ABOUT THE SURVEY**

The 2017 Caregivers Connect Survey was conducted online with caregivers from the Caregiver Connect Facebook Group, sponsored by GreatCall. The results reported here are based on 125 responses. Survey responses were collected from September to December 2017.

## **ABOUT GREATCALL**

GreatCall is the leader in connected health for active aging. With health and safety solutions for older adults and their family caregivers, GreatCall's innovative suite of easy-to-use mobile products and award-winning approach to customer care helps aging consumers live more independent lives. Products and services include: Lively Mobile, Jitterbug Flip, Jitterbug Smart, Lively Wearable, Healthsense, Dashboard, HealthNotes and health, safety and wellness apps Urgent Care, GreatCall Link, MedCoach and 5Star Urgent Response Service. GreatCall's products and services are sold nationwide at leading retailers as well as direct to consumers at 1-800-296-4993 and online at [GreatCall.com](http://www.GreatCall.com). GreatCall is headquartered in San Diego, CA. To learn more, please visit [www.GreatCall.com](http://www.GreatCall.com).