

## Caregiver's Army Backgrounder

The Caregiver's Army© is for people caring for loved ones. Whether you are caring for a spouse, parent, or neighbor, we are committed to helping you and your loved one. Caring for a loved one may be one of the greatest challenges a family can experience. In the past decade, the number of family caregivers in North America has exploded by 400 percent, reaching into a quarter of all households. As baby boomers age and life-spans increase, the medical and ethical issues involved in caring for the elderly and dying will affect us at a personal and profound level.

During the past several decades we have learned how important support groups can be in dealing with a commonly shared problem. Support groups are a significant way of sharing faith, love, and laughter. Support groups for older individuals and caregivers have been established around some physical needs, usually a disease or some continuing medical problem. Both caregiver and care receiver finds the opportunity to ventilate frustrations and to learn from each other how better to cope with accidents, illness, and disabilities. This need is particularly acute for families living with such memory-loss diseases as Alzheimer's, Pick's, or Parkinson's. The need to know what is reversible and what is not is important. The need for affirmation, particularly when home care is no longer possible, is important.

Children who care for their parents, or some other disabled or sick loved one, are called the sandwich generation. Their own children are grown; and just as they begin to look forward to more time for leisure and freedom, they are often required to become parents to their parents. They are caught in the middle.

Another need for a support system takes place when a loved one dies or is placed in a nursing home. These people suffer deeply and many would benefit if they could share their grief. Persons, such as myself, need someone to talk to about death and dying AND living.

There are no federal programs available today for caregivers of loved ones. The cost of medicine alone can be the deciding factor on whether to buy food or buy the required medication. The Caregivers' Army© wants to contact all state and federal governments. I want them to help older Americans that don't care about the sex life of the African elephant. Almost daily you see benefits for Aids and other disease. Have you seen a benefit for Alzheimer's? I haven't! Daily I see commercials on starving children in foreign countries. Have you seen a commercial on older, starving Americans? They were once our great leaders, our parents, our husbands, our wives; possible OURSELVES tomorrow.

Researching the cause and cure of this disease offers our best hope. In recent years, research has yielded important discoveries. Researchers say they are close to finding ways to slow Alzheimer's in its developing stages. The genes associated with the disease have been identified. And new drugs and other substances may work to slow its progression. Much more needs to be done. We must do all we can to stop this terrible disease.

President Clinton has identified long-term care as an important issue for American families. He also sent the message that the government will not be covering the high costs associated with it. The President has proposed a four-part national long-term care initiative to begin to address the problem.

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The first part offers a \$1,000 tax credit to families who are providing long-term care services to a family member. The second-part proposes a national Family Caregiver Support program to help families find information and services within communities to support and train family caregivers. The third-part of the President's proposal includes a national campaign to educate Medicare beneficiaries about how little coverage Medicare provides for long-term care services. In fact, sources report that Medicare covers as little as nine percent of long-term care costs. And finally, the President proposes that the federal government offer long-term care insurance programs that federal employees and retirees can purchase. Overall, the President's proposal for Long-Term Care Planning emphasizes that protecting against long-term care costs will be an individual responsibility. The need for long-term care can arise at any time, at any age. Does any of this surprise you? Everything that the President addressed is OLD news to us.