

# Respite Care for Older Texans

## WHAT IS RESPITE CARE?

Respite — or regular, temporary breaks from providing care at home — requires having someone else look after loved ones who are older and have chronic illnesses or disabilities. Respite gives caregivers time to take care of their own needs and health care, exercise, run errands, and spend time with their children, spouses and friends. It is essential to caregivers' physical and mental health and to keeping families together. If caregivers ignore their own needs, they are at risk of developing their own health problems or burning out and being unable to care for their loved ones.

## BACKGROUND

Most older Texans want to live independently at home, and those who receive assistance at home rely exclusively on unpaid family caregivers. More than 3.4 million family caregivers in Texas help their loved ones live independently, keeping them out of costly facilities such as nursing homes. The unpaid work of Texas family caregivers is valued at about \$35 billion annually.<sup>1</sup>

Caring for a family member can be rewarding but also very demanding. Many family caregivers place the needs of their loved ones ahead of their own. A recent survey of Texans age 45 or older found that one in six caregivers report being emotionally stressed.<sup>2</sup> Texas caregivers also report difficulty getting enough rest and exercise.

## CURRENT TRENDS

Caregivers themselves are aging.<sup>2</sup>

- Sixty percent of family caregivers in Texas are women, are around 60 years old and care for someone approximately 80 years old.
- Fifty-eight percent of caregivers have been employed either full- or part-time while providing care.
- Seventy-five percent are likely to be married and have at least a two-year college degree.
- Twenty-one percent have children under the age of 18 living with them.

- Sixty-one percent of current and former caregivers report feeling stressed emotionally, and 35 percent report feeling strained financially.
- Fifty-five percent of caregivers find it difficult to get enough rest; 50 percent find it difficult to exercise regularly; 36 percent find it difficult to maintain a healthy diet and 32 percent may experience health problems themselves.
- Sixty-six percent of working caregivers find it difficult to balance their work and family.

## REACHING CAREGIVERS

Caregivers may live in rural areas that lack respite services and public transportation systems that can bring in providers from other communities. Family caregivers of people living with autism, mental or behavioral health diagnoses, or dementia-related conditions, such as Alzheimer's disease, may experience more stress than other caregivers due to the challenging behaviors that frequently accompany these conditions.<sup>3,4,5</sup> Qualified professionals with the skills to care for people with behavioral challenges can be difficult to find.



Outreach messages about respite must be targeted to be effective. For example, messages for families with special-needs children should be different than those for families caring for an aging relative. Research further indicates that messages should be adapted to the values and languages of different cultural and ethnic groups.<sup>6</sup>

## CURRENT DELIVERY SYSTEMS

- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
- Disability or age-specific nonprofit organizations
- No-cost, faith-based respite programs
- Private pay care offered by for-profit organizations
- The Texas Health and Human Services Commission: respite services, including long-term services and supports programs, area agencies on aging, and local intellectual and developmental disability authorities
- HHSC's Texas Lifespan Respite Care Program: serves those providing care for people of any age and any disability and who could not receive respite through existing programs

- When overnight respite is needed, families might receive respite from an assisted living facility or a nursing home.

## BARRIERS TO ACCESSING SERVICES<sup>7</sup>

Barriers to respite services include not knowing the meaning of the term respite; not knowing how to find a licensed and reputable respite provider; lack of knowledge about the benefits of respite for both the caregiver and care recipient; lack of affordable respite services; limited respite options; cultural traditions that emphasize family responsibility; and language barriers. Texas caregivers also identified a lack of financial assistance, long waiting lists and schedule availability as barriers to accessing respite care.

Access to respite options is often limited. Waiting lists for waiver and state-funded programs range from two to 12 years. Each program also has eligibility criteria that exclude certain populations, such as adults under age 60. Those enrolled in one of these programs also face limits to the number of respite hours their caregivers can provide. Program limitations on payment for respite care providers are an additional barrier.

## NEXT STEPS

- Identify gaps in availability of respite services.
- Increase caregiver awareness of the importance of respite services and where to find respite services.

## RESOURCES

- Take Time Texas: <https://apps.hhs.texas.gov/taketimetexas/>
- Texas Respite Advisory Committee: <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/about/communications-events/meetings-events/2020/05/21/texas-respite-advisory-committee-meeting>
- Aging and Disability Resource Center: [hhs.texas.gov/services/aging/long-term-care/aging-disability-resource-center-or-855-937-2372](https://hhs.texas.gov/services/aging/long-term-care/aging-disability-resource-center-or-855-937-2372)
- ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center: [archrespite.org/respitelocator-service-state-information/176-texas-info](https://archrespite.org/respitelocator-service-state-information/176-texas-info)
- AARP Caregiver Resource Center: [aarp.org/caregiving](https://aarp.org/caregiving)
- Caregiver Action Network: [Caregiveraction.org](https://caregiveraction.org)

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