

Overview

More than 8.4 million Americans, including family members of veterans, provide care to an adult relative living with mental illness.ⁱ With national shortages of mental health services, the role of caregiver often falls on families—with little or no support or training.

Family caregivers provide emotional and financial support and frequently manage medications, search for mental health services, make appointments, prepare meals, shop, arrange transportation, complete paperwork and respond to crises. Because of the demands of mental illness, caregivers devote an average of 32 hours a week to caregiving, about 8 hours more than other caregivers.ⁱⁱ This takes a heavy toll; over half experience a high level of emotional stress, and more than 75% are in poor or fair health.

In addition, caregiving responsibilities cause many to arrive late, leave early and take unpaid time away from work, costing the U.S. economy an estimated \$25.2 billion annually in lost productivity.ⁱⁱⁱ This also places a significant financial strain on already overwhelmed family caregivers.

Notably, over 5.5 million families in the U.S. care for a military service member or veteran, many of whom have mental health conditions. Among post-9/11 veterans, half live with post-traumatic stress disorder (52%) and/or major depression (46%).^{iv}

Typically, post-9/11 military caregivers are young (37% are under the age of 30), nonwhite (43%), employed (76%) and isolated from family and friends who could share caregiving responsibilities (53%).^v Most military caregivers (90%) spend at least 40 hours per week in caregiving tasks.^{vi}

The demands of caregiving—on top of work, child-rearing and other responsibilities—take a toll on military families. The stresses of caregiving lead to poorer physical and mental health, strains in family relationships and workplace problems. Nearly 40 percent of military families meet criteria for major depressive disorder (MDD) themselves, over four times higher than in the general population.^{vii}

NAMI's asks

- **Support S. 591 / H.R. 1472, the Military & Veterans Caregiver Services Improvement Act of 2017**, sponsored by Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Rep. Jim Langevin (D-RI-2), which expands the VA caregiver program and includes caregivers of veterans with serious injuries or illnesses, including traumatic brain injury, psychological trauma or other mental illness.
- **Support S. 1028, the RAISE Family Caregivers Act**, sponsored by Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME), which would create a national family caregiving strategy and establish a federal Family Caregiving Advisory Council.

Facts about mental health caregiving

- 1 in 4 caregivers have difficulty finding a mental health professional or a doctor who understands mental health.
- In addition to worries about finding services, caregivers face concerns about other risks:
 - 7 in 10 caregivers report the person they care for has been hospitalized or in an emergency department due to a psychiatric crisis.
 - Almost 1 in 3 caregivers report the person they care for has been arrested.
 - 1 in 5 caregivers report that the person they care for has been homeless for a month or longer.
 - 2 out of 3 caregivers are worried that the person they care for will attempt suicide.

Caregiving challenges ^{viii ix}	Caregivers of adults with mental illness	All caregivers
Duration of care	9 years	5 years
Hours per week spent caregiving	32 hours	24 hours
Care recipient lives with caregiver	45%	34%
Caregiver in poor or fair health	77%	52%
High level of emotional stress	53%	38%
Caregiving results in financial strain	25%	16%

ⁱ Hunt, G; Greene R; Whiting, G; Reinhard, S; Feinberg, L; Choula, R; Green, J; Houser, A. (2015) *Caregiving in the U.S. 2015*. National Alliance for Caregiving, AARP. Retrieved 5/30/16: http://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2015_CaregivingintheUS_Final-Report-June-4_WEB.pdf

ⁱⁱ Hunt, G; Greene R; Whiting, G; (2016) On Pins & Needles: Caregivers of Adults with Mental Illness. National Alliance for Caregiving. Retrieved 5/30/16: <http://www.caregiving.org/mentalhealth/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Witters, D (July 27, 2011) *Caregiving Costs U.S. Economy \$25.2 Billion in Lost Productivity*. Gallup Poll. Accessed 5/30/2017: http://www.gallup.com/poll/148670/Caregiving-Costs-Economy-Billion-Lost-Productivity.aspx?g_source=position1&g_medium=related&g_campaign=tiles

^{iv} Ramchand, R; Tanielian, T; Fisher, MP; Vaughan, CA; Trail, TE; Epley, C; Voorhies, P; Robbins, MW; Robinson, E; Ghosh-Dastidar, B (2014) Hidden Heroes: America's Military Caregivers. Elizabeth Dole Foundation. Accessed May 30, 2017: http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR400/RR499/RAND_RR499.pdf Ibid. p.48

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Hunt et al (2016) On Pins & Needles: Caregivers of Adults with Mental Illness.

^{ix} Hunt et al (2015) Caregiving in the US, 2015.