

Seniors and Caregivers – Online Survey Executive Summary

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AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
FAMILY PHYSICIANS

Introduction

In early 2012, AAFP Public Relations collaborated with Harris Interactive to conduct a national survey of seniors and caregivers. The survey gathered the opinions of seniors and caregivers on various topics related to the stresses they experience on a daily basis, as well as how, when, and where they go to find additional health and wellness information.

This report summarizes the findings of this survey.

Key Findings

Understanding Caregivers

More than one in 10 adults in the United States are caregivers for an adult family member, relative, or friend on a regular basis (11%).

- Adults age 45 to 54 are significantly more likely than those age 18 to 34 to be caregivers (15% vs. 8%). There are no significant differences in likelihood to be a caregiver between adults of different genders, regions or marital status.

Three in five caregivers (60%) are employed, which is slightly higher than the percentage of the overall population (55%) and significantly higher than the percentage of seniors who are employed (15%).

- Just over a third of caregivers are employed full time (35%); 15% work part time and 16% are self-employed.
- On the other hand, a vast majority of seniors are retired (85%), significantly higher than the percentage of retired caregivers (18%).

The Impact of Caregiving on Caregivers' Lives

Nearly nine in 10 caregivers say that there are one or more stressors associated with caregiving (88%), while 12% say there none.

- Caregivers most commonly cite trying to balance work and family with their caregiving responsibilities (29%) and the emotional stress of caregiving (27%) as the most stressful parts of caregiving.
- Time (13%) and money (11%) are the most stressful aspects of caregiving for about one in 10 caregivers.
- Few caregivers find the physical stress caregiving puts on their body (4%), or "other" stresses (4%) to be the most stressful elements of caregiving.

Most caregivers say they are in good health (67%); about a third say their health is very good (36%) and another third say it is good (30%).

- Only 15% of caregivers say their health is excellent, and 16% say their health is fair. Virtually no caregivers say they are in poor health.

When it comes to the impact that caregiving is having on caregivers' health, nearly three-quarters of caregivers agree that it is having at least some impact on their health (72%).

- However, most don't feel that the impact caregiving has on their own health is particularly large; about half say it has "some" impact (48%) and another 16% say it has "a fair amount" of impact. Only 8% say it has quite a bit (5%) or a great deal (4%) of impact on their health.
- A quarter of caregivers say caregiving has had no impact at all on their health (24%).

For the 60% of caregivers who are employed, most find that caregiving rarely or never causes them to miss work (76%; 42% rarely; 34% never).

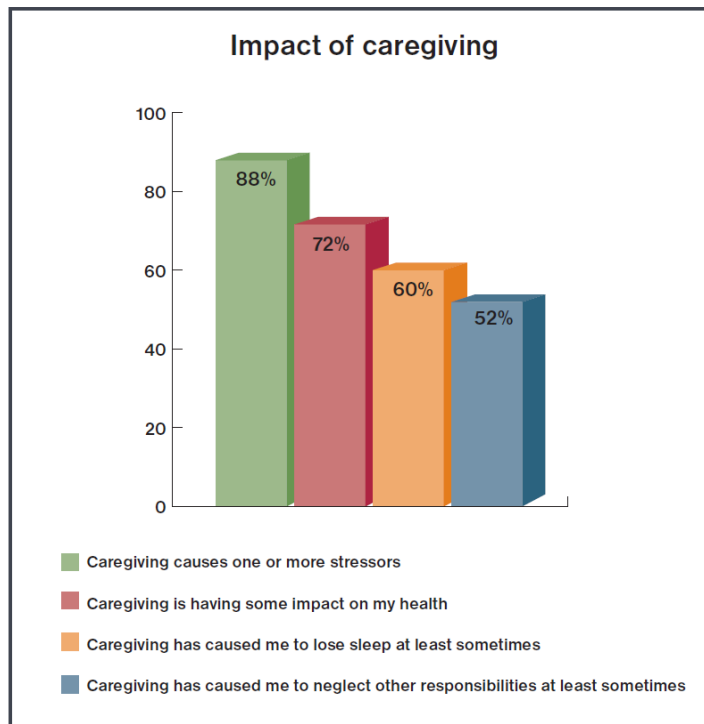
- About one in five caregivers say caregiving causes them to miss work sometimes (20%) and another 4% say it causes them to miss work often. No caregivers say it causes them to miss work always.

About half of caregivers say that their caregiving responsibilities cause them to neglect their own responsibilities, like taking care of their own health, errands, home, family and friends, at least sometimes (52%).

- Just over one in 10 say this happens always/often (12%), while four in 10 say it just happens sometimes (40%).
- Nearly half of caregivers say that their caregiving responsibilities rarely, if ever, cause them to neglect their own responsibilities (48%); 32% say this rarely happens, and 16% say it never happens.

Three out of five caregivers say they lose sleep over their caregiving responsibilities at least sometimes (60%), with most saying this happens sometimes (46%), and just a few saying it happens often (13%) or always (1%).

- Just over a quarter say they rarely lose sleep over their caregiving duties (28%), and 13% say this never happens.



Where Caregivers Go For Health Information

For the 96% of caregivers who manage the health of those they are a caregiver for, physicians or other health care providers are the top sources of information (63%) when they have questions about the health of those they care for.

- Female caregivers (74%) are significantly more likely than male caregivers (53%) to use physicians or other health care providers to answer health questions about those they care for.

Among the 63% of caregivers who refer to physicians or health care providers when they have questions about those they care for, nearly all caregivers direct these questions to a primary care physician (96%).

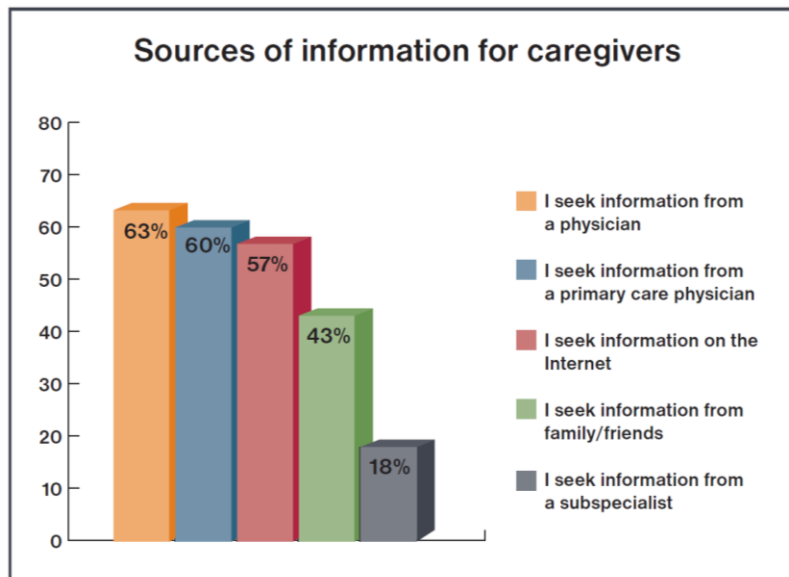
- 7% of caregivers have gone to the staff at a hospital outpatient center, 5% have gone to the staff at a VA/military hospital or clinic, 4% have gone to the staff at a public clinic or health center, 3% have gone to the staff at an in-store clinic (e.g. clinics inside a pharmacy, grocery store or other retail store), and 4% have gone somewhere else.
- Another one in five caregivers have turned to another type of physician (18%) for this information.

More than half of caregivers use the Internet as a resource for answering questions about the health of those they care for (57%).

- General Internet searches (41%) are the most common way caregivers use the web to answer their health questions, followed by visiting health/medical websites (36%), message boards/blogs/forums (15%) and social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) (5%).

More than two in five caregivers will turn to friends and/or family members when they have questions about managing the health of those they care for (43%).

Only 3% turn to some other source, and 6% indicate they don't look anywhere.



Difficulty Finding Credible Health Information

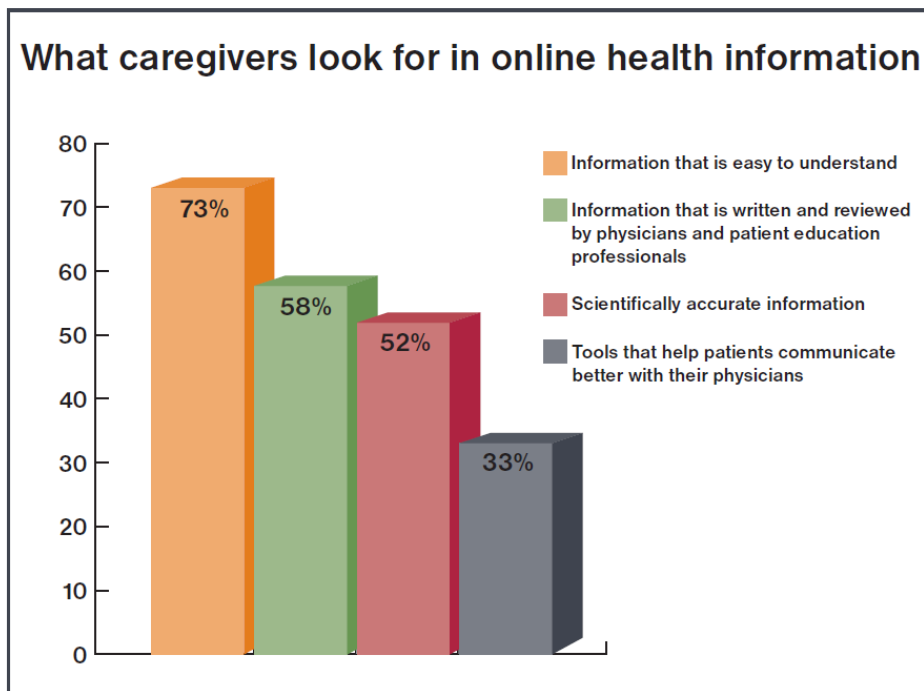
More than half of caregivers (56%) feel that there is no one online resource for highly credible health information for caregivers. Conversely, 44% feel that such an online resource for credible health information does exist.

Seniors are slightly more likely to feel that there is one online resource where they can get highly credible health information for seniors – 50% said yes, while the other 50% said no.

- Senior women are significantly more likely than men to say that there is one place they can go online to get highly credible information (59% vs. 39%).

Among the 92% of caregivers and the 82% of seniors that use online health resources, the top feature they look for in an online health resource is “information that is easy to understand” (73% of caregivers; 78% of seniors).

- After this, the next most important features are having “information that is written and reviewed by physicians and patient education professionals” (58% of caregivers; 62% of seniors), and having “scientifically accurate information” (52% of caregivers; 59% of seniors).
- Though less important, about a third of caregivers (33%) and seniors (27%) say they look for “tools that help patients communicate better with their physicians” on these online health resources. Three percent of caregivers and 4% of seniors said they looked for some “other” feature, and 5% of caregivers and 6% of seniors said “none.”

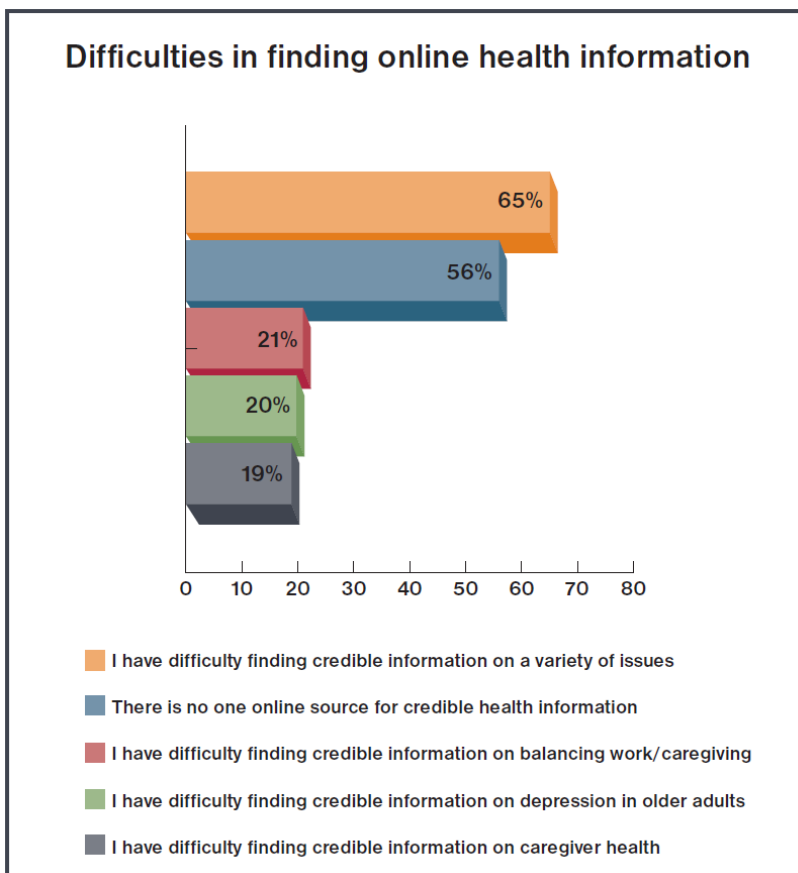


Nearly two thirds (65%) of caregivers have difficulty finding credible information on a variety of health issues, while 35% do not have any difficulty finding credible information.

- Caregivers have the most difficulty finding credible information on balancing work and caregiving (21%), depression in older adults (20%) and caregiver health (19%).
- Caregivers have a moderate amount of difficulty finding information on prescription drug information for the elderly (17%), assisted living and other housing options for seniors (16%), helping older adults deal with life changing events (15%), caring for a senior who has dementia (13%), preventive medical care for seniors (12%) and Alzheimer's disease (11%).
- Caregivers have the least difficulty finding credible information on sexuality in later life (9%), elder abuse (9%) and online pharmacies (7%). Only 3% have difficulty finding information on other topics.

Seniors report less difficulty finding credible information on these topics than caregivers do; 34% said they had difficulty finding credible information on any of the same issues, while 66% do not have any difficulty finding credible information.

- Seniors have the most difficulty finding information about prescription drug information for the elderly (14%), preventative medical care for seniors (13%), sexuality in later life (12%) and helping older adults deal with life changing events (11%).
- Seniors have little difficulty finding information on assisted living and other housing options for seniors (9%), depression in older adults (7%), caring for a senior who has dementia (7%), Alzheimer's disease (5%), elder abuse (5%), online pharmacies (5%) and "other" issues (1%).
- Seniors who are also caregivers have little difficulty finding information about caregiver health (1%) and balancing work and caregiving (1%).



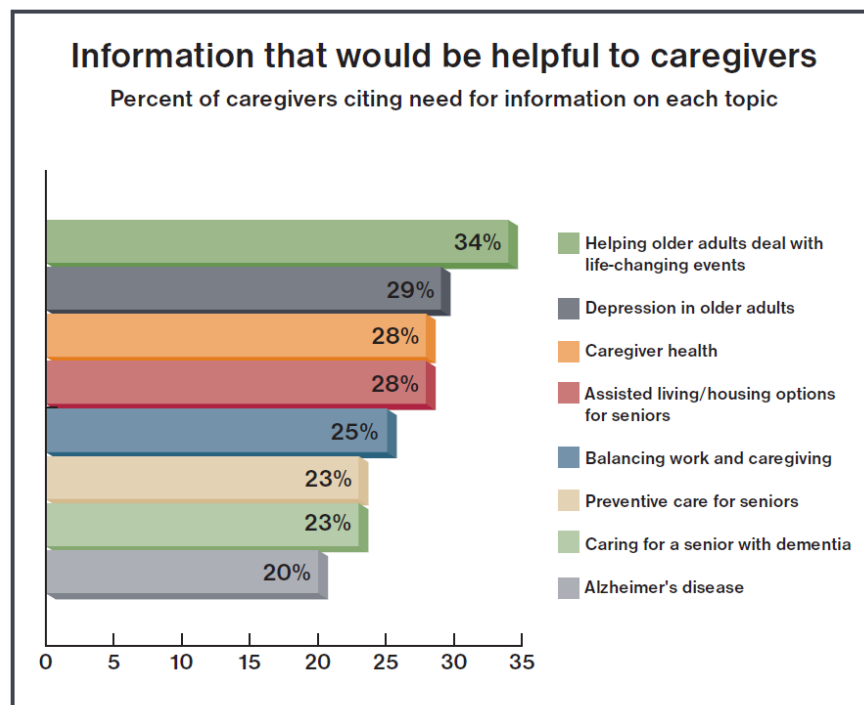
Credible Health Information

More than four in five caregivers say it would be helpful for them to have credible information on one or more of a variety of health issues relevant to caregivers (83%), while 17% said none.

- Caregivers say it would be most helpful to have information on helping older adults deal with life changing events (34%), depression in older adults (29%), caregiver health (28%), assisted living and other housing options for seniors (28%) and balancing work and caregiving (25%).
- About one fifth of caregivers would find information on preventive medical care for seniors (23%), caring for a senior who has dementia (23%), Alzheimer's disease (20%) and prescription drug information for the elderly (17%)..
- Conversely, caregivers say that information on sexuality in later life (12%), online pharmacies (12%), elder abuse (8%) and "other" issues would be least helpful.

Two-thirds of seniors (65%) feel that it would be helpful for them to have credible information on one or more of a variety of health issues relevant to them.

- Those issues seniors say it would be most helpful to have more information about include preventive medical care for seniors (36%), prescription drug information for the elderly (31%), and assisted living and other housing options for seniors (23%).
- The next most helpful pieces of information would be on helping older adults deal with life changing events (19%), Alzheimer’s disease (17%), sexuality in later life (17%) and depression in older adults (15%).
- Seniors find that information on caring for a senior who has dementia (10%), online pharmacies (9%), elder abuse (4%) and “other” issues (3%) would be least helpful.
- Those seniors who are also caregivers don’t seem to find information on caregiver health (1%) or balancing work and caregiving (1%) very helpful, perhaps because it might not be relevant to them.



Researching Specific Health Issues

When researching a specific health issue, caregivers spend an average of 2.3 hours looking for information about it. This is significantly higher than the amount of time seniors spend; on average, seniors spend only .7 hours finding information when researching a specific health issue.

Attitudes about Healthcare and Caregiving

I sometimes get confused by doctors' recommendations.

- Among caregivers who found the statement applicable (92%), four in 10 (41%) agree that they sometimes get confused by doctors' recommendations, however, the majority (59%), disagree with the statement.
- Among seniors who find this statement applicable (98%), only about one-quarter (24%) agree that they get confused by doctors' recommendations, with three-quarters (76%) disagreeing.

I sometimes get confused by bills I received from doctors or insurance/medical coverage providers.

- Among caregivers who found the statement applicable (88%), over four in 10 (46%) agree that they sometimes get confused by bills they received from doctors or insurance/medical coverage providers, while the majority of caregivers (54%) disagree.
- Among seniors who found this statement applicable (94%), 42% agree they sometimes get confused by bills they received from doctors or insurance/medical coverage providers, while over half (58%) disagree.

I know little about prescription medicines (e.g., how they work, and what foods, other medicines or activities might interact with them).

- Of the caregivers who found this statement applicable (94%), 45% agree that they know little about prescription medicines (e.g., how they work, and what foods, other medicines or activities might interact with them), while over half (55%) disagree.
- Nearly all seniors found this statement applicable (98%), and among those who did, 41% agree they know little about prescription medicines (e.g., how they work, and what foods, other medicines or activities might interact with them), while nearly six in 10 (59%) disagree.

I don't know where to start when it comes to "end-of-life" planning (e.g., setting up a living will or health care proxy).

- Among caregivers who found this statement applicable (91%), only 44% agree they don't know where to start when it comes to "end-of-life" planning (e.g., setting up a living will or health care proxy), while over half of caregivers (56%) disagree.
- Not surprisingly, among seniors who found this statement applicable (96%), only 22% agree that they don't know where to start when it comes to "end-of-life" planning (e.g., setting up a living will or health care proxy), while the overwhelming majority (78%) disagree.

I feel frustrated that I have to go to multiple resources when I'm trying to find information on a specific health issue.

- 58% of caregivers agree that they feel frustrated when they have to go to multiple resources when trying to find information on a specific health issue.
- Among caregivers who found this statement applicable (93%), nearly two-thirds (63%) agree that they feel frustrated that they have to go to multiple resources when trying to find information on a specific health issue, while only 37% disagree.
- Among seniors who found this statement applicable (91%), about half (53%) agree that they feel frustrated having to go to multiple resources to find information on a health issue, while 47% disagree.

Methodology

Harris Interactive® fielded the study on behalf of AAFP from March 5 – 7, 2012 via its QuickQuerySM online omnibus service, interviewing 2,238 adults age 18+, of whom 448 are seniors (aged 65+) and 241 are caregivers. Data were weighted using propensity score weighting to be representative of the total U.S. adult population on the basis of region, age within gender, education, household income, race/ethnicity and propensity to be online. No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated; a full methodology is available.