

# Bipartisan Congressional Assisting Caregivers Today (ACT) Caucus



In March 2015, Senators Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) and Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Representatives Diane Black (R-TN) and Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-NM) launched this new bicameral caucus that focuses on bringing greater visibility to the value of and need to support family caregivers, the challenges and opportunities individuals of all ages face as they seek to live independently, and the need for solutions. The caucus aims to inform Members of Congress about these issues, elevate the conversation, forge an environment and context conducive to reaching bipartisan solutions, and help create a sense of urgency to act. This is an ageless issue, so it is important to consider the needs of older adults and individuals with disabilities, as well as their family caregivers.

Many of us are, have been, or will be a family caregiver or are likely to need the help of one to live independently in our homes and communities. The caucus engages with and learns from a broad array of stakeholders such as family caregivers, older adults, persons with disabilities, service providers, the paid workforce, employers, long-term care insurance industry, private and public payers, local, state and federal officials, researchers, relevant technology, innovators, and others.

## Background

Family caregivers are the backbone of services and supports in this country – they are the first line of assistance for most people and they help make it possible for older adults and people with disabilities to live independently in their homes and communities instead of in more costly nursing homes. In 2013, about 40 million family caregivers provided unpaid care valued at about \$470 billion to adults who needed help with daily activities such as bathing, dressing, meal preparation, and transportation, more than total Medicaid spending that year. About 3.7 million family caregivers provide care to a child under age 18 because of a medical, behavioral or other condition or disability. Family caregivers often help their loved ones with activities such as bathing, dressing, eating, transportation, shopping, housework, and managing finances, as well as medical/nursing tasks, such as wound care and managing multiple medications. They often serve as care coordinators, communicating and advocating with health professionals and accompanying loved ones to medical appointments, and provide emotional support, too. Many family caregivers take on care willingly, yet family caregivers can also face physical, emotional, and financial challenges. By supporting family caregivers, we can help people live at home where they want to be, helping to delay or prevent more costly institutional care and unnecessary hospitalizations, and saving taxpayer dollars.

Long-term services and supports (LTSS) both unpaid and paid play an important role in ensuring that individuals and family caregivers have necessary assistance. LTSS help people take care of themselves, such as help with activities like those noted above for individuals who are not able to perform those tasks on their own, typically for at least three months. About 12 million individuals require these services and this number is expected to more than double by 2050. Almost half of those who receive these services are under age 65, and at least fifty two percent of people turning age 65 will need these supports at some point in their lives.

People want to live independently in their homes and communities, and it is important to ensure that any taxpayer dollars involved are used in a fiscally responsible and cost effective way to give consumers greater choice and control, rather than moving people to more costly nursing homes.

### Why the Caucus is Important

The caucus serves as a forum to engage those in the House and Senate about family caregiving and LTSS issues. The caucus is a venue for learning more about particular issues, exchanging ideas, sharing information, growing interest and commitment to addressing the issues, and creating bipartisan conversations and relationships around these issues that can lead to solutions.