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Finding Help Fast is Key to Supporting Family Caregivers

Toll-free number and website link caregivers with local help in Wisconsin

MADISON, WI (May 25, 2010) – Caring for an elderly or disabled family member can be a joy; but it can also be a physical, emotional, and financial challenge. Without support, many caregivers find themselves driven to the breaking point leaving them sick, depressed, or in a financial hole.

Finding assistance is often time-consuming and many caregivers give up before getting help. Wisconsin's Area Agencies on Aging offer a website – www.wisconsincaregiver.org – and toll-free phone number – (866) 843-9810 – to help family caregivers quickly find the support they need in any county or tribe in Wisconsin.

Caregiving affects a large percentage of the population and most caregivers don't know where to start looking for help, according to Barb Thoni, president of the Wisconsin Association of Area Agencies on Aging. This is particularly true for caregivers who don't live in the same community or even the same state as their loved one who needs care. "Nationally, one in three adults is caring for an elderly person or someone with special needs providing, on average, 20 hours of care per week," says Thoni. "That's in addition to their work and other family obligations. Without help, it's really tough for caregivers to continue to provide care on their own for any length of time."

In addition, says Thoni, lost productivity because of caregiver absenteeism or distraction costs U.S. businesses tens of billions of dollars annually. "Employed caregivers who have contacted us early [in the process of finding caregiving help] told us that they saved two to three days of work, sick, or vacation time that they would have spent finding or arranging for the help they needed," says Thoni. "That's why it's so critical that families know that there is a simple way to find help – before they find themselves in a crisis situation."

Caregivers who visit the website or call the toll-free number are connected to program specialists who provide unbiased, comprehensive information and assistance on local services such as adult day care, case management, home health and personal care, respite care, financial and legal matters related to caregiving, home delivered meals, transportation and more.

Anyone directly caring for or concerned about the well-being of someone over 60 or someone with Alzheimer's disease or a related disorder can find their county or tribal Family Caregiver Support Program by calling the toll-free number – (866) 843-9810 – or going to the website (www.wisconsincaregiver.org). The program also serves grandparents or relative caregivers 55 years of age and older who are caring for children under age 19, or who are caring for a relative with a disability who is 19 to 59 years of age.

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