



## Alaska Commission on Aging SFY2017 Legislative Advocacy Priorities

### Provide appropriate supports for family and other caregivers caring for older Alaskans

Family caregiving is the foundation of long-term care in Alaska. Approximately 84,900 Alaskans (or 12% of the state's total population) care for vulnerable older Alaskans who live with a physical, mental, and/or cognitive impairment. This care is valued at more than \$1 billion annually (AARP 2015). An estimated 33,000 Alaskans care for an elderly loved one with dementia (Alzheimer's Facts and Figures 2016). As Alaska's population ages, family caregiving and natural supports are becoming increasingly important in the care of Alaskans at home with chronic health conditions, physical disabilities, and cognitive impairments. While many families provide compassionate care for their elderly loved ones, caregiving can take a significant toll. Research indicates that family caregivers of older adults – particularly those who care for loved ones with dementia – are more likely to report poor health, higher rates of chronic disease, as well as depression and anxiety than non-caregivers. Family caregivers of significantly impaired older adults are also vulnerable to financial stress due to lost wages and benefits when they cut back on work hours or leave the workplace due to caregiving demands.

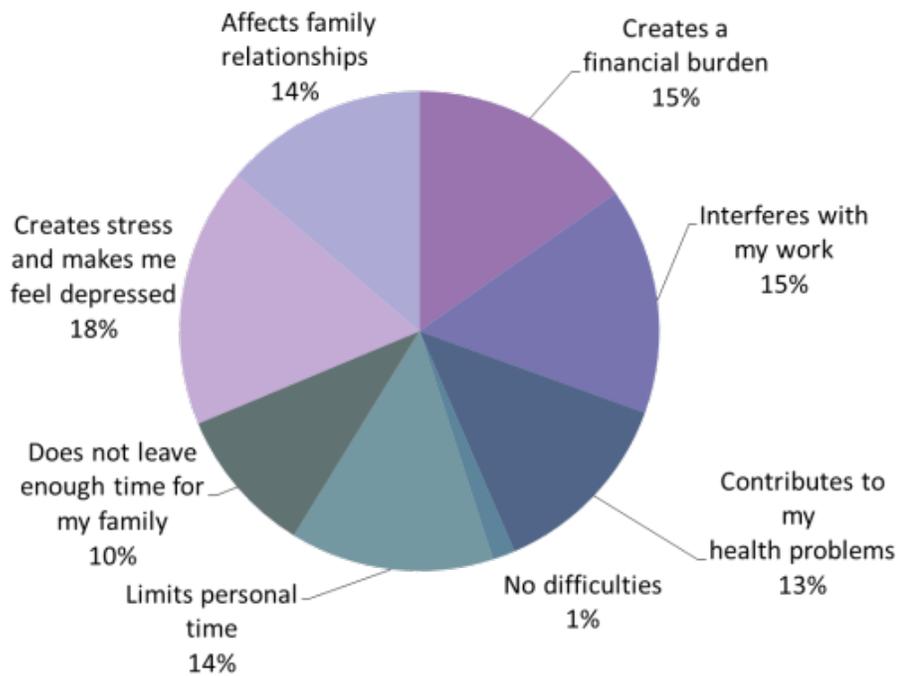
Research shows that investment in caregiver supports produces a positive return. Family and other natural caregivers who receive training and supportive services are better able to provide care at home improving the quality of life and safety for both the caregiver and the person under their care, providing a huge cost savings by preventing the need for premature institutional care. If the needs of caregivers are not addressed, we risk compromising the safety and well-being of seniors and their families.

**Recommendations:** The Alaska Commission on Aging supports efforts to

- (1) Maintain base funding for the **National Family Caregiver Support Grant Program**, administered by the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services Senior Community Grants Program, which provides caregiver training, respite, case management, counseling, peer supports, and adult day. These services support unpaid caregivers caring for their elderly loved ones at home.
- (2) Adopt a *uniform family caregiver assessment tool* to identify caregiver needs and provide person- and family-centered caregiver support and training. These services will equip families and other natural caregivers with the resources they need to provide safe and quality care at home for as long as possible to prevent the need for early out-of-home placement. (Alaska has the highest cost of nursing home in the nation. Annual median cost for skilled nursing home care in Alaska is \$297,840 per individual, according to Genworth Long-Term Care Cost Survey, 2016.)\*
- (3) Utilize *telehealth and assistive technologies* to enhance safety, quality of life, and reduce the burden on family and other natural caregivers. These technologies improve efficiencies and generate cost savings.
- (4) Encourage home- and community-based service providers to engage caregivers.\*

\*Based on recommendations from *Families Caring for an Aging America Report, September 2016* published by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicines.

## ***What is the most difficult challenge you face as a caregiver?***



Source: Findings from the Alaska Commission on Aging Family Caregiver Survey conducted in 2013 and published in *Alaska's Roadmap to Address Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia*, 2014.

