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Holiday Season Underscores Family Caregiver Needs

Resources are Available to Support Caregiving at Home and in the Community

SACRAMENTO— After long absences, holiday gatherings can bring families great joy—but also difficult surprises. This holiday season, Mom or Dad may seem different—more frail, forgetful, or confused than during your last get-together. A family member’s disability or [memory loss](#) may mean that your role in the family will change, as their need for care increases.

For anyone already caring for a loved one at home, the holidays can be especially challenging, both to plan and to execute, as the immediate needs of those being cared for at home are often unpredictable and all-consuming.

“I recall some holidays with my mom when we were in the hospital the whole time,” said Simone Nazzal, who postponed graduate education and returned home to care for her mother during her three-year battle with breast cancer. “We rang in the New Year in a rehab facility.”

The holidays offer an important time to recognize the role of family caregivers and ensure they have the supports they need. More than five million Californians serve as unpaid family caregivers, a role that can be incredibly rewarding but also take a tremendous toll. Without supports, family caregiving can be a [significant burden](#) with potential emotional, physical, and financial consequences, especially for women working outside the home.

California has many resources available to help. The state leads the nation in building a durable system of family caregiver supports, offering [caregiver training](#), [Adult Day Services](#) programs, [Caregiver Resource Centers](#), and new technologies that can aid in supporting caregiving at home and in communities.

“By 2030, Californians aged 60 and older will comprise one quarter of the state’s population,” said California Department of Aging Director Susan DeMarois. “We are making significant investments now to ensure that our older adults have the care and support they need at home and in their communities so they can safely age in place.”

Brenda Boles was always struck by her husband’s intellect. When he was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, and later prostate cancer, Boles gave up a highly successful career as an artist to care for her husband until his death 10 years later.

“I think a lot of people think caregiving is not going to be as exhausting as it is,” she said. “They think, well, I love this person, I can take care of them. How it’s going to be in your mind and the reality of it are very, very different.”

Coping with her husband’s sometimes puzzling behavior and her own physical and emotional exhaustion, Boles was grateful for the services of the independent, nonprofit Del Oro Caregiver

Resource Center. Del Oro is one of 11 Caregiver Resource Centers in the state, funded by the California Department of Aging, federal and local funds, private foundations, and others, that offer family caregivers a range of services including counseling, care planning, education, and respite care.

“They were wonderful,” said Boles. “They would give me four hours at a time so I could get out and do things. Del Oro also offered me a therapist when I was depressed and didn’t know what to do.”

Michelle Nevins, executive director of the Del Oro Caregiver Resource Center in Citrus Heights, said the holidays have always brought an uptick in calls from family members seeking information and support, especially help with grief, support groups and [education](#) about dementia, nutrition, elder law, and other topics.

Nevins said Caregiver Resource Centers are an important part of the state’s effort to create a system of caregiving that works, one of the key goals of the [California Master Plan for Aging](#), a comprehensive 10-year effort to expand programs and access to care and services for all seniors and people with disabilities.

“With the Master Plan for Aging, additional monies are flowing behind caregiving, which has been tremendous, allowing us to expand services and supports for clients. We can reach more people,” she said.

As you celebrate family this holiday season, remember there are many resources available to help navigate the aging journey with your loved ones.

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