



Family Caregiver Support Program

As the baby boomers are entering their senior years in record numbers, this “silver tsunami” is impacting social policy. These baby boomers are swelling the already burgeoning numbers of elderly and disabled adults who are experiencing medical issues, mobility limitations or decreased cognitive functioning and require assistance to enable them to remain safely in their homes and communities. Of that assistance, 80% is provided by unpaid family caregivers.

In Washington State, AARP’s Public Policy Institute estimates that in 2009 there were 854,000 family caregivers actively providing care, the economic value of which was estimated at around \$8 billion annually. Both numbers will only go up.

The Family Caregiver Support Program (FCSP), supported by federal and state funding, was created to serve these unpaid family caregivers, the backbone of home and community-based long-term care.

Family caregivers do what needs to be done – often at great cost to their physical and mental health, as well as to their finances. ALTC case managers utilize the evidence-based assessment tool, TCARE, to identify each caregiver’s unique stresses and burdens. TCARE helps establish a goal around which case managers and caregivers can work together to craft a care plan combining services that research has shown can mitigate those stresses and burdens. Services may include information, education, counseling, a break from caregiving and financial assistance with acquiring necessary safety equipment and minor home modifications. And, just as important, TCARE addresses the physical and mental health of the caregiver, often neglected by caregivers until it’s too late. Sadly, elderly caregivers are 63% more likely to die prematurely than their non-caregiving counterparts.

ALTC’s FCSP service delivery also incorporates additional evidence-based supports. Powerful Tools for Caregivers classes help caregivers understand and adapt to their changing role. STAR-C and RDAD provide valuable in-home coaching for those caring for people with dementia.

In 2015 ALTC served 129 family caregivers new to FCSP, as well as caregivers whose services continued from prior years. Supporting the caregivers who are shouldering the burden of caring for vulnerable adults is the right thing to do. And it is the fiscally smart thing to do. FCSP saves the State costs associated with premature or unnecessary placement of care receivers in more expensive care settings. And as the numbers of family caregivers continue to grow, social policy must adapt, and funding will need to grow as well.