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# Report: How COVID-19 Is Affecting Caregivers



By [Jennifer Chesak](#) Fact checked by [Ashley Hall](#)

September 18, 2020



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Laura Porter / Verywell

## Key Takeaways

A Blue Cross Blue Shield report has found that unpaid caregivers in the U.S. experience a higher prevalence of health conditions that could lower their overall wellbeing.

More individuals are identifying as caregivers during the COVID-19

outbreak.

One in four unpaid caregivers report feeling added stress because of the pandemic.

Millennial caregivers and those in predominantly Black or Hispanic communities experience the greatest health impact.

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed more people in the U.S. into the role of unpaid caregiver, increasing the demands for those who were already assisting a loved one with daily tasks.

A new Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) report published on September 9 shows that the stress of managing work and family responsibilities is taking a toll on caregivers' mental and physical health. Caregivers in younger generations and racial and ethnic minorities are the hardest hit.<sup>[1]</sup>

"You can't be in two jobs at once, and yet people are being forced to," Alexandra Drane, co-founder and CEO of Rebel Health and [ARCHANGELS](#), tells Verywell. ARCHANGELS, a platform for caregivers, commissioned a 2020 National Caregiver Survey which provided insight into BCBS's The Health of America report.<sup>[1]</sup>

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## The BCBS Report

The report looked at 6.7 million BCBS members who are currently acting as a caregiver for a spouse, child, or both. The report compared health differences in caregivers to those from a benchmark population.<sup>[1]</sup>

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— ALEXANDRA DRANE, REBEL HEALTH AND ARCHANGELS CEO

Based on measures from the BCBS Health index, the report found that caregivers in the sample experienced a 26% greater impact from health conditions that could be detrimental to their overall wellness, including mental health.<sup>[2]</sup>

The prevalence of conditions such as [hypertension](#), obesity, tobacco use, major depression, anxiety, and adjustment disorder was higher among caregivers than the benchmark population. One in four unpaid caregivers

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reported feeling more stress as they attempted to balance work and family during the pandemic.<sup>[1]</sup>

“If you’re a nonessential worker trying to work from home, and you’ve got this five-year-old pulling at your leg, it’s really hard to focus on them and help them with their schooling while you’re also trying to do your job and make money to support your family,” Drane says. “And that’s the new part of the population.”

### What This Means For You

If you’re an unpaid caregiver for a loved one, the role could be affecting your own health and wellbeing. Experts recommend seeking additional resources and services to help alleviate stress, such as asking family and friends for help, finding ways to stay connected to combat isolation, and maintaining a normal routine as much as possible.

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## How COVID-19 Is Changing the Caregiver Role

The ARCHANGELS survey found that 55% of current caregivers wouldn’t have thought of themselves as caregivers before the COVID-19 pandemic. The report also found that 61% of Americans are currently worried about taking care of or looking after a friend, neighbor, or family member.<sup>[1]</sup>

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Drane uses herself as an example of how COVID-19 flipped the switch. “For my mom and stepfather, it went from—we didn’t worry about them at all, we just hung out together, to *‘oh my God, now I’m a 49-year-old woman who is so stressed out about their health.’*”

Caroline Tapp-McDougall, the publisher of [Caregiver Solutions](#) magazine and author of the forthcoming “Complete Guide for Family Caregivers,” tells Verywell that COVID-19 turned up the volume on the caregiver role. “Before that, there wasn’t that label, so to speak,” Tapp-McDougall says. “We were just doing our job within the family.”

## How Caregiving Is Affecting Millennials

Younger adults appear to be struggling in the caregiver role more so than older generations, according to the BCBS report. In the sample, millennial caregivers had more prominent increased rates of health conditions

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Compared to the benchmark population, millennial caregivers had increased rates of emergency room visits and hospitalizations.<sup>[1]</sup>

The stress-related conditions of hypertension and adjustment disorder were 82% more prevalent for millennial caregivers.<sup>[1]</sup>

Older millennials will enter their 40s next year, while younger millennials are in their mid-20s and 30s, according to Pew Research.<sup>[3]</sup> Millennials are in their prime working years and many have young children, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.<sup>[4]</sup>

“With millennials, they’re the generation that are just setting up shop,” [Lise Leblanc, BA, MEd., RP](#), a psychotherapist and author of [Conscious Caregiving Guide](#), tells Verywell. “They’re building their lives... and then you add this extra stress,” Leblanc says in reference to the pandemic.

Drane does not think youthfulness is an advantage when it comes to caregiving. “The older you are, the more resilience you often have because you’ve been through a lot,” she says.

However, Drane adds that having a well-developed support system can help with that resilience. “From the perspective of feeling like you are a part of a community that has got your back—that can increase as you get older,” she says.

With the need for physical distancing measures during a pandemic, establishing a sense of community can be more challenging.

In the ARCHANGELS survey, 56% of millennial caregivers reported high rates of loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic. They aren't alone: other generations in the sample felt similarly, with 54% of Gen Xers and 42% of baby boomers reporting intense feelings of isolation.<sup>[1]</sup>

## How Caregiver Health Varies By Community

The BCBS Health Index found that the health effects of caregiving are more pronounced in Black and Hispanic communities than in White communities.<sup>[1]</sup>

While the BCBS report doesn't explore the reason for this discrepancy, a contributing factor may be the fact that people of color—whether they're serving as caregivers or not—are disproportionately represented in

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frontline industry jobs that can increase their COVID-19 exposure.<sup>[5]</sup>

"That stress of juggling caregiving and daily jobs and knowing those daily jobs come with phenomenal risk—that's a problem," Tapp-McDougall says.

According to the survey, nearly two thirds of Hispanic caregivers reported caring for a loved one in their home, compared to 57% of Black caregivers and 37% of White caregivers.

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## Stress, Anxiety, and Depression Among Caregivers

Independent of age or race, more than half of the caregivers (57%) in the sample reported experiencing clinically significant levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, according to the ARCHANGELS survey.<sup>[1]</sup>

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Part of the reason caregivers are stressed—especially during the pandemic—is the reduction in resources they typically rely on, such as closed daycare facilities.

"You also have the reality that a lot of the infrastructure that existed across the country—congregate care sites, nursing homes, assisted living—have become hotbeds of COVID-19, and a number of them have either shut down, or individuals have taken those folks home," Drane says.

Drane also points out that unpaid caregiving while managing other life tasks is hard. "Caregivers are incredible multitaskers," she says. "If you're a caregiver, whether it's during COVID-19 or not, you basically have to act like a lawyer. You're often doing tasks like a nurse. You are serving as a financial advisor. You're basically a day-to-day project manager. This job is huge."

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The ARCHANGELS survey also asked participants how they were coping with stress and anxiety. Many caregivers reported using alcohol (14%) and medication (18%), and half of the participants reported using food as a coping mechanism.<sup>[1]</sup>

Drane hears stories from caregivers who use food over alcohol to cope with stress. "If you had three glasses of wine instead of one at dinner, and then you need to get up at three o'clock in the morning and give someone medication, that's hard to do," she says. "But you can have three bowls of ice cream and still get up at three in the morning."

# How to Find Balance

With hectic and erratic schedules, caregivers can have a hard time focusing on their own health needs. Experts say that to best care for someone else, a caregiver must also care for themselves. One way to start finding that balance is to seek additional resources.

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— LISE LEBLANC, BA, MED., RP

“If we want the future to look different, we have to change it today,” Leblanc says. “There’s only so long that you can just keep repeating day after day these stressful circumstances without getting to a point of burning out.”

That said, resources might look different during a pandemic. Drane recommends making use of pharmacy delivery, respite services, and telehealth. ARCHANGELS has a [resources page](#) that connects caregivers to services in their area.

Maintaining a semblance of a normal routine can also help ease stress. “That could include inviting someone to take a walk with you or to come and have tea with you,” Drane says. Incorporating others into your schedule can also help you combat feelings of loneliness or isolation.

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Drane also recommends staying active—but with a caveat. “There’s nothing more frustrating than a caregiver being told, ‘You should go for a walk,’” she says, explaining that many caregivers cannot leave the person they are caring for alone, even for a short period of time. That’s why she believes that any activity counts, even if it’s just moving around the house.

Tapp-McDougall recommends that caregivers reach out to friends and family for help. “Sometimes it’s a phone call. Sometimes it’s arranging an Uber delivery to get somebody dinner. There’s all kinds of things that people can do to help out in those situations.”

If you know someone who is a caregiver, Drane recommends pitching in where you can—and intentionally. “Don’t ask, ‘*What can I do for you?*’—actually do something for them, whatever that might be...connecting them to a resource, filling their fridge, [or] mowing their lawn.”

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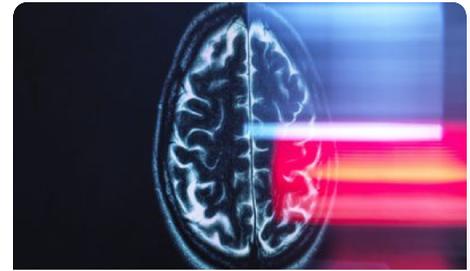
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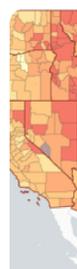
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