

## CREATING A CARE ECONOMY: THE FAMILY CAREGIVER PLATFORM PROJECT

Leading up to the election of 2016, the politics of caring were heating up. Here's the evidence: In exit polling, voters of both parties were asked to choose between options that would help family caregivers - financial help, easier access to care workers and in-home services, and making housing suitable for people with disabilities. A fifth said greater financial help would be most helpful; another fifth said caregivers would benefit most from easier access to care workers and in-home services; and 11 percent chose adapted housing. **Many more – 41 percent – chose “all of the above.”**

How, exactly, did voters become aware of the need to do much more to support family caregivers? One part of the answer is the work of dedicated individuals and organizations, who have documented and studied what family caregivers do, who they are, what their real-life situations are like, and what their concerns are. Another and equally compelling part of the answer is that **there is now more organized advocacy championing the causes of family caregivers at the grassroots level than ever before.** This is the mission of the **Family Caregiver Platform Project (FCPP).**

Created as a time-limited initiative by Altarum Institute's Center for Elder Care and Advanced Illness, the FCPP was designed to be a nonpartisan, nationwide ground operation in support of family caregivers. Launched in 2015 and concluding in 2016, this initiative was powered mainly by volunteers, and hence accomplished on a financial shoestring. The organizing website -- [www.caregivercorps.org](http://www.caregivercorps.org) -- can and should be emulated by others looking to attract, inform, and nurture interested volunteers from all walks of life who can be trained to advocate –both by bringing forward their own personal stories, and by asking policymakers, employers and other decision-makers to consider family caregivers as a constituency warranting closer attention and cooperation as a matter of daily business.

Historically, neither major U.S. political party acknowledged the importance of family caregivers in formal policy documents. That began to change in the run-up to the 2016 election, as the FCPP helped to bring family caregiver issues into focus, with advocates submitting language in 23 states as part of party platform deliberations, and gaining acceptance in 11. Among the platform planks and legislative resolutions that the FCPP made available on its organizing website for advocates to use were calls to undertake the following:

- Alleviating financial hardships for family caregivers;
- Promoting flexible employment;
- Providing more reliable services and supports to caregivers;
- Helping communities build volunteer-driven “Caregiver Corps” to help families struggling with round-the-clock support of vulnerable loved ones.

To read the actual submissions that were made to states, go to <https://caregivercorps.org/downloads/>

In the summer of 2016, at the national level, both parties took notice. The final Democratic Party platform (<https://www.demconvention.com/platform/>) included these specific commitments for the first time: *“We will ensure that family caregivers have the support, respite care, and training they need to support their loved ones. We will create a strong, stable workforce to help meet families’ needs, by raising wages, improving access to training, and giving workers the opportunity to come together to make their voices heard in support of a stronger system... We will increase childcare investments to make*

quality childcare more affordable, boost wages for childcare workers, and support the millions of people paying for, coordinating, or providing care for aging relatives or those with disabilities." The final GOP national party platform (<https://www.gop.com/platform/>) states: "Our aging population must have access to safe and affordable care. Because most seniors desire to age at home, we will make homecare a priority in public policy and will implement programs to protect against elder abuse."

## Next Up

Now we're in the next phase – the work that people like you can do to make tangible legislative and administrative gains at all levels of government, and in the employment sector. Altarum and Caring Across Generations, together with the 14 organizational partners participating in the FCPP, launched an effort to combine the voices and energies of family caregivers with care workers at a national "**America CARES**" forum on Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>. Part of the follow-up of that forum is a live, ongoing "digital assets page," (<http://altarum.org/our-work/america-cares-forum-digital-asset-page>) where you can find resources to create your own movement in 2017. For example, you can write a legislative resolution! Offer to help local and state legislators and county officials do more to reach out to family caregivers! Send material to the website above and we'll post it! Write a blog and send it to us!

Here's why we need to act fast:

- Today, the front lines of care in the community are manned by 39% of U.S. adults – an estimated 90 million people -- who are providing care worth half a billion dollars every year to their loved ones.<sup>i</sup> **This issue matters to the American economy.**
- Yet in providing vital home-based support, family caregivers themselves face significant financial penalties in lost wages, as well as lost pension and Social Security contributions.<sup>ii</sup>
- In the next few decades, this problem will only become larger. The number of older adults over the age of 65 will nearly double by 2050, and the number of older adults aged 85 years and older will more than triple from 6 million in 2014 to 19 million in 2050.<sup>iii</sup>
- These changes, coupled with falling birthrates, will create a **care gap**—less than 3 potential caregivers for each older adult in need of care compared with a 7:1 ratio in 2010.<sup>iv</sup>
- At the same time, paid care workers face serious financial disincentives to work in home care jobs due to low wages, lack of access to training and advancement opportunities, and few employment benefits.

Thanks for doing what you do. Let's work together to create a stronger care economy.

Email us at [info@MediCaring.org](mailto:info@MediCaring.org).

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<sup>i</sup> Fox S, Duggan M, Purcell K. Family Caregivers Are Wired for Health. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/06/20/family-caregivers-are-wired-for-health/>

<sup>ii</sup> National Alliance for Caregiving and MetLife Mature Market Institute. The MetLife Study of Caregiving Costs to Working Caregivers: Double Jeopardy for Baby Boomers Caring for Their Parents. National Alliance for Caregiving and MetLife Mature Market Institute; 2011. <https://www.metlife.com/mmi/research/caregiving-cost-working-caregivers.html#key findings>

<sup>iii</sup> Administration on Aging. Projected Future Growth of the Older Population: By Age 65 and Older; US Census Bureau, Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Selected Age Groups by Sex for the United States, States, Counties, and Puerto Rico Commonwealth and Municipios: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2014.

<http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkml>

<sup>iv</sup> Redfoot D, Feinberg L, and Houser A. The Aging of the Baby Boom and the Growing Care Gap: A Look at Future Declines in the Availability of Family Caregivers. Washington, DC: AARP Public Policy Institute. 2013. <http://www.aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/info-08-2013/the-aging-of-the-baby-boom-and-the-growing-care-gap-AARP-ppi-ltc.html>