



JB Pritzker, Governor
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Dear Aging Network:

November is National Family Caregivers Month, and I would like to recognize the almost 600,000 Illinois family caregivers providing an estimated 670 million hours of unpaid care during any given year. These 600,000 caregivers join the estimated 53 million Americans across the nation who are caring for loved ones with illnesses, disabilities, and other physical, cognitive, and mental health conditions. From helping with shopping and transportation to providing complex medical care in their own homes, these family caregivers are a vital component of the Aging Network and a critical resource for older Illinoisans facing the devastating toll of social isolation exacerbated by the COVID-19 epidemic. With the holiday season quickly approaching, this is an important time to recognize family caregivers, and highlight the [supports they may need](#).

According to the Alzheimer's Association, 83% of all long-term care services in the community is provided by unpaid caregivers, primarily family members. These past eight months haven't been an easy adjustment for many of us. Despite the challenges of the rapidly spreading virus, home schooling, and working from home, essential caregivers have more than met the challenge.

Caregivers are greatly diverse representing both genders and all races, cultures and ages. Additionally, caregivers do the job of caregiving in many different ways. Some are in person daily caregivers, while others are weekly, monthly, or even - like myself - long distance caregivers. However, it is important to recognize that **each way comes** with its own set of stressors and emotions; and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic only contributes to those pressures.

This year's theme of National Family Caregivers Month is [#CaregivingInCrisis](#). According to a study done over the summer by the [Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving \(RCI\)](#), 83% of caregivers reported increases in stress since the beginning of the pandemic. 42% of caregivers noted that additional help from other caregivers declined since the pandemic began. And many respondents named increased responsibility due to isolation or increased health risks and/or a family member contracting COVID-19 as their main source of stress.

We are grateful to our Area Agencies on Aging for the caregiver support services they provide. Last year, our AAAs served 55,098 caregivers through our programming, providing 267,208 units of service. I cannot stress enough that help is available. Self-care is especially important during these stressful and unpredictable times. [Find a Caregiver Resource Center near you](#).

We all know someone who is providing care for someone else. Caregivers give of themselves without expecting anything in return, and they rarely think of themselves first. Now, more than ever, we should all reach out to someone we know in that caregiver role and offer some small kindness. Can you run an errand for them? Provide a meal? Maybe give them an evening off while you supervise? Even a small encouraging note or gift would brighten their day. Support those who support others, and join IDoA as we [#RAISEcaregiving](#) awareness through ACL's social media campaign. Here are some additional web links with information you may find helpful:

[Alzheimer's Association: COVID-19 - Tips for Dementia Care](#) (Resources available in Spanish)

[CDC: Caregiving - A Public Health Priority](#) (Resources available in Spanish)

[CDC: Guidance for Caregivers of People with Dementia](#) (Resources available in multiple languages)

[Family Caregiver Alliance](#) (Resources available in multiple languages)

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www.illinois.gov/aging

Regrettably, I close this monthly letter knowing that out of the over 10,210 COVID-19 deaths in the State of Illinois, **over 87% of them** have been adults 60 years of age or older. I present these numbers not to dishearten you, but rather to highlight how incredibly important it is that we all stay cautious and encourage others to follow direction from Governor Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Public Health.

November is a time to be thankful for the good things in our lives, and it is on that note that I wish you all a Happy Thanksgiving. Here are some **suggestions to keeping your Thanksgiving safe**. This year's holiday will sure be different; but it's for everyone's safety to slightly modify; *'Over the WiFi and through the Zoom to grandmother's house we go.'* Please stay safe and be well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paula Basta". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and a long horizontal stroke across the top.

Paula Basta, M.Div.
Director, Illinois Department on Aging