


## The Importance of Caregivers

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*Martha Shapiro, LCSW, Director of Programs at Senior Concerns in Thousand Oaks.*

by Carol Leish, MA

"Between 2012 and 2050, our county will experience considerable growth in its older population, projected to be 83.7 million," according to, Martha Shapiro, LCSW, Director of



Programs at Senior Concerns in Thousand Oaks. "According to the Ventura County Area Agency on Aging, there are now more people living in Ventura County who are age 60+ than who are under the age of 18.

"Most Americans over the age of 65 live in the community, not in nursing homes or other institutions. Only 4.5 percent (about 1.5 million) of older adults live in nursing homes and 2 percent (1 million) in assisted living facilities. This means that there will continue to be a greater reliance on community-based services, such as those offered by Senior Concerns.

"According to the Alzheimer's Association, between 2020 and 2025 the number of people age 65+ with Alzheimer's disease is estimated to increase 21.7% and most will be care for at home by a family member, who themselves may experience a variety of physical, emotional, financial, and social burdens associated with the caregiving role."

Caregivers in the home may provide hands on assistance with dressing, bathing, feeding and more. Or, they may only provide verbal assistance and guidance while also providing emotional support. Each person's needs are different, and may change over time.

Caregiver burnout can happen for various reasons, according to Shapiro. "Caregivers are often tasked with providing difficult, sometimes medical in nature, physical and emotional help. They may be on guard 24/7, having to be aware of their loved ones' needs. This can take a toll emotionally and physically. If they do not have proper support and breaks, they can feel physical and mental exhaustion."

Providing caregivers, the community's support and caring is essential since caregivers are the backbone of the long-term care system in America. Shapiro said, "I encourage people to reach out to those in caregiving roles and offer concrete help. Rather than asking, 'What can I do to help?' suggest something clear and specific. Considering to offer dropping off a meal once a week, or picking up groceries or prescriptions every Saturday, or sitting with their loved ones for two hours a week so that the caregiver can take a break. Be clear about what you can offer so that it will be easy for the caregiver to accept the help.

"Senior Concerns has a Caregiver Resource Center to support and empower family caregivers," according to Shapiro. "Anyone caring for an aging loved one can schedule a free care consultation to understand the resources available to them, and create a plan of care to help them in their caregiving role. Several caregiver support groups are also offered to facilitate caregivers coming together and supporting each other. Senior Concerns also offers seminars over Zoom that are open to the public that provide education and information on a variety of topics pertinent to older adults and family caregivers.

Contact Martha Shapiro, LCSW, at Senior Concerns at: [\[email protected\]](#), or by calling: (805) 497-0189. Also, look at their website at: [www.seniorconcerns.org](http://www.seniorconcerns.org).

Other information that can help caregivers caring for family members or others can be found by calling the Ventura County Area Agency on Aging at: (805) 477-7342. For further information website at: [www.vcaaa.org](http://www.vcaaa.org). For those who are caregivers, or need caregivers, realize that Ventura County has services to offer support and encouragement.