

## HEALTH: Research indicates caregivers face greater hardships

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Relatives and friends caring for aging or disabled Californians are under financial and emotional strains and likely to face greater burdens because of recent state budget reductions, according to new research.

A study released by the [UCLA](#) Center for Health Policy Research shows the state's estimated 6 million informal caregivers suffer higher levels of serious psychological distress, such as depression, and negative health behaviors, including smoking, compared to the general population. Researchers say about 3 million caregivers between ages 45 and 64 particularly are at risk.

"This is the 'sandwich generation' -- the group of people struggling to meet the needs of both growing children and aging parents, often alone and while holding down full-time jobs," said Geoffrey Hoffman, the study's lead author. "Caregivers need help, especially as Baby Boomers age and place even greater strains on ... their families' abilities to cope."

Researchers used 2009 California health surveys to find that caregivers provide an average of 20 hours of care per week for friends or relatives who can no longer bathe, shop, manage medicine or pay bills. They did not say how many caregivers live in the Inland area.

Few caregivers are paid or use state services that might alleviate financial and psychological burdens. Yet uncompensated care by family and friends is expected to increase. The U.S. Census projects that the number of people at least 65 years old will more than double in 30 years.

"We may be seeing an association between care giving and stress, where caregivers are both more likely to be seriously depressed and to exhibit certain health behaviors that put them at risk," Hoffman said. "These effects on caregivers' overall health merit attention from policy makers."

Researchers found:

More than 1 million caregivers reported moderate or serious emotional distress.

Middle-aged caregivers are more likely to binge drink, smoke or be obese compared to older caregivers and middle-aged non-caregivers.

All caregivers who reported serious psychological distress were more likely to smoke than the non-caregivers with serious psychological distress.

More than half of all caregivers work full or part time.

About one-third of caregivers who live with care recipients spend an average of 36 hours providing care.

Less than 8 percent of informal caregivers reported being paid for the help they provide.

Nearly 20 percent of caregivers spent at least \$250 on care giving in the past month.

Researchers said recent cuts to California's In-Home Supportive Services program and the Dec 1, 2013 elimination of the Adult Day Health Care program likely will increase burdens on informal caregivers.

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### **Caregiver Strain**

**Go to** [www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu/](http://www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu/) to see the **UCLA** Center for Health Policy Research's study on caregiver hardship.