



# The Hidden Costs of Caregiving

As the elderly population grows, many of us are put in the position to provide emotional and financial support for our children and parents at the same time. The situation is common around the world. It's estimated that over 2.5 million people are unpaid caregivers in Australia.<sup>1</sup> In Great Britain, approximately 2.4 million people are combining childcare with caring for older or disabled relatives.<sup>2</sup> In the U.S., 6.5 million American adults are raising a child and caring for a parent.<sup>3</sup> The numbers and percentages are similar in Asia<sup>4</sup>—in fact, in most of the countries in which AECOM operates.

Providing financial and emotional support across multiple generations can create stress. As cited by several Care.com articles and reports, people in this situation often experience:

- Feelings of loneliness and isolation
- Trouble managing relationships and finding time for themselves
- Conflicting emotions as they are pulled in multiple directions every day

Here are some steps that can help make the situation more manageable:

- 1. Have the tough conversations.** In many ways this is the hardest but most important step. Now is the time to ask about your parents' needs and wishes, where they keep important documents, and what financial resources they have. This should include clarifying if they have a will, and what their wishes are for end of life treatment, should it be needed. These conversations may feel awkward, but the information will be invaluable when it comes to establishing the best balance between resources, everyone's needs, and your own wellbeing.
- 2. Ask for help.** Don't be afraid to ask siblings and other family members for help, whether it's with managing health care appointments, child care, or simply getting the break you need to care for yourself. You can also investigate in-home services to help extend a parent's independence, whether it's bringing in a cleaning service, getting groceries or meals delivered, or hiring someone to drive them. [GuidanceResources EAP](#) can be a resource in finding help wherever you are around the world, as can [WorkLife Links](#) in Australia and New Zealand, and [Care.com](#) in the U.S. and Canada. Also, talk to your manager about how you can best deliver on work while supporting the needs of your family.
- 3. Hope for the best, plan for the worst.** Learn about health care resources in your country, long-term care insurance, and any veteran's benefits. You may also want to talk to a lawyer about estate planning, especially if your parents do not have a will. (This is another area in which [GuidanceResources EAP](#) can be helpful in directing you to legal resources.) Preparing in advance will help you respond effectively when decisions need to be made.

<sup>1</sup> *State of Caring 2012*, Carers Australia

<sup>2</sup> *State of Caring 2012*, Carers U.K

<sup>3</sup> *Caregiving in the U.S.*, 2015 National Alliance of Caregivers and AARP Public Policy Institute

<sup>4</sup> *Feeling the squeeze: Asia's Sandwich Generation*, The Economist Intelligence Unit 2010



- 4. Take care of yourself.** Self-care is essential, but easy to neglect when you are balancing all the demands of work and caring for others. Be sure to eat right, take some time to do things for yourself, get enough sleep, and laugh (when you can). See the article "[Creating a Self-Care Plan](#)" as a guide for taking action. Don't forget to use the [GuidanceResources EAP](#) as a resource for additional information and support.
- 5. Keep the lines of communication open.** As your family situation changes, so will the expectations and feelings of family members. Talk with each other so you can resolve issues quickly and keep stress levels lower all around.