

September 2018

How Paid Family and Medical Leave Helps Seniors

North Carolina has a growing elderly population. As in the rest of the United States, hundreds more Baby Boomers in our state are reaching retirement age each week.

Many seniors rely on family members to care for them in the event of a health crisis. Some are still participating in the workforce, and have no support in the event of serious illness or injury. Others are themselves caregivers for their family members. All seniors and their families would benefit greatly from having access to paid leave, but **only 13 percent of working people in the Southeast have access to a paid leave policy.**

Why is paid family and medical leave needed?

- **No one should have to choose between earning a paycheck and recovering from illness, welcoming a newborn, or caring for a sick family member.** Unfortunately, too many people in North Carolina face this terrible choice. Although the Family Medical leave Act allows many employees to take up to 90 days *unpaid* leave away from work to care for themselves or their families in times of childbirth and illness, the United States is one of only two countries in the world that does not provide paid family and medical leave.
- **Paid family medical insurance (FMLI) allows workers to receive income when they have to take time off from work to care for a newborn, a sick family member, or even themselves, when they experience qualifying medical issues.** With an FMLI program, working people pay a nominal insurance premium of a few dollars every month into a fund that then provides everyone who qualifies with a specific percentage of their pre-leave income when they need to take FMLA-eligible time off.

Seniors need family caregivers, and family caregivers need paid leave

- **North Carolina is rapidly aging.** More than 1.4 million North Carolina households include a person aged 65 or older,¹ and it's expected that this population will double by 2050, as the Baby Boom generation moves into retirement.² By 2033, 1 in 4 will be 60 or older. In the next 20 years, people ages 75-84 will be the fastest growing age group, and those ages 85 and older will be the second fastest growing age group in the state.³
- **Seniors need the support of family caregivers to age and live with dignity in their homes.** Thanks to this Silver Tsunami, North Carolina will see an increase in community members with functional and cognitive limitations. National data shows that 20 percent of those over the age of 65 need help with basic daily activities⁴ and family members are often the first people seniors can turn to for care.
- **Paid family medical leave helps family members care for their aging loved ones.** In North Carolina, almost 1.2 million people are caregivers for their own family members suffering from chronic illnesses.⁵ About 9 in 10 adults living at home with a physical, cognitive, or chronic health condition rely on unpaid family caregivers as

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their main source of help with everyday activities.⁶ Paid leave gives family members the support they need to provide this care without having to choose between their bills and their loved ones.

Seniors are often working caregivers themselves

- **Seniors not only receive care, they also provide it to their family members, and likewise need paid leave.** 1.3 million family caregivers in North Carolina provide close to 1.2 billion hours of care per year to their loved ones.⁷ This includes 98,676 grandparents who are primary caregivers for 177,662 of their own grandchildren.⁸
- **Many of these seniors continue to work while providing care to their loved ones.** Although some seniors in North Carolina are able to retire in relative financial security, far more are not able to do so. In fact, our state is currently home to more than 233,000 people over the age of 65 who are either currently employed or actively looking for work.⁹ Additionally, 57,331 of the North Carolina grandparents providing primary care to their grandchildren are still working.¹⁰
- **Ironically, these working seniors also include those employed as professional caregivers**—some of the lowest paid occupations in the economy. Of the 123,570 professional caregivers in North Carolina, 23 percent is aged 55 or over. About 10 percent of homecare workforce is 65 or older.¹¹
- **Too many care-giving seniors cannot afford to take unpaid leave to provide care for their loved ones.** Seniors in North Carolina earn a median household income of just \$36,252 every year, far less than their younger counterparts, who annually earn \$55,226.¹² About 22 percent of the state’s seniors are living in or near poverty (below 150 percent of the federal poverty level).¹³ 1 in 4 grandparents with primary care for their grandchildren are living in poverty.¹⁴
- **Paid leave ensures working seniors can afford to take time away from their jobs to care for their family members—especially their grandchildren—when they fall ill without having to sacrifice their incomes and financial peace of mind.**

¹ 2012-2016 American Community Survey, Table S0103: Population 65 and older in North Carolina

² Sabine Schoenbach. (2014). Caregivers at Risk: The Urgent Need for Fair Pay and Paid Leave for All of NC’s Caregivers. NC Justice Center Reports. Accessed online at <http://www.ncjustice.org/?q=workers-rights/nc-justice-center-report-caregivers-risk-urgent-need-fair-pay-and-paid-leave-all-nc>

³ Guiding Lights Caregiving Support Center. (2018). Caregiving Statistics. Accessed online at <http://www.guidinglightsnc.org/caregiving-statistics.php>

⁴ Boushey, Heather and Sarah Jane Glynn, April 2012. “The Effects of Paid Family and Medical Leave on Employment Stability and Economic Security,” Center for American Progress citing Kenneth G. Manton and XiLiang Gu, 2001. “Changes in the prevalence of chronic disability in the United States black and nonblack population above age 65 from 1982 to 1999,” Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 98, 6354-6359.

⁵ Feinberg, Lynn, Susan C. Reinhard, Ari Houser, and Rita Choula. July 2011. “Valuing the Invaluable: 2011 Update – The Growing Contributions and Costs of Family Caregiving,” AARP Public Policy Institute.

⁶ Susan C. Reinhard, Lynn Friss Feinberg, Rita Choula, and Ari Houser. (2015). Valuing the Invaluable: 2015 Update. Undeniable Progress, but Big Gaps Remain. AARP Policy Institute. Accessed online at <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2015/valuing-the-invaluable-2015-update-new.pdf> See also: H.S. Kaye, C. Harrington, and M.P. LaPlante, “Long-Term Care: Who Gets It, Who Provides It, Who Pays, And How Much?” Health Affairs, 29(2010): 11–20.

⁷ Susan C. Reinhard, Lynn Friss Feinberg, Rita Choula, and Ari Houser. (2015). Valuing the Invaluable: 2015 Update. Undeniable Progress, but Big Gaps Remain. AARP Policy Institute. Accessed online at <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2015/valuing-the-invaluable-2015-update-new.pdf>

⁸ AARP. (2017). Grandfacts: State fact Sheets for Grandbabies. AARP Policy Institute. Accessed online at <http://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/State%20Fact%20Sheets/Grandfamilies-Fact-Sheet-North-Carolina.pdf>

⁹ 2012-2016 American Community Survey, Table S0103: Population 65 and older in North Carolina

¹⁰ AARP. (2017). Grandfacts: State fact Sheets for Grandbabies. AARP Policy Institute. Accessed online at

<http://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/State%20Fact%20Sheets/Grandfamilies-Fact-Sheet-North-Carolina.pdf>

¹¹ Parahealth Institute. (2017). Workforce Data Center. Accessed online at <https://phinational.org/policy-research/workforce-data-center/#states=37&var=Age>

¹² Analysis of 2012-2016 American Community Survey by Bankrate.com. Accessed online at <https://www.bankrate.com/retirement/bankrate-study-seniors-incomes-in-47-states-dont-go-far-enough/>

¹³ 2012-2016 American Community Survey, Table S0103: Population 65 and older in North Carolina

¹⁴ AARP. (2017). Grandfacts: State fact Sheets for Grandbabies. AARP Policy Institute. Accessed online at <http://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/State%20Fact%20Sheets/Grandfamilies-Fact-Sheet-North-Carolina.pdf>