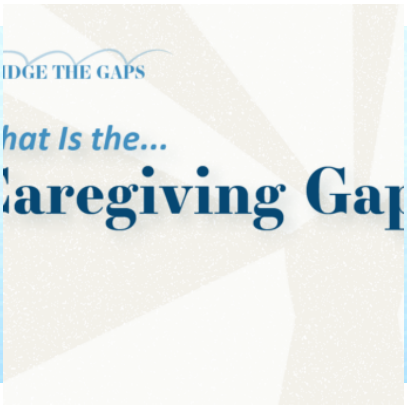

06.08.26 | BRIDGE THE GAPS

What Is the Caregiving Gap?

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A reality of our modern lives is that for many of us, becoming a caregiver often starts well before we even realize we are providing care. We could be helping a parent with their bills, coordinating prescriptions, driving a spouse to an appointment, or going a little out of our way to check on a loved one on our commute home.

Over time, these small acts of love and doing what needs to be done can quietly become one of the most significant financial roles we take on. And disproportionately, this default role of caregiver often falls to women. In fact, according to the 2025 Caregiving in the U.S. report, 61% of family caregivers are women, compared with 38% who are men.

When we talk about the "Caregiving Gap," it is a recognition of the cumulative impact of absorbing caregiving responsibilities – be it for one's children, aging parents, spouse, or other loved one – that compound over time via reduced earnings and derailed career momentum.

Indeed, the costs of caregiving can manifest in both direct and indirect ways. Direct costs include transportation, home modifications, medical supplies, household help, paid care, legal documents, prescriptions, or missed reimbursements. Indirect costs, on the other hand, are the silent multipliers over time that include reduced hours, missed promotions, career pauses, lower retirement contributions, and lower future Social Security benefits.

These numbers add up. A report by the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau detailed that the estimated employment-related costs for mothers providing unpaid care averages $295,000 per lifetime, and that unpaid family caregiving can reduce a woman's lifetime earnings by 15%.

Why does this especially matter now? According to the same Caregiving in the U.S. report, the number of family caregivers has spiked 45% over the past 11 years, with an estimated 63 million Americans (roughly one in four adults) supporting an adult with complex medical conditions or disabilities.

It is clear, then, that caregiving is no longer a rare or temporary family situation. For many households, it is becoming a normal part of financial life. As such, it is important for us to open the conversation about caregiving, and why women should acknowledge that it can be a substantial part of their overall financial picture, impacting income, emergency savings, benefits, retirement contributions, insurance needs, estate planning, and family communication.

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This is why we will focus in on the "Caregiving Gap" for the next several months as part of our broader Bridge the Gaps program. The goal is to build on the content and conversations we put forth as part of our "Confidence Gap" topic, which endeavored to help build a foundation for women to feel empowered to take control of their financial lives, and apply this to the growing and often complicated reality that caregiving presents for women.

By acknowledging the Caregiving Gap, women can begin to approach care with more clarity, more communication, and more confidence, and plan proactively about how it might impact their own financial futures. The goal is not to predict every future need. It is to create enough structure so that love, responsibility, and financial well-being can coexist more sustainably.

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