

The Aging of the Baby Boom and the Growing Care Gap: A Look at Future Declines in the Availability of Family Caregivers

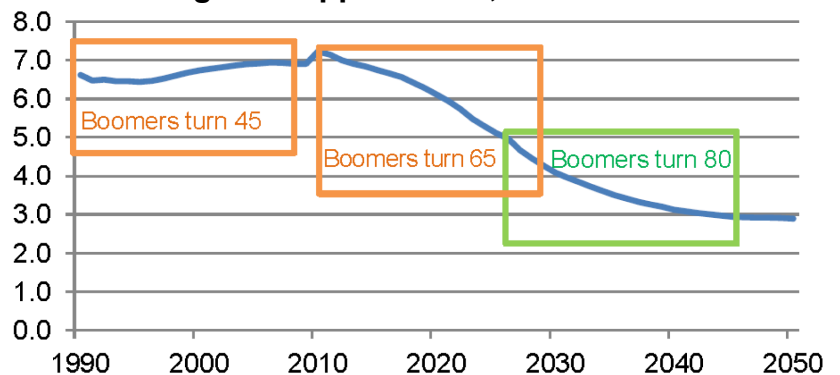
Donald Redfoot, Lynn Feinberg, and Ari Houser
AARP Public Policy Institute

This paper uses a “caregiver support ratio,” which is the number of potential caregivers aged 45–64 for each person aged 80 and older, to document the declining availability of family caregivers to provide long-term services and supports (LTSS) during the next few decades.

By tracking this ratio nationally and for all 50 states for the period from 1990 to 2050, the paper addresses the factors that will affect the availability of family caregivers as boomers age from the peak caregiving years into the high-risk years of late life. The paper finds that

- **The period from 1990 to 2010** was marked by boomers aging into the prime caregiving years. As a result, the caregiver ratio was high and increased slightly, from 6.6 to 7.2 potential caregivers aged 45–64 for every person aged 80-plus.
- **The period from 2010 to 2030** will be a time of transition as boomers progress into old age and the caregiver ratio declines sharply from 7.2 to 4.1—especially when the oldest boomers begin to reach age 80 in the 2020s.
- **The period from 2030 to 2050** will include all remaining boomers aging into the high-risk years of 80-plus, and the caregiver ratio is expected to continue to drift downward, from 4.1 to 2.9.

Caregiver Support Ratio, United States



Source: AARP Public Policy Institute calculations based on REMI (Regional Economic Models, Inc.) 2013 baseline demographic projections.

In just 13 years (2026), as the baby boomers age into their 80s, the decline in the caregiver support ratio is projected to shift from a slow decline to a free fall in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Rising demand and shrinking families to provide support suggest that the United States needs a comprehensive person- and family-centered policy for LTSS that would better serve the needs of older persons with disabilities, support family and friends in their caregiving roles, and promote greater efficiencies in public spending.

In Brief IB 213, August 2013.
A synopsis of the AARP Public Policy Institute *Insight on the Issues*, number 85. Reprinting with permission only. © 2013, AARP. AARP Public Policy Institute
www.aarp.org/ppi ppi@aarpp.org