

Mapping Caregiver Navigation Services

Key Insights and Future Directions

With more than 63 million caregivers nationwide, the need for accessible and coordinated navigation support is substantial and growing. Caregiver Navigation is an essential service helping family and informal caregivers access resources and supports. This brief synthesizes findings, insights, and future directions for the aging network from USAgings' environmental scan.

Caregiver Navigation in the Aging Network

Caregiver Navigation is designed to support family and informal caregivers, spouses, partners, relatives, and friends by helping them identify and access the resources they need through their caregiving journeys. Caregiver navigation activities have been carried out by area agencies on aging (AAAs) and Title VI Native American Aging Programs for more than two decades, though many providers do not recognize themselves as offering the service.

Discussions with AAAs, state units on aging (SUAs), and family caregivers identified key gaps, best practices, and opportunities to strengthen how the aging network connects caregivers to needed resources. These system-wide insights on strengths, challenges, obstacles, and opportunities will help guide efforts to expand and improve caregiver navigation services nationwide.

Strengths

The aging network is a trusted community resource and well-positioned to deliver caregiver navigation due to its deep community presence and experience.

- **Person-centered, relationship-driven support models** with emphasis on direct support and peer connection, including support groups, help caregivers gain insight and feel less alone.
- **Strategic leveraging of funds** allows for adaptation to local needs.
- **Growing use of consumer-directed approaches** that empower caregivers to make choices and access services at their own pace.

These strengths create a solid foundation for delivering tailored, responsive navigation services that resonate with caregivers.

Challenges

Despite these advantages, several challenges affect caregiver engagement and access to navigation.

- **Many individuals fulfilling caregiving roles do not identify as caregivers**, which reduces awareness and uptake and services.
- **The service landscape is complex and varies significantly** across communities, counties, and states, creating inconsistencies in access and awareness. Complex eligibility requirements, geographical region, and the digital divide add to the complexity.
- **Outcomes are difficult to capture** due to the relational and emotion-based work of caregiver navigation.

Obstacles System-level constraints further complicate the delivery of caregiver navigation. • Agencies receive limited funding, restricting the scope of services they can provide. • Service availability and waitlists hinder support, often due to funding, staffing shortages, or lack of local providers. • It is difficult for consumers to discern what information is vetted and complete. The growing presence of AI-powered solutions and concern about misinformation creates barriers for caregivers accessing support. These obstacles highlight the concern of identifying caregiver needs and being able to meet their needs consistently.	Opportunities There are clear pathways to strengthen caregiver navigation and expand its impact. • Improve caregiver outreach and messaging to better resonate with individuals who do not identify as caregivers. • Develop and enhance centralized entry points and referral systems to simplify access and enhance organizational capacity through a No Wrong Door approach. • Strengthen data collection and outcome measurement to demonstrate value by leveraging assessment tools. By addressing these areas, the aging network can create a more seamless, accessible, and effective caregiver navigation system.
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Closing Perspective

Caregiver navigation is a powerful foundation for supporting family caregivers across the aging network. By strengthening what works and addressing key barriers and system challenges, aging professionals can create a more coordinated, accessible, and sustainable system of support for caregivers nationwide.

To help the aging network communicate this need for greater investment in caregiver navigation services, Year 2 of this initiative will implement outcome-based evaluations of 14 program sites nationwide. These evaluations will assess the impact of navigation services on caregiver burden and self-efficacy, two factors central to sustaining the capacity of family caregivers.

In Year 3, the grant team will build on this foundation by developing research-informed resources, such as ready-to-use data collection tools and best practice case examples, for widespread dissemination across the aging network.

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