

May Senior Sense: What the Biden Infrastructure Plan Means for Caregivers

By Liz O'Donnell

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“For too long, caregivers — who are disproportionately women, and women of color, and immigrants — have been unseen, underpaid, and undervalued.” President Biden spoke these words on March 31 while unveiling his American Jobs Plan. This is what happens when we have a hands-on, family caregiver in The White House. President Biden’s family history, raising his two sons after his wife and daughter were killed in a car accident, and then losing one of his sons to cancer years later, is an integral part of who he is. Just like the care we provide to our family members is an integral part of ours.

Politics aside, this presidential speech felt like more than rhetoric. The plan, also commonly referred to as the Infrastructure bill, calls for a \$400 billion investment in the care economy. While it will face a tough sell with critics and opponents to get passed, it is gratifying to see care prioritized at the highest levels of government. No matter what happens with the legislative process, caregiving has been elevated to its rightful place in the discussions about how this country runs, and I suspect we caregivers will not let that conversation wane.

Critics are pushing back against the bill saying care is not infrastructure. Bridges and roads, they say, that’s infrastructure. Family caregivers, however, have long known that care is indeed infrastructure. Merriam-Webster defines infrastructure as, “the system of public works of a country, state, or region,” also, “the resources (such as personnel, buildings, or equipment) required for an activity.” Family caregivers know that we, hand-in-hand with paid caregivers, are the resources required to keep our families functioning, our healthcare system from collapsing under the burden of a rapidly aging society, and our economy humming. According to the AARP, approximately 41 million unpaid family caregivers provide an estimated 34 billion hours of care worth \$470 billion. And when we are able to balance paid work with our unpaid work, it is the paid caregivers we rely on to support our families in our absence. These are the roads we pave and the bridges we build from where institutional, medical care ends and home care begins.

From what we know of Biden’s plan, the \$400 billion would go toward providing seniors more medical care at home. It would support Medicaid coverage of long-term care outside of traditional institutional settings and provide better access to home- and community-based health care services. It would also increase pay and benefits to home care workers. [Research](#) from the LeadingAge LTSS Center at UMass Boston shows investing in direct care workers increases the quality of care given.

Caregiving has always been challenging, but the past year has made it that much more so. As the pandemic continues, our leaders see what we have always seen – that society can no longer ignore the serious cracks in the infrastructure nor can they continue to minimize the work of care. This bill could be an important step toward improving the care experience for family caregivers, paid caregivers, and, of course, the people we care for.

Liz O'Donnell is the founder of [Working Daughter](#) and the author of [Working Daughter: A Guide To Caring For your Aging Parents While Making A Living](#). For caregiving support, information and resources contact a Senior Care Advisor at Care.com. We are master’s-level social workers specializing in adult and senior care. Call us today at (855) 781-1303 x3 or email questions to careplanning@care.com

