

# SONGS & SMILES

## Changing the Narrative

### Alzheimer's Destroys Connections

Alzheimer's is a disease, not a normal part of aging. The disease often develops slowly, but it always gets worse, never better, and there is no cure.

For the person who has Alzheimer's, the disease destroys connections with their own memories and their connections with other people.

### A Growing Problem

In the United States alone, almost 6 million people are living with Alzheimer's. The risk for Alzheimer's and other dementias increases with age.

Percentage of the U.S. population living with Alzheimer's:

- 3% of people age 65-74
- 17% of people age 75-84
- 32% of people age 85 and older

The baby-boom generation has now reached the age of 65 and older, and this segment of the population is expected to increase dramatically in the coming years. By 2050, the number of people age 65 and older living with Alzheimer's is projected to reach 13.8 million.

### Caregiver Strain and Stress

Too often, the disease also destroys connections between people caring for the person who has Alzheimer's. The journey challenges the entire family, because it is distressing to watch a loved one slowly decline. Caring for someone who has Alzheimer's gets progressively harder and can last for many years.

Sadly, many caregivers die even before the person who has Alzheimer's. Other caregivers survive, but fail to thrive. Family members and friends stop visiting, eventually drifting apart. Celebrations cease.

### Disturbing Statistics

- More than 16 million Americans provide unpaid care for people with Alzheimer's or other dementias.
- About two-thirds of primary family caregivers are women, about 30 percent are age 65 or older.
- About one-quarter of caregivers are "sandwich generation" caregivers – meaning they care not only for an aging parent, but also for children under age 18.
- More than 40 percent of caregivers report that no one else provides unpaid assistance.
- People caring for someone who has Alzheimer's have increased risk of disease and health complications, and 74 percent of caregivers report they are concerned about maintaining their own health.

### The Good News

Caregivers who get training and support experience lower stress and better health, and in turn are better equipped to care for their loved ones. Songs & Smiles increases awareness of the unique challenges faced by families caring for a loved one who has Alzheimer's. Programs provide caregivers with practical training and resources, while building and strengthening connections with family, friends, and communities.

### Supporting Research and Statistics

- Family Caregiver Alliance (<https://www.caregiver.org/alzheimers-disease-caregiving>)
- 2020 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures (<https://www.alz.org>)

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