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# Elevating the National Dialogue on Care

A Message Playbook to Elevate  
Care & Caregiving in the 2024 Election  
and Beyond



## Introduction

All of us will need the support of caregivers at multiple points in our lives, yet the tools and opportunities to make care accessible, affordable and equitable just aren't in place. As care organizations and advocates, we can rally our communities and candidates to elevate caregiving supports and solutions in the 2024 elections and beyond.

This playbook is meant to help organizations and policymakers inspire people who don't already see care as a priority, to see themselves in the caregiving issue and to take action on issues that support caregivers of all types. It is for communicators and advocates seeking to broaden their base of support for caregiving policy and solutions that can drive positive change.

The guidance and messages that follow are based on a series of focus groups with a mix of caregivers of children and older adults and non-caregivers in the U.S.; and a nationally representative online survey of 1,005 likely voters. ([Summary research report may be found here.](#))

This research confirmed what many of us already believe and have experienced: that while caregiving and caregivers are seen as very important in people's lives and to the health of our society, likely voters believe the U.S. is not doing a good job supporting those who provide care. There is broad, strong and bipartisan support—as well as support that holds strong regardless of disability status, race and household income—for making changes in how we as a nation provide care to our families and support family caregivers. This support is bipartisan and cross-ideology. And while care is not yet a top-of-mind priority voting issue, the research charts a clear framework and messages to make it so.

Our collective opportunity is to weave these messages throughout communications—with our stakeholders, communities, networks, policymakers and candidates—so that care becomes a genuine ballot box issue.

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This playbook was developed by Caring Across Generations. Caring Across Generations is a national organization of family caregivers, care workers, disabled people, and aging adults working to transform the way we care in this country so that care is accessible, affordable and equitable—and our systems of care enable everyone to live and age with dignity.

To achieve our vision, we transform cultural norms and narratives about aging, disability and care; win federal and state-level policies; and build power amongst the people touched by care. For more information, visit [CARINGACROSS.ORG](https://CARINGACROSS.ORG).

## Strategic Message Imperatives

What	Why
<p><b>Capitalize on the unifying aspects of caregiving.</b></p>	<p>Care is not a partisan issue. There is a shared understanding that care is valuable (to individuals, families and our economy), and that everyone is going to need it. Support is bipartisan and crosses ideological lines.</p>
<p><b>Leverage the emotional intensity of caregiving.</b></p>	<p>The act of giving and receiving care is personal and deeply emotional. While those who have experienced it identify the most intensely, even those who have not can imagine and empathize. When tapped into, this emotion leads to the belief that “it shouldn’t be this hard,” which opens the door to solutions.</p>
<p><b>Lift care as a “kitchen table” issue and demonstrate the positive impacts of change.</b></p>	<p>Likely voters see, understand, and agree that care needs to be done differently, but they do not know how to achieve it. Most are trapped in existing paradigms of providing care and not only need new ones, but also need permission to imagine, believe in and support solutions that they cannot conceptualize now. Demonstrating how policies and solutions can help achieve a better reality around care drives support.</p>
<p><b>Emphasize the act of caregiving.</b></p>	<p>You don’t have to be a caregiver to believe caregiving is important. While experience matters—those who give or receive care have a higher intensity of support—even those not currently in a care situation empathize and imagine their own future need. By emphasizing the act of caregiving and of providing care (to show that caregiving comes in all shapes and sizes), we build a bigger base of support.</p>

## Framework

The storytelling framework below is a guide for constructing care messages that drive support. This framework works because it's grounded in an idea that many people already believe—that care is challenging—and helps them imagine what it could look like if improvements were made. The pages that follow use this framework to elevate care and a care infrastructure broadly, but you can apply this framework to any care policy or program for which you're seeking to rally support.

<p><b>Recognize the current care ecosystem and its impact</b></p> <p>Use facts to help people recognize how the current care ecosystem operates and its impact in society, along with the challenges and issues that they and other caregivers face.</p>	<p><b>Make the issue of care relevant on a personal level</b></p> <p>Create an emotional connection on why care matters and how it is currently impacting caregivers' and care recipients' reality.</p>	<p><b>Envision improvements to the care ecosystem</b></p> <p>Help demonstrate how the policies and solutions can help them achieve a new and better reality around care.</p>	<p><b>Motivate to vote in support</b></p> <p>Put the pieces together to drive action in favor of caregiving initiatives or candidates supporting caregiving initiatives.</p>
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## Elevator

Elevator language puts all the pieces together to make a compelling argument in a short amount of time. The short and long elevators below use the above framework plus messages that drive the most support among likely voters.

In talking points or materials, follow these elevators with your own ideas about HOW our system should be able to reflect today's needs, as well as a call-to-action for your audience. For example, describe the policies you are advocating for and the positive change they will make for people. You might encourage your audience to learn more, send a letter of support or find out a candidates' positions on caregiving.

## Short Elevator

Everyone is going to need care at some point, whether it's care for ourselves or a loved one. Yet too many people navigate the challenges of care and caregiving alone or are forced to choose between their job and caring for themselves or the ones they love. It shouldn't be this hard.

Rethinking how we provide care to our families will make it possible for more people to be there for their loved ones, improve quality of life, to help them age with dignity and afford care when they need it. We need to recognize the importance of caregiving throughout life—from childhood, to illness, to disability and aging—with a system and care infrastructure that truly reflects the needs of today's families.

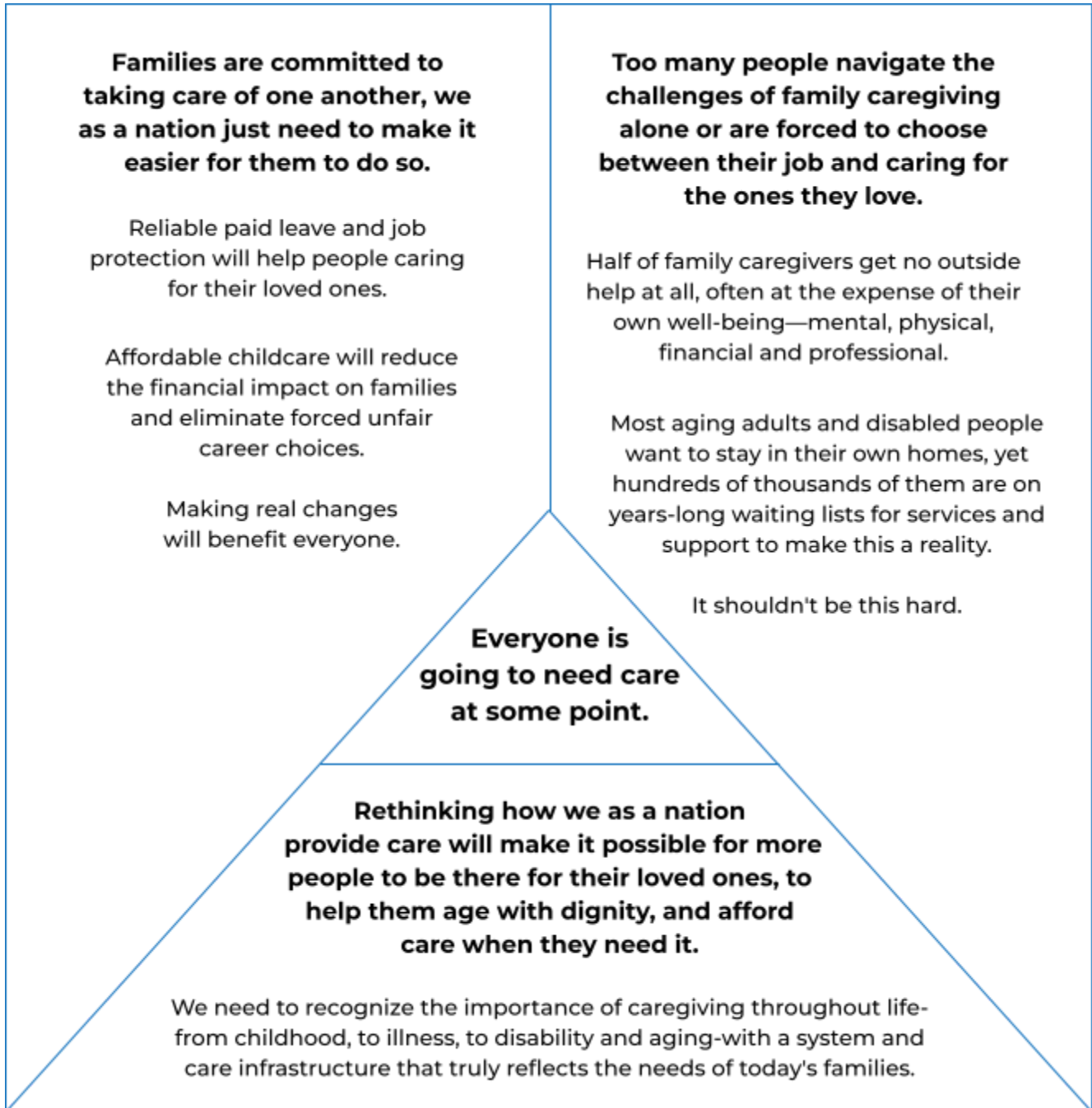
## Long Elevator (weaves in policy solutions)

Everyone is going to need care at some point. Yet too many people navigate the challenges of care and caregiving without support or are forced to choose between their job and caring for the ones they love. Half of family caregivers get no outside help at all, often at the expense of their own well-being—mental, physical, financial and professional. Those who need care also experience physical, mental, financial, and professional strain when paid support is unavailable, and that lack of support significantly impacts wellbeing. And while most aging adults and disabled people want to stay in their own homes, hundreds of thousands of them are on years-long waiting lists for paid support to make this a reality. It shouldn't be this hard.

Rethinking how we provide care to our families will make it possible for more people to be there for their loved ones, to help them age with dignity, and afford care when they need it. We need to recognize the importance of caregiving throughout life—from childhood, to illness, to disability and aging—with a system and care infrastructure that truly reflects the needs of today's families. Reliable paid leave and job protection will help people caring for their loved ones. Affordable childcare will reduce the financial impact on families and eliminate forced unfair career choices. Accessible aging and disability care will ensure people who need care receive it and that care workers are paid living wages.

Families are committed to taking care of one another, we as a nation just need to make it easier for all of us to do so. Making real changes will benefit everyone.

## Message Triangle



## Mobilization Messages

Mobilization messages are for stakeholders and audiences that already believe care is a priority. Among this audience, the messages below were most relevant and most likely to drive action. Use them in social media posts, letters to the editor, speeches and more.

<p><b>Concerns</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most aging adults and disabled people want to stay in their own homes but lack the support to do so. Hundreds of thousands of them are on years-long waiting lists for paid support to make living in their own homes a reality.</li> <li>• The responsibility of being a caregiver can be all-consuming. Half of family caregivers get no outside help at all, often at the expense of their own well-being—mental, physical, financial and professional.</li> <li>• The U.S. is one of the only countries in the world without a national paid family leave policy—this ‘privilege’ is provided to only 23% of U.S. workers, a small fraction of people who will need time to care for themselves or a family member in the event of injury or illness.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Facts</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every person will need care in their life—as a growing child; after illness or injury; from disability or while aging later in life. Receiving care is something all of us will experience.</li> <li>• Due to the lack of supports in this country, family caregivers and care recipients tackle a myriad of physical and emotional needs every day, while navigating complex systems. They take it all on—managing appointments and medications, thinking through the hard conversations, navigating daily routines, arranging transportation, taking on home duties, going without the paid supports needed and so much more.</li> <li>• Disabled people and older adults who don’t have paid support are often either going without care or must rely on family caregivers, putting strain on relationships and reducing the quality of care.</li> <li>• Caring for another person is full of rewards and tough moments—each relationship and circumstance has its own complex dynamic. Family caregivers simply want to provide the care that their loved ones deserve.</li> </ul>



<b>Impacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Family caregivers must often reduce their working hours or leave their jobs entirely to provide care. This leads to a loss of income and career opportunities, affecting their financial stability and long-term earning potential.</li><li>• Family caregivers often dip into their savings or retirement funds to cover caregiving expenses, resulting in reduced savings for their own future needs. This can lead to financial insecurity in retirement.</li><li>• The stress and physical demands of caregiving can have adverse effects on the caregiver's own health. This can result in increased health care costs and reduced productivity.</li></ul>
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## Persuasion Messages

Persuasion messages are for audiences who are not strongly opposed but need some convincing in order to be motivated to action. Those denoted with an (▽) indicate messages that are particularly compelling for older, conservative audiences.

<b>Concerns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No one should have to go bankrupt or face financial hardship to care for their loved ones. They should be able to rely on the programs they paid into to help aging or disabled family members in need.</li><li>• The responsibility of being a caregiver is all-consuming. Half of family caregivers get no outside help at all, often at the expense of their own well-being—mental, physical, financial and professional.▽</li><li>• Most aging adults and disabled people want to stay in their own homes but lack the support to do so. Hundreds of thousands of them are on years-long waiting lists for paid support to make living in their own homes a reality.▽</li></ul>
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<b>Facts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Every person will need care in their life—as a growing child; after illness or injury; from disability or while aging later in life. Receiving care is something all of us will experience.</li><li>• Caring for another person is full of rewards and tough moments—each relationship and circumstance has its own complex dynamic. Family caregivers simply want to provide the care that their loved ones deserve. ▽</li><li>• Due to the lack of supports in this country, family caregivers and care recipients tackle a myriad of physical and emotional needs every day, while navigating complex systems. They take it all on—managing appointments and medications, thinking through the hard conversations, navigating daily routines, arranging transportation, taking on home duties, going without the paid supports needed and so much more. ▽</li></ul>
<b>Impacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Both family caregivers and people who need care must often reduce their working hours or leave their jobs entirely because of lack of paid support. This leads to a loss of income and career opportunities, affecting their financial stability and long-term earning potential.</li><li>• Family caregivers, disabled people, and older adults often dip into their savings or retirement funds to cover caregiving expenses, resulting in reduced savings for their own future needs. This can lead to financial insecurity in retirement.</li><li>• The stress and physical demands of caregiving can have adverse effects on the caregiver's own health and for the person receiving care. This can result in increased health care costs and reduced productivity.</li></ul>



## Words to Lose & Words to Use

Use	Why it Works
Parent	<p>These words communicate clearly, are commonly understood, have positive meanings / associations, and inspire emotion.</p>
Caregiver	
Providing care	
Responsibility	
Companion	

Lose	Why it Doesn't Work
Obligation	<p>These words have more negative associations or are understood in different ways (some positive/some not) and are thus confusing and open to interpretation.</p>
Custodian	
Collective	
Universal	
Guardian	



## Sample Social Post Copy

These are examples of how to use this messaging in social media.

**Post Copy:** Too many people navigate the challenges of family #caregiving alone. [Lawmakers/Congress] need/s to recognize the importance of caregiving throughout life—from childhood, to illness, to disability and aging.

**Graphic:** Text on card with underline emphasis/Brand colors: *“Everyone needs care at some point.”*

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**Post Copy:** Most aging adults and disabled people want to stay in their own homes but lack the support to do so. Yet hundreds of thousands of them are on years-long waiting lists for paid support to make this a reality.

**Graphic:** Image of aging adult or disabled people. Text: *“Congress: End waiting lists for care.”*

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**Post Copy:** No one should have to go bankrupt or face financial hardship to care for their loved ones.

**Graphic:** Brand color card with people figures/half colored in. Text: *“Half of family caregivers get no outside help—often at the expense of their own well-being—mental, physical, financial and professional.”*

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