

# A third of US seniors die with dementia, study finds

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Report tallies enormous medical, financial and caregiver toll of conditions like Alzheimer's.

(HealthDay)—There's more troubling news for America's aging population: A new report finds that one in every three seniors now dies while suffering from Alzheimer's or another form of dementia.

In many cases, dementia is the cause of [death](#) or contributes to it, the Alzheimer's Association study finds.

The rate of deaths related to Alzheimer's disease rose 68 percent from 2000 to 2010, according to the report. At the same time, deaths from other major diseases, such as [heart disease](#) and [HIV/AIDS](#), have declined.

"Alzheimer's disease is a public health crisis that is here," said Beth Kallmyer, vice president of constituent services for the Alzheimer's Association. "One in three [seniors](#) is dying with Alzheimer's or another [dementia](#). For other major diseases, the death rate is going down because the federal government funds and invests in research. We have not seen that same commitment for Alzheimer's disease."

Released Tuesday, the report also focuses on the toll that Alzheimer's takes on families, particularly those caregiving from a distance. In 2012, more than 15 million people were Alzheimer's caregivers. They provided more than 17 billion hours of unpaid care that the Alzheimer's group estimated was valued at \$216 billion.

Direct out-of-pocket costs for families of people with Alzheimer's are \$34 billion, according to Kallmyer. "The cost of care is a challenge, and not everyone has access to the services they need," she said.

About 15 percent of Alzheimer's caregivers live more than an hour away from their loved ones. Out-of-pocket costs for these long-distance caregivers are nearly twice as high as those who live close by. Each year, a long-distance caregiver has nearly \$10,000 in expenses compared with about \$5,000 for a local [caregiver](#), according to the report.

"Long-distance caregiving can be financially, emotionally and physically more draining. Managing the day-to-[day care](#) can certainly be a challenge, but long-distance caregivers can feel guilt, and they may feel resentment from other family members. And, they may have to manage the daily care from a long distance," Kallmyer said.

Overall, the cost of caring for the 5 million people with Alzheimer's disease is about \$203 billion, according to the report. That figure includes Medicare, Medicaid, family costs and private insurance costs. The lion's share of the cost—about \$142 billion—is paid by Medicare

and Medicaid.

Even more concerning is that the Alzheimer's Association estimates that by 2050, nearly 14 million people will have Alzheimer's disease. That could drive costs for Alzheimer's care as high as \$1.2 trillion in 2050.

The U.S. government currently funds about \$500 million in Alzheimer's research, according to Kallmyer. In comparison, heart disease receives about \$4 billion in research funding and cancer gets about \$6 billion, she said.

Dr. Brian Appleby, a physician with the Center for Brain Health at the Cleveland Clinic, said he wasn't surprised by these latest figures.

"Alzheimer's is going to affect all of us individually. Soon, we'll all have someone we know or someone in the family or even ourselves with Alzheimer's disease. It's something we all need to be prepared for," Appleby said.

He said that while current treatments won't cure or reverse the disease, they can increase the amount of time until someone needs nursing home care. Right now, he said, the focus is on trying to prevent Alzheimer's disease from occurring.

"Alzheimer's disease is really a chronic illness. It starts decades before we see the symptoms," Appleby said. The best advice to potentially prevent Alzheimer's disease is to keep your heart healthy, he said. That means quitting smoking, eating healthy, maintaining a healthy weight and getting regular exercise. It also means staying active mentally, he added. Do crosswords and other puzzles, and read, he advised.

And, stay socially active, he recommended. "People who are socially isolated are at a greater risk of Alzheimer's disease," Appleby said.

For her part, Kallmyer added: "Alzheimer's is impacting so many people already, and the impact is significant. And, as the baby boomers age, the rate of Alzheimer's and the death rate from [Alzheimer's](#) is only going to increase."

**More information:** Create a free care plan for your loved one and find local resources with the [Alzheimer's navigator](#) from the Alzheimer's Association.

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