

Study: Baby boomers will drive explosion in Alzheimer's-related costs in coming decades

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As baby boomers reach their sunset years, shifting nationwide demographics with them, the financial burden of Alzheimer's disease on the United States will skyrocket from \$307 billion annually to \$1.5 trillion, USC researchers announced today.

Health policy researchers at the USC Leonard D. Schaeffer Center for Health Policy and Economics used models that incorporate trends in [health](#), [health care costs](#), education and demographics to explore the future impact of one of humanity's costliest diseases on the nation's population.

Other key findings include:

- From 2010 to 2050, the number of individuals aged 70+ with Alzheimer's will increase by 153 percent, from 3.6 to 9.1 million.
- Annual per-person costs of the disease were \$71,000 in 2010, which is expected to double by 2050.
- Medicare and Medicaid currently bear 75 percent of the costs of the disease.

"Alzheimer's disease is a progressive disease with symptoms that gradually worsen over time. People don't get better," said Julie Zissimopoulos, lead author of the study and an assistant professor at the USC Price School of Public Policy. "It is so expensive because individuals with Alzheimer's disease need extensive help with daily activities provided by paid caregivers or by family members who may be

taking time off of work to care for them, which has a double impact on the economy," she said.

"In late stages of the disease," she added, "they need help with personal care and lose the ability to control movement which requires 24-hour care, most often in an institutional setting."

Zissimopoulos collaborated with Eileen Crimmins of the USC Davis School of Gerontology and Patricia St.Clair of the USC Schaeffer Center on the study, which was posted online ahead of publication by the Forum for Health Economics and Policy on Nov. 4.

The team found that delaying the onset of Alzheimer's even a little can yield major benefits—both in quality of life and in overall costs.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2012, 43.1 million Americans were 65 and older, constituting 14 percent of the population. By 2050, that number will more than double to 83.7 million, constituting 21 percent of the population.

Medical advances that delay the onset of Alzheimer's by five years add about 2.7 years of life for patients. By 2050, a five-year delay in onset results in a 41 percent lower prevalence of the disease in the population and lowers the overall costs to society by 40 percent, according to the team's research.

"Our colleagues in the medical field are working on ways to understand how the disease interferes with brain processes—and then stop it," said Zissimopoulos, who is also an associate director at the USC Schaeffer Center. "Investment in their work now could yield huge benefits down the line."

More information: www.degruyter.com/view/j/fhep. ...

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Provided by University of Southern California

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