

## Study: Caring for elderly stroke survivors costs an estimated \$40 billion per year

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Micrograph showing cortical pseudolaminar necrosis, a finding seen in strokes on medical imaging and at autopsy. H&E-LFB stain. Credit: Nephron/Wikipedia

It's assumed that family and friends will help out in the event of a medical crisis, but that's not always feasible. And when stroke survivors need more than 20 hours of care per week, as a study in the August edition of *Stroke* shows, it's a large burden for their loved ones.

More than half of elderly stroke survivors receive help from a caregiver, requiring 22.3 [hours](#) of assistance per week on average. That's nearly double what [elderly patients](#) who have not had a stroke require, at an average of 11.8 hours of help.

A group of University of Michigan researchers found the need for care translates to about \$11,000 per stroke survivor per week, for an annual estimate of around \$40 billion in costs to care for elderly stroke survivors.

"Previous studies underestimated the caregiving resources that are used, and we expect the cost of caregiving will only increase as baby boomers age," said first author Lesli Skolarus, M.D., M.S., a neurologist with the U-M Comprehensive Stroke Center.

Caregivers could include unpaid, like family and friends, along with paid caregivers, as about one-third of stroke survivors with informal care also receive paid care. Activities included in the estimate are accompanying the patient to physician appointments, cooking, cleaning, helping the patient eat, bathe and dress and helping with money matters and insurance decisions.

Using data from a national survey of Medicare beneficiaries, the team compared 892 elderly self-reported stroke survivors to 892 non-stroke controls, accounting for demographics and other health conditions, like hypertension, [coronary heart disease](#) or dementia.

The researchers determined more than half of elderly [stroke survivors](#) receive help from a caregiver, requiring 22.3 hours of assistance per week on average. That's nearly double what elderly patients who have not had a stroke require, at an average of 11.8 hours of help.

"Stroke survivors need a caregiver to spend the equivalent of half of a

full-time job each week to help them," said senior author James Burke, M.D., M.S., a neurologist with U-M's Comprehensive Stroke Center and the Ann Arbor Department of Veterans Affairs. "Caregiving is an especially big burden in patients with neurological conditions."

Skolarus added, "We need to plan for other mechanisms to support caregivers and survivors. Hopefully planning now will reduce the future burden."

The team first presented the research at the International Stroke Conference in Los Angeles.

**More information:** Lesli E. Skolarus et al, Care Received by Elderly US Stroke Survivors May Be Underestimated, *Stroke* (2016). [DOI: 10.1161/STROKEAHA.116.012704](https://doi.org/10.1161/STROKEAHA.116.012704)

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