



e-Connected Family Caregiver: Bringing Caregiving into the 21st Century **STUDY SNAPSHOT AND KEY FINDINGS**

Introduction

UnitedHealthcare and the National Alliance for Caregiving conducted a study, *e-Connected Family Caregiver: Bringing Caregiving into the 21st Century*, to increase understanding and awareness of the home technologies that family caregivers feel could help lessen the challenges of caregiving and ensure their loved ones are safe, remain independent and are getting the care they need.

Conducted in November 2010, the study surveyed 1,000 family caregivers who have already used the Internet or some other technology to support their caregiving. It assessed how helpful 12 particular technologies would be in supporting caregivers or helping them provide care. It also explored perceived barriers to using technology, factors that influence family caregivers' use of technology and sources of information about technology that caregivers trust.

Selected Key Findings

- Of the 12 technologies evaluated, the three that appeared to have greatest potential were:
 - Personal health record tracking (77 percent rated it as very or somewhat helpful) that would help caregivers electronically keep track of their care recipient's history, symptoms, medications and test results;
 - A caregiving coordination system (70 percent) that provides a shared electronic log for their loved one's doctor appointments and other caregiving needs; and
 - A medication support system (70 percent), a device that reminds the patient about his or her prescription medications and dispenses pills.
- The most commonly reported obstacle to accepting the 12 technologies was the perception that the technology would be expensive (37 percent).
- Caregivers surveyed recognized that technology holds the power to bring significant benefits to both them and their care recipients, including: helping them to save time (77 percent), more easily manage the logistics of caregiving (76 percent), make their care recipient feel safer (75 percent), increase their feelings of effectiveness as a caregiver (74 percent) and reduce stress (74 percent).

About the Study Publishers

Since 2006, UnitedHealthcare and the National Alliance for Caregiving have partnered to conduct a series of studies that focus on the issues and trends affecting family caregivers, who provide an estimated \$375 billion worth of unpaid care annually. These studies have examined caregiver health, the financial costs of caregiving, the impact of the economic downturn on caregivers and the specific issues affecting Hispanic caregivers.

Established in 1996, the [National Alliance for Caregiving](#) is a non-profit coalition of national organizations focusing on issues of family caregiving. The Alliance was created to conduct research, do policy analysis, develop national programs, and increase public awareness of family caregiving issues. Recognizing that family caregivers make important societal and financial contributions toward maintaining the well-being of those for whom they care, the Alliance's mission is to be the objective national resource on family caregiving with the goal of improving the quality of life for families and care recipients.

[UnitedHealthcare](#) is a part of UnitedHealth Group, a diversified health and well-being company dedicated to helping people live healthier lives and making health care work better. With headquarters in Minnetonka, Minn., UnitedHealth Group offers a broad spectrum of products and services through six operating businesses: UnitedHealthcare Employer & Individual, UnitedHealthcare Medicare & Retirement, UnitedHealthcare Community & State, OptumHealth, Ingenix and Prescription Solutions. Through its family of businesses, UnitedHealth Group serves more than 75 million people worldwide.

DETAILED KEY FINDINGS

Caregivers Want Web-based and Mobile Technologies to Help Them Care for Their Loved Ones

Caregivers are most receptive to technologies that help them deliver, monitor, track or coordinate their loved one’s medical care. Of the 12 technologies evaluated, the three that appear to have greatest potential for acceptance and usage by caregivers fall into that category, and more than half of the surveyed caregivers say none of the seven potential barriers examined in the survey would prevent them from trying each technology.

	% Very or Somewhat Helpful	% With Any Barrier to Trying It
<u>Personal health record tracking</u> A website or computer software to keep track of care recipient’s personal health records, including patient history, symptoms, medications, tests, etc.	77%	43%
<u>Caregiving coordination system</u> A shared electronic log for care recipient’s doctor appointments and other caregiving needs. Caregivers can use the system to request a volunteer on certain days and times, and family members and friends can use it to sign up to help.	70%	47%
<u>Medication support system</u> A device that reminds the care recipient and dispenses pills on schedule. Electronic buttons can be pressed for directions on how to take each pill (e.g., on a full stomach, avoid certain types of foods) and possible side effects to watch out for. It also alerts the caregiver by phone or e-mail if a dosage is not removed from the device within a certain time period.	70%	47%

Three other technologies also appear to be appealing to caregivers, yet larger shares of caregivers report the presence of barriers that could prevent them from trying the tools.

	% Very or Somewhat Helpful	% With Any Barrier to Trying It
<u>A symptom monitor and transmitter</u> A device that electronically sends information such as blood sugar or blood pressure readings to a doctor or care manager to help manage care recipient’s health care. It also creates symptom-tracking graphics of the care recipient’s health.	70%	54%
<u>Interactive system for physical, mental and leisure activities</u> A TV-based device, like a Wii Fit, that would allow the caregiver to create a schedule of gentle physical activities and mental games for the care recipient. It includes personalized activities with family photos, illustrated audio books and other audio-visual and interactive leisure activities for him/her.	62%	52%
<u>A video phone system</u> A phone with video capability or an Internet-connected computer with webcam that allows caregivers to check in and see the care recipient when they can’t physically be together (during work, vacations, errands, long-distance caregiving).	61%	58%

Caregivers are less likely to view the remaining technologies as helpful, or they report more barriers to trying them. These technologies include a passive movement monitoring system for caregivers to track their loved one’s movement in the home; an online- or smartphone-based caregiving decision support tool; electronic caregiver training simulations; caregiving coaching software; an online caregiver peer matching service; and a transportation display system.

Seven in 10 caregivers (69 percent) say they would be somewhat or very receptive to using a smartphone for applications to help them with caregiving.

Perceived Benefits and Barriers to Caregivers' Adoption of Technologies

The top expected benefits of these technologies to the caregivers themselves are: saving time (77 percent), making caregiving easier logistically (76 percent), increasing feelings of being effective (74 percent) and reducing stress (74 percent).

- Smaller but still sizeable shares of respondents believe technology would help reduce physical demands on their body (64 percent) or reduce their feelings of depression (51 percent). Almost half think it could save them money (46 percent), even though expense is the most prevalent barrier to trying caregiving technologies.
- Long-distance caregivers – those who live one hour or more from their care recipient – are especially likely to think that technology could make them feel more effective as a caregiver (83 percent versus 74 percent overall).
- Caregivers under 50 are more likely than older caregivers to expect eight of the 10 potential benefits of caregiving technology.
 - They also would be more likely to try the technologies if they were available at low cost.
 - They are less likely to report the presence of any barrier to trying technologies.

The majority of caregivers think using caregiving technologies will result in direct benefits to their care recipient.

- 75 percent report it could help their care recipient feel safer.
- 65 percent feel it could help the recipient be more independent.
- 60 percent believe it could help the care recipient feel more connected to others.

The No. 1 obstacle to trying new technology is caregivers' perception that devices will be expensive (37 percent).

Other barriers include the beliefs that:

- It does not address one of the caregiver's pressing caregiving issues (22 percent).
- The care recipient would resist the technology (20 percent).
- The technology will lessen the care recipient's privacy (13 percent).
- It diminishes the care recipient's sense of independence and pride (13 percent).
- It takes too much time or effort to learn or use (12 percent).
- It decreases the care recipient's social interaction (7 percent).

Caregivers Identify What Would Encourage Them to Try New Technologies

The surveyed caregivers indicate they would be much more or somewhat more likely to try a technology to help them with caregiving if:

- A health professional who is involved with the caregiver or their recipient explained that the technology would be helpful (88 percent).
- They saw a how-to explanation showing it is very simple to install and use (80 percent).
- They were offered a three-year warranty on the technology (78 percent).

Other influencers of at least six in 10 caregivers include a seal of approval from a caregiving organization (66 percent), a recommendation from a caregiver in an online forum (62 percent) and a magazine write-up of how a technology helped another caregiver (60 percent).

Caregivers say medical websites are their most trusted information resource.

- 77 percent of those surveyed say that a medical website, like WebMD or MayoClinic.com, is a source they would trust for information to help them decide whether they want to use a caregiving technology.
- Two-thirds trust a government website, like Medicare's or the Administration on Aging's website (67 percent), or a consumer review website (66 percent).
- Caregiving magazines or websites (57 percent) and caregiver forums on the Internet (50 percent) are the information sources that caregivers are next most likely to trust.

Caregivers Report How They Use and Access Technology

All of the caregivers in this survey have used the Internet or some other technology to help them provide care.

- 70 percent have searched the Internet for information or support related to caregiving.
- 47 percent have used an electronic organizer or calendar to help them with caregiving.
- 11 percent have participated in a caregiving-related blog or online discussion.
- 41 percent have used some other technological device or system – other than a standard computer or cell phone – to help them with their caregiving.

Caregivers were asked whether they have Internet, cable or an alarm system connected to an outside service – all potential means of delivering caregiving technology in the home.

- 89 percent have high speed Internet access.
- 73 percent have wireless Internet.
- 73 percent have cable television.
- 74 percent have access to a mobile device with browsing capabilities.
- 23 percent have a security or alarm system that is connected to an outside service.

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