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New Report on Caregiving Warns of “Looming Crisis” for Baby Boomers

NEW YORK (September 28, 2006)— Americans are poorly prepared to meet an inevitable "caregiving crisis" coming as a result of population aging, according to *Caregiving In America*, a comprehensive new report released today by The Caregiving Project for Older Americans, a joint collaboration of the International Longevity Center-USA (ILC-USA) and the Schmieding Center for Senior Health & Education (SCSHE).

Caregiving in America reports that demographic and social trends are reducing the available pool of family caregivers, who by far are the greatest source of care to impaired older adults. The so-called sandwich generation, those responsible for raising children and caring for aging parents, have been especially hard-hit by these trends. At the same time, the caregiving industry is experiencing a severe and worsening shortage of paid professionals. Today, over 15 million people use caregiver services in the United States, and with the aging of baby boomers, that number is expected to nearly double by 2050.

“There is a growing gap between caregivers and the accelerated need for them,” says Dr. Larry Wright, Co-Director of The Caregiving Project for Older Americans, and Director of SCSHE.

“The material presented in this report clearly outlines the looming national crisis that threatens to undermine the health the millions of aging Americans.”

Caregiving in America contrasts the U.S. with nations such as Japan, Germany and Austria who have handled the caregiving challenges of a rapidly aging population by adopting universal systems of long-term care. The United States arguably has no caregiving system at all.

“Underlying ageism can explain, in part, why this crisis receives less attention than it warrants,” says Dr. Robert Butler, Co-Director of The Caregiving Project for Older Americans and President and CEO of the ILC-USA. “Older people receiving care are deemed disposable and without value.”

Caregiving In America profiles the current state of the caregiving system, which is both home-based and institutional. More than 12 million people in the United States, about 80 percent of whom are age 50 or older need some form of long-term care. Many of those in need of care go without it—about 20 percent of adults needing assistance are unable to find either paid or voluntary help.

“If 20 percent of our older adult population is going without the care they need, imagine what that percent will be as the number of older adults increases,” says Dr. Wright.

Eight in ten adults who receive long-term care at home get their care exclusively from family, friends and volunteers. A family providing care often suffers from loss of wages and benefits that are sacrificed when they reduce their hours, or quit their job, in order to care for a family member. Disruptions and absenteeism due to employees’ caregiving duties cost U.S. employers up to \$33.6 billion per year. Family caregivers also report having less time for family and friends, giving up vacations, hobbies and social activities.

As the burden of family caregivers grows, the shortage of paid caregivers, especially of those in home-based settings worsens. The report outlines a critical shortage of direct care workers. Low wages, few fringe benefits, unpleasant work conditions and lack of career development all contribute to the shortage. Caregiver wages are among the lowest of U.S. occupations—the median hourly wage in 2004 was just over \$10 among nurses aides, under \$9 for home health aides and about \$8 among personal care and home care aides.

The lack of standards and national consensus about the training required of caregivers hurts their recruitment and retention. At present, there is no universally accepted curriculum for either paid or unpaid caregivers. The development of such standards would enhance the value and reward of caregiver occupations, thus attracting more workers to the field. The number of home health aides needed in the over the next decade is expected to increase 56 percent.

“As the gap of demand and supply of caregivers widens, it is crucial we tackle the barriers of affordable, quality care,” says Dr. Butler. “We must address the regulatory obstacles, the financing of long-term care and the need for better communications between medical practitioners, caregivers and care recipients.”

Caregiving in America, offers a context for caregiving and an overview of the caregiving field, providing an inventory of work done over the years by various academic, professional, and service organizations. The report was designed both to map the territory and introduce specific project initiatives, and to offer a context for what has already been done and what still needs to be accomplished in the caregiving field. The Platform for Action, the final section of the report, outlines the ongoing work of The Caregiving Project for Older Americans, which includes assembling a national advisory committee and expert panel, convening a national caregiving summit and conducting a series of national caregiving surveys.

The publication of *Caregiving In America* was sponsored by the Schmieding Foundation and MetLife Foundation. To download the complete report visit <http://www.ilcusa.org/prj/caregiving.htm>. To request a copy of the publication please contact caregiving@ilcusa.org.

About The Caregiving for Older Americans Project

The Caregiving Project for Older Americans is an action-oriented collaboration that aims to improve the nation’s caregiving work force through training, the establishment of standards, and the creation of a career ladder. A joint venture of the International Longevity Center-USA (ILC-USA) and the Schmieding Center for Senior Health & Education (SCSHE), the effort combines the talents of a policy research center with a clinical outpatient and health education program under a \$1 million challenge grant from the Schmieding Foundation of Springdale, Arkansas.

About the International Longevity Center-USA

The International Longevity Center-USA (ILC-USA) is a research policy organization in New York City and has sister centers in Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa. Led by Dr. Robert N. Butler, a world renowned physician specializing in geriatrics, the Center is a non-for-profit, non-partisan organization with a staff of economists, medical and health researchers, demographers and others who study the impact of population aging on society. The ILC-USA focuses on combating ageism, healthy aging, productive engagement and the financing of old age. The ILC-USA is an independent affiliate of Mount Sinai School of Medicine and is incorporated as a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) entity. More information on the ILC-USA can be found at www.ilcusa.org

About the Schmieding Center for Senior Health and Education of Northwest Arkansas

The Schmieding Center for Senior Health and Education of Northwest Arkansas (SCSHE), located in Springdale, Arkansas, provides older adults and their families with education, healthcare, information resources and other services for more positive aging. Education services include unique in-home caregiver training programs, public programs on positive aging, and professional programs to improve the geriatric expertise of healthcare professionals and students. Healthcare services include comprehensive clinical care and rehabilitation by an interdisciplinary team of geriatric professionals. The Schmieding Center is a partnership of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, the Area Health Education Center-Northwest, and Northwest Health System. More information on SCSHE is available at www.schmiedingcenter.org.

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