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IDAHO CAREGIVER ALLIANCE RELEASES ACTION PLAN AS GOVERNOR RECOGNIZES NOVEMBER AS NATIONAL FAMILY CAREGIVER MONTH

Idaho's caregivers – parents, sons and daughters, spouses, friends and neighbors – provide more than 201 million hours in uncompensated care annually. Acknowledging their service, Gov. Butch Otter recognized November as National Family Caregiver Month, hailing the contributions of Idaho's estimated 300,000 family caregivers.

“I am so happy to see the state recognize the importance of family caregivers,” said Beth Gee, a family caregiver and Boise State University employee. “For me, as someone working full time and caring for my parents and young children, a helping hand now and then would be appreciated.”

Like Gee, most caregivers balance full- or part-time employment with managing the complex care and medical needs of their loved ones. Although they do this work willingly, it comes at a cost. Caregivers can lose up to \$600,000 in wages over a lifetime, and Idaho employers lose approximately \$33.6 billion in productivity annually, according to the Idaho Caregiver Alliance.

The Alliance, formed in 2012, includes representatives of the private sector, nonprofit organizations and government agencies. Acknowledging that the importance of family caregivers will continue to grow, the Alliance has released an Idaho Lifespan Family Caregiver Action Plan to raise awareness of family caregiving. It identifies actions that will assist caregivers as they strive to keep their jobs, maintain their health and avoid burnout. Among the action plan's recommendations:

- Giving caregivers “respite care” or time away from caregiving to help prevent or delay burnout, relieve caregiver stress, and allow caregivers time to take care of themselves.
- Investing in training and information for caregivers, who are increasingly expected to manage complex medical and/or psychological conditions with little to no information, instruction, or support.
- Increasing public awareness about unpaid caregivers, and recognizing employers who currently do accommodate the needs of family caregivers.
- Working to embed the voice of caregivers in policy decisions and systems.

The full action plan is available at:

<https://hs.boisestate.edu/csa/files/2016/09/Idaho-Family-Caregiver-Action-Plan-9-30-2016.pdf>

“Most of our systems are siloed into about thinking about the person with the condition when it comes to policy decisions, rather than the network of support that surrounds them,” explained Sarah Toevs, coordinator for the Alliance and director of the Study of Aging at Boise State. “Not only are caregivers asked to provide increasingly complex care for family members with

disabilities or chronic illnesses, but the number of available caregivers is declining. Currently, there are six working adults for every person over the age of 65, but by 2020 this ratio will be three to one.”

An investment in caregiving is an investment in people, Toevs added, and also reflects Idaho values of family and independence.

“I hope policy makers support the recommendations identified in the Idaho Caregiver Action Plan,” Gee said. “We are on the verge of a caregiver crisis.”

Information about the Alliance is on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/idahocaregiveralliance/>.

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