

# Aging Caregivers: A Looming Crisis for Adults with Disabilities in Arizona

By Madison Blanton

Arizona's population boom is no secret. Over the past few years, the state has experienced a dynamic surge in residents, with growth rates still doubling the national average despite expected slowdowns. However, this growth masks a pressing and under-recognized issue: the increasing number of adults with disabilities living with aging caregivers, a trend underscored by a 2024 report from the Economic and Business Research Center at the University of Arizona.

A significant majority of adults with disabilities in Arizona reside at home with family caregivers or parents, and a staggering 25 percent of these caregivers are over the age of 60. This demographic shift presents a critical challenge that we, as a society, cannot afford to ignore.

The predicament faced by aging caregivers is alarming. As they grow older, their capacity to provide care diminishes due to their own health issues and limitations. Yet, the responsibility of caring for their adult children with disabilities remains squarely on their shoulders. At One Step Beyond, an organization dedicated to supporting adults with disabilities, we encounter these stories daily. Take Vicki Jensen, for instance, who cares for her adult daughter, Kendra, who has Down syndrome.



Vicki shares a common fear among many parents in her situation: "We have zero family here in Arizona, so if something were to happen to us, then what is her next step? To grieve losing her parents and her home?"

This fear is not unfounded. The loss of a caregiver is

the leading cause of homelessness among individuals with cognitive disabilities. This stark reality underscores the urgent need for systemic changes to support these vulnerable populations.

The implications of this issue extend beyond the well-being of individuals with disabilities and their caregivers. When families are overwhelmed and unable to access necessary support, it strains the social fabric of our communities. It stifles opportunities for inclusion, equality, and economic participation for people with disabilities.

As a state, Arizona must prioritize the development of more housing options tailored to the needs of people with disabilities. This means creating financially accessible housing with appropriate support services to foster independence and quality of life. The current housing options are often misaligned with the needs and preferences of individuals with disabilities and their families. Shouldn't they have a say in where they call home?

We stand on the brink of a housing crisis that will only intensify in the coming years. Addressing this requires innovative solutions that provide supportive and financially attainable housing options. It is not merely an act of compassion but a social responsibility to support our fellow community members who are most in need.

Investing in such solutions now will not only alleviate the immediate pressures on aging caregivers and their families but also build a more inclusive and resilient community for all

Arizonans. We must act swiftly and decisively to ensure that individuals with disabilities can live with dignity and security, regardless of the age or health of their caregivers.

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