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LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT FAMILY CAREGIVING

By Ketki Nandanwar, Lin Zheng, Liz L. Isidro Ferrer, Di Zhang

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Caregiving is a public responsibility, not just a private burden. Local governments are uniquely positioned to act:: they manage public health, aging services, long-term care infrastructure, and the civic networks that connect residents to support. By embracing this role, cities and counties can strengthen equity, economic mobility, and community resilience—making care a visible, integrated, and valued part of local life.

Lessons from small, rural communities in Kennebunk (ME), Martinsville (VA), Cheboygan (MI), and Franklin (MA) show a powerful truth: **local leadership makes caregiving visible, coordinated, and sustainable**. Cities and counties already hold the levers to transform daily life for millions of families.

LOCAL CAREGIVING CHALLENGE

Care keeps communities running. Over 63 million Americans depend on family caregivers, yet these vital workers face financial stress, emotional burnout, and disconnected services. **Local policies and systems often make caregiving even harder, limiting the ability of families to provide safe, reliable care.**

1

Housing barriers

Restrictive zoning and need for home modifications limits housing options.

2

Fragmented services

Families struggle to find and navigate supports; transportation gaps limit access to health care and respite.

3

Funding instability

Without predictable revenue, services start and stop, leaving families to fill the gaps.

4

Limited capacity

Programs rely on volunteers or short-term grants and lack staff to expand or coordinate.

WHY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS MATTER

State and federal policies set the framework; local governments make it real. Coordinating services, removing barriers, and connecting the dots, they turn scattered programs into real help families can count on, from homes to transit to health care.

Land Use & Zoning

Expand ADUs, allow flexible housing, and support multigenerational living.

Local Services & Infrastructure

Align senior centers, adult day programs, libraries, parks, public health, and transit.

Funding

Create dedicated local revenue streams to ensure stable caregiver services.

Partnerships & Coordination

Build cross-sector networks to align caregiving resources.

Local government touches every corner of the caregiving ecosystem

CASE STUDIES – BRIEF PROFILES

HOUSING & ZONING FOR CAREGIVER SUPPORT

Kennebunk – York County, Maine

- State law lets towns allow ADUs and flexible housing. Kennebunk made it work locally for multigenerational living.

- Kennebunk pairs zoning reform with tax breaks, home upgrades, and volunteer support, making multigenerational living practical and legal.

- **Kennebunk highlights how state rules and local action break restrictive zoning, creating caregiver-friendly, multigenerational housing.**

ACCESS TO SERVICES & RESPITE SUPPORT

Martinsville – Henry County, Virginia

- Layered local partnerships connect aging services, transit, housing, and workforce programs in a resource-strapped county.

- Stacking programs and strengthening home care, Martinsville turns scattered resources into a reliable, functioning caregiving system.

- **Martinsville exemplifies how layered local partnerships can transform scarce resources into a functioning, dependable caregiving system.**

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR CAREGIVING PROGRAMS

Cheboygan County, Michigan

- A locally controlled senior millage creates a stable, flexible public funding base for caregiving services.

- Millage funds act as a 'match,' unlocking federal and state aging programs and filling gaps in funding, ensuring continuous caregiving services.

- **Cheboygan shows how local taxes combined with federal funding, can turn scattered caregiving programs into a stable, reliable public infrastructure.**

CONNECTING FRAGMENTED CARE SYSTEMS

Franklin County, Massachusetts

- Regional backbone institutions link 30 small towns into a coordinated caregiving ecosystem.

- Rather than adding programs, the county creates shared governance, referral, and planning structures that integrate senior centers, volunteer drivers, and public health services.

- **Franklin demonstrates how governance innovation lets many low-capacity towns operate as a single, effective caregiving system.**

For more details on case studies: https://labs.aap.cornell.edu/node/1137

POLICIES AND STRATEGIES REPLICABLE BY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Enable Caregiver-Friendly Housing

- Support ADUs and shared housing, promote home modifications and offer targeted tax relief.

Establish Dedicated Funding Streams

- Senior millages, levies, and pooled municipal funds can help ensure local long-term care funds.

Build Cross-Sector Governance

- Create caregiver councils; integrate health systems, nonprofits, and employers.

Expand Caregiver Services Programs

- Add mobility support services, medical rides, respite care, and integrated care.

Build Closed-Loop Workforce Pipelines

- Provide fast-track training aligned with local jobs and strengthen retention and advancement.

Coordinate Systems and Data

- Create cross-sector caregiver teams and use de-identified data to track needs and gaps.