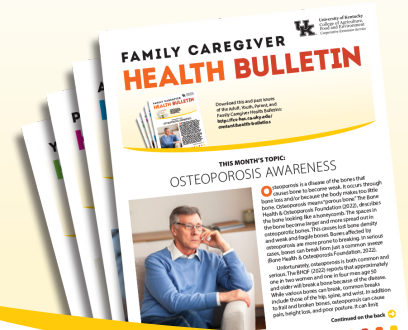


FAMILY CAREGIVER HEALTH BULLETIN

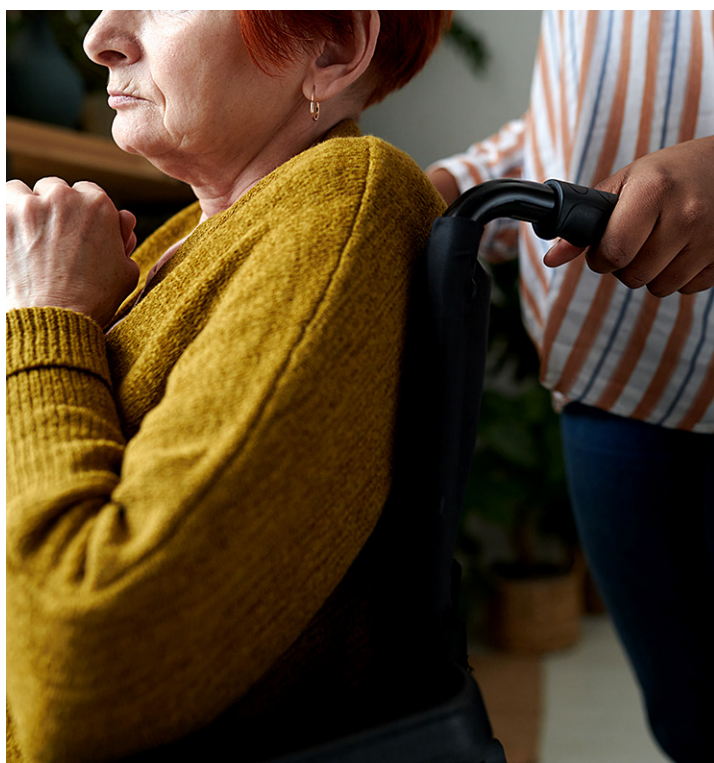


JUNE 2025

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

JUST-IN-CASE CAREGIVING PREPARATION



In the wake of actor Gene Hackman's death at age 95, caregivers can learn the value of having a backup plan to their backup plan. If you are not familiar with the actor or his death, Gene Hackman was an Academy Award-winning actor whose career spanned more than 40 years. He opted to retire from acting in 2004 because of health concerns. He lived a quiet life in New Mexico with his wife, Betsy. Betsy, 30 years younger than him, was a concert pianist. She became Hackman's primary caregiver as he developed advanced Alzheimer's disease. They led a solitary life in New Mexico. It was reported that Betsy worried what would happen to Hackman if something happened to her.

And then it did. Betsy — the only caregiver to Gene Hackman — unexpectedly died in their own home after contracting a rare rodent-borne disease. Hackman, in poor health and likely not knowing

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Disabilities
accommodated
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that his wife had passed, was left alone for more than a week until he too died. The Hackmans had financial resources to hire help and had family to call. Yet Betsy took on caregiving as a lone caregiver with no backup person or contingency plan.

As caregiving groups review this tragedy, people are sharing similar stories and fears of this occurring in their own families and networks. But there is hope that people can learn how important it is to have a plan for unexpected events and emergencies. Plans could include daily check-ins (by phone, text, email, or social media) and chosen timeframes for a welfare check if check-ins are missed.

Today, you can involve technology in your plan. Technology is transforming caregiving with 24/7 remote monitoring. This monitoring lets caregivers track vital signs, medication, and daily activities. Voice-activated emergency response systems, GPS, and other tailored smart home technology can add safety and reduce caregiver burnout.

Be sure to choose a trusted source as a backup primary caregiver. This person should have house keys, alarm codes, and proper documents about routine. Your backup needs to know about schedule, care, food preferences, health-care providers, medications, dietary needs, insurance, legal records, advanced directives, etc. They need to be fully prepared in case they have to take over as primary caregiver.

Caregivers also need support. Betsy, like so many dementia caregivers, had a huge responsibility to carry. Her husband's care demands left little time for taking care of her own health and social ties. Joseph Coughlin, a senior contributor at Forbes, talks about the need for a "longevity preparedness plan" in which you form the ground work for different types of support beyond financial security. Again, the Hackmans had financial resources. They did not have an extra support system, varied social ties, or adaptive housing or technological monitoring to support the emergency they endured. They did not choose a person beyond Betsy to check on Gene Hackman if she became unable to care for him. The more time we put into caregiver preparation, the less likely the Hackmans' scenario will play out. This is especially true when we know that older age is linked to more frailty, disease, and dependence than earlier life stages.

AARP offers the Prepare to Care Guide which serves as a tool for individuals and families to make a caregiving plan and backup plan, no matter where you are in the caregiving process. The guide highlights five steps:

1. Start the caregiving conversation
2. Form a caregiving team
3. Make a caregiving plan
4. Find caregiving support
5. Maintain self-care

For more information about AARP's Prepare to Care plan,

go to AARP for an online guide at <https://learn.aarp.org/prepare-to-care-guide>, call 1-877-333-5885, or contact your local Extension Agent.

To ask for a welfare check, dial 911 or a non-emergency police number. Give the full name of the person under concern and the reason for your worry.

Elder services in your area can refer you to resources that can help. The toll-free number to find services in your area is 1-800-677-1116.

Call the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline to talk to a dementia expert for confidential support, crisis help, local resources, and information at 1-800-272-3900. Dial 711 if you are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech impaired.

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