

# Area Agency on Aging *Connections*

## Solutions for Caregivers conference offers exactly that

By Daniel Casciato  
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According to the Allegheny County Department of Human Services Area Agency on Aging (ACAAA), more than 12,000 seniors in the county receive in-home support from working and home-based caregivers.

In a region where the majority of the seniors are active, live independently and care for themselves, help brought into the home supplements the daily loving acts of family members. ACAA believes that it is important for caregivers to be energized and equipped to provide daily help to the senior. Because of this, they sponsor Solutions for Caregivers, an annual free conference for caregivers to share information, resources and creative solutions.

"I think more people need to know about this conference and the services," said Judy Wetzel, who attended last year's conference and is caring for her ailing mother. "There are many people like me out there who are caring for a loved one and they don't even know where to begin or where services are. The conference really gives caregivers the opportunity to talk with other caregivers, share information, and to understand that someone else is going through the same thing that we are going through."

This year's conference, to be held October 10 at the downtown Omni William Penn Hotel, is a merging of two conferences that



tions for Caregivers and Spotlight on Aging. (The Spotlight on Aging conference raises awareness of aging services available in the community through informal networks like churches and food pantries.)

The conference will explore many common caregiver problems and issues, and offer practical solutions and advice for increasing communication, improving coping skills and connecting caregivers to resources. The topics to be covered include:

- Area Agency on Aging Services: What They Are and How to Access Them
- What to Expect in Aging: Natural Changes versus Troubles to Address
- Time Management: Juggling Work, Life and Caregiving
- Assistive Devices: Let Them Do the Lifting
- Legal Issues: Rights and Responsibilities of Being a Caregiver

- Navigating the Healthcare Jungle
- Feeling Stressed? Learn about Using Humor to Care for Yourself So You Can Care for Others
- Healthy Eating and a Healthy Lifestyle for Seniors
- Financial Issues That Affect Seniors
- Gentle Exercise for the Mind and Body
- A Fresh Perspective: Dealing with Guilt and Grief

About 350 people attended last year's conference, according to Lisa Paris, project specialist for ACAA. Dorcas Amaker of Pittsburgh attended that conference and highly recommends it. "It was wonderful," said Dorcas, 80. "It gives a caregiver plenty of insight of what you are going into. It was also useful to hear the advice coming from the various experts. It really opens your eyes and gives you confidence."

One addition to this year's conference is that caregivers can meet with various experts on a one-on-one basis for up to 15 minutes to talk about their individual concerns and have the expert provide some direction. These one-on-one sessions will focus on the things that are most important to caregivers, including:

- Legal issues
- Financial issues
- Health and nutrition
- Alzheimer's and mental health
- Access ACAA or medical services

"Some caregivers don't know where to begin," explained Lisa. "We wanted to provide comprehensive information, almost like a simulation of what happens when they need services. For instance, what happens after they make a call to the SeniorLine? What does an assessor do? We want them to walk through the steps of what happens when they access services, and let them know how long it takes and what can they expect."

The conference is free to caregivers and seniors, and includes a complimentary continental breakfast and lunch. In order to accommodate audience size, attendees are required to register in advance.

For more information or to obtain a brochure, call SeniorLine at (412) 350-5460. *PSN*