

**CCoA**  
California Commission on Aging

# AGEWATCH

## Alzheimer's Disease to Cost U.S. up to \$7.7 Trillion by 2030

Recent research data developed by IHS Markit and the Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease (PFCD) projects the cumulative total cost of Alzheimer's disease between 2017 and 2030 will be \$7.7 trillion - \$3.2 trillion in health care costs and \$4.5 trillion in the value of unpaid caregiving. Today, Alzheimer's disease affects more than five million Americans, and one in three seniors die with Alzheimer's or another dementia. Further, an increasing number of Americans under the age of 65 have early-onset Alzheimer's disease, another major indication that more must be done to better address and manage this debilitating chronic condition.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, 90 percent of what we know about Alzheimer's has been discovered in the last 20 years. Supporting efforts to better detect, treat and prevent the onset of this costly chronic disease is an important step towards saving lives and health care dollars, and time is of the essence for identifying areas of opportunity for change. The IHS/PFCD data asserts that within just five years of a breakthrough treatment, 2.6 million people could be spared from developing Alzheimer's disease and \$650 billion could be saved on health care costs and unpaid caregiving.

To read the PFCD press release and see state by state data on Alzheimer's costs, click [here](#).

*Excerpted from the [Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease press release](#) Alzheimer's Disease to Cost up to \$7.7 Trillion by 2030.*

## Full dental services restored to adults covered by Medi-Cal

Full dental services were officially restored for adults covered by Medi-Cal on Jan. 1, but according to local health care providers, many individuals who qualify still don't know about the recently expanded benefits.

"They're automatically covered if they have Medi-Cal," said John Luther, chief dental officer at Western Dental in Santa Maria. "So in California, this is a very significant part of the population. Some 13.5 million people are covered under these benefits." Western Dental is working to spread the word about the restoration of Medi-Cal's dental services, which were drastically cut in 2009 during the economic downturn. While partial dental benefits were returned to Medi-Cal in May 2014, Luther said benefits were only fully restored recently, after Gov. Jerry Brown approved Senate Bill 97 in July 2017.

Full funding for the adult Denti-Cal program allowed full restoration of its services, including posterior root canal therapy, full and partial denture repairs, adjustments, and relines, and white crowns for front teeth, which Luther said is an essential operation for individuals seeking work. Periodontal services, gum treatments, will also be included. Luther said the availability of this service is especially important because without healthy gums, individuals can't have healthy teeth. Health care providers, he said, are also seeing more connection between gum disease and other chronic inflammatory diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease.

*Reprinted in part from the Santa Maria Sun - Volume 18, Issue 48. Full dental services restored to adults covered by Medi-Cal by Kasey Bubnash.*

AGEWATCH is an occasional publication of the California Commission on Aging (CCoA) intended to inform, educate, and advocate. The CCoA is an independent state agency established in 1973 to serve as the principal state advocate on behalf of older Californians. The CCoA office is located at 1300 National Drive, Suite 173, Sacramento, CA 95834. (916) 419-7591

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## DO POPULAR TV SHOWS SNUB OLDER ADULTS?

Guest Contributor  
Stuart Greenbaum

Older adults are dramatically under-represented across the most popular television series – making up less than 10 percent of all speaking characters. According to a 2017 study titled “[Seniors on the Small Screen: Aging in Popular Television Content](#),” conducted by Humana and USC’s Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism [Annenberg Inclusion Initiative](#), (former Media, Diversity, & Social Change Initiative), out of 1,609 speaking characters evaluated only 151 were age 60 and above.

To assess the prevalence and portrayal of older adults in popular television programming, the study’s two samples included the top 50 TV series among viewers age 18-49 (i.e. “The Walking Dead,” “Games of Thrones” and “The Big Bang Theory”) and the top 50 series among viewers age 65 and older (i.e. “NCIS,” “Bull” and “Blue Bloods”). Of the series in the study, 28 titles were common to both samples.

The study also checked for ages behind the camera. Notably, of 121 writers just 5 percent were 60 years of age or older. Of 100 showrunners, the industry term for the influential leading executive producer, 11 percent were 60-plus.

Compare these numbers to the American population, in which individuals 60 and older represent about 20 percent.

### TV TRANSMITS SOCIAL MESSAGES

According to the study, “Nielsen estimates that in the first quarter of 2017, Americans age 65 and older spent over 50 hours per week watching TV.” Which explains why the study’s authors, led by USC associate professor [Stacy Smith](#), founder and director of the Initiative, note, “it is important to consider the messages TV transmits regarding its audience.”

Some results were positive. A healthy percentage (nearly three-quarters) of the older adults portrayed in popular series are shown to be active, engaged and working. And nearly half of the older adult characters were shown using technology.

“For younger viewers – especially those who expect to work longer before retirement – television may demonstrate the value of the senior workforce,” the study relates. “For older viewers, these portrayals may reinforce that seniors can still make important contributions to society no matter their age.”

Consistent with previous findings across cinematic storytelling, stereotypic and often ageist language permeates the small screen. One or more ageist comments appeared in 41 percent of the series analyzed, which “reflects a reliance on outdated tropes by writers and storytellers,” the study’s authors noted. More disturbing was the authors’ expressed concern that the stereotypic commentaries and misrepresentations about older adults tend to reinforce young viewers’ negative conceptions about aging.

“Seniors have a wealth of stories to share and perspectives to present,” concluded the authors, who advised, “Incorporating characters and storytellers in their later years will give viewers of all ages the opportunity to watch more vibrant, diverse and compelling stories on screens both large and small.”

*Editor’s Note: This article and research contributes to the California Commission on Aging’s initiative to encourage the authentic representation of older adults in film and TV. The Commission’s March 2018 public meeting will feature a roundtable presentation on the subject titled “Hollywood Takes: On Aging.”*



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## UCLA research finds shortfall in mental health services for older adults

California's older adult population will increase 64 percent by 2035, and with it the need for more mental health services. Yet the state's public mental health system lacks adequate services specifically tailored to older adults, according to a [study](#) and other [documents](#) released today by the [UCLA Center for Health Policy Research](#).

Notably, the state has no systematic record of which local agencies used state mental health care funds to provide services for older adults or data to measure whether treatments worked.



The UCLA study calls for standardized data reporting and geriatric training, outreach and more integrated services for the state's growing older adult population. The research is the first evaluation of mental health services for adults 60 and older in the public mental health system since the passage of the Mental Health Services Act in 2004.

Click here to read full report, [Older Californians and the Mental Health Services Act: Is an Older Adult System of Care Supported?](#)

Information from the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research Newsletter, January 25, 2018.

## Upcoming Events

Feb. 28—March 1, 2018 California Commission on Aging Meeting, L.A. Downtown Hotel, Los Angeles. [Www.ccoa.ca.gov](http://www.ccoa.ca.gov) for agenda.

March 26-29, **Aging in America**, the 2018 conference of the American Society on Aging, in San Francisco. Visit [www.asaging.org/aia](http://www.asaging.org/aia) for information and to register.

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