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## **Why Your Mom May Need a Break this Month**

By Kelly Viator, Director, Louisiana ALS

Kelly.viator@alsalams.org

This Mother's Day, you might consider that nearly every woman in Louisiana faces the fate of being a caregiver or being the one cared for at home, due to aging or special needs.

One in four Louisianans care for a child or adult with disabilities or an older adult in their home. It is estimated that 917,000 adults are caregivers in this state, providing more than 600 million hours of care each year that is valued at over \$5.7 billion!

The average caregiver in our state is a middle-aged working woman who is caring for their aging mother in the home. When you consider that 10,000 individuals turn 65 every day in the U.S., this role will only increase.

Caregiving for children with disabilities, adults with disabilities and adults who are aging in place starts out as a manageable activity, juggled with one's work and other family obligations, but within five years, the caregiver often feels overwhelmed.

According to experts at a recent summit of caregivers and patient advocates called by the Louisiana Lifespan Respite Coalition, by the time agencies which exist to help the caregiver are contacted, the caregiver is burned out, feeling panicked and overwhelmed by their responsibilities.

"Respite" is about giving that caregiver a break and some relief from the duty they assumed out of love. Caregivers often pay an emotional and physical price, as well as a financial one in juggling the demands of home, work and personal life with

the special needs of their loved one with disability. Most will never ask for help or get it.

The Louisiana Lifespan Respite Coalition wants that to change. It is important that the caregiver build in meaningful “break” time from the moment they assume their caregiving responsibilities. Respite is simply about the time to recharge their “caregiving” batteries.

Getting that message out to organizations, churches and volunteer groups which might start respite programs is just as important as convincing the caregiver that respite helps them and their loved ones.

More information about respite programs is available at [www.LouisianaAnswers.com](http://www.LouisianaAnswers.com) or by calling (225) 342-7100.

We encourage all family members to recognize and commend the vital role caregivers play in the lives of their families and thank those who make it possible for loved ones with special needs to live at home with grace, dignity, love and independence.

Often that caregiver is known simply as “Mom”.

*Kelly Viator is executive director for ALS Association (Lou Gehrig's Disease) and a member of the Louisiana Lifespan Respite Coalition.*