Eldercare Locator Launches Holiday Campaign to Encourage Families to Start Conversations About Critical End-of-Life Issues

Survey Finds a “Conversation Disconnect” as 90 percent of Americans Know They Should Have A Conversation About What They Want At The End Of Life, Yet Only 30 Percent Have Done So

Washington, DC and Cambridge, Mass. – Eldercare Locator launched its 11th Annual Home for the Holidays campaign today to encourage families to take time this holiday season to discuss critical end-of-life issues with their loved ones. A national survey by The Conversation Project this fall found that 9 in 10 Americans want to discuss their loved ones’ and their own end-of-life care, but only approximately 3 in 10 have actually had these conversations.

The campaign, which includes the release of a new guide that covers everything from how to initiate conversations to the right questions to ask about health, legal, financial and end-of-life issues, is available for download at www.n4a.org. The publication seeks to eliminate the “conversation disconnect” by providing the public with the topics, tools and information they need to discuss planning for the future and end-of-life issues during the holiday season when families spend extended time together.

“This holiday season, we encourage families to spend time asking each other some basic questions about end-of-life goals,” said Kathy Greenlee, Administrator, Administration for Community Living and Assistant Secretary for Aging. “Starting the conversation tends to be the hardest part, but once that happens, all parties involved feel relief that these important issues are being addressed.”

The new guide prepares families for the conversation, offering helpful tips and topics for consideration. Topics include all things health and legal related, such as lists of doctors, health conditions, medical records, durable power of attorney, trusts, advance directives, wills and how to research and locate important financial documents. End-of-life topics for discussion include naming one person to make final decisions, values and ideals around quality of life and care and the types of medical treatment that may be available.

“Having conversations about health, legal, financial and end-of-life issues is truly valuable for everyone involved,” said Sandy Markwood, CEO of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a). “Understanding the thoughts and wishes of your loved ones helps give those involved peace of mind when it comes time to make those important decisions.”

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The Conversation Project survey found a host of reasons why Americans haven’t had discussions about end-of-life, including that they think it’s not something they need to worry about at this point in life (29%); they aren’t sick yet (23%), the subject makes them feel uncomfortable (21%); and they don’t want to upset their loved ones (19%). One-fifth of Americans who haven’t broached the subject are waiting for their loved ones to bring the topic up first. Yet anxiety over initiating the conversation is unnecessary, as nearly half (48%) of Americans say that if a loved one asked them about their wishes for end-of-life care, they’d welcome it and be relieved to discuss it.

“These talks with loved ones need not be grim or frightening. In fact, they can be among the richest and most intimate conversations families can have. What a better time than when people are together during the holiday season?” says Ellen Goodman, Founder of The Conversation Project. “Americans now overwhelmingly agree that it's important to talk with our loved ones about how we want to live at the end of our days. Yet, we still find it hard to begin those conversations. That’s where we hope to close the gap and encourage Americans to discuss these important issues.”

To learn more about community resources that may be of assistance to older adults, caregivers and their families before or after communicating with loved ones from your local Area Agency on Aging, Title VI Native American aging program or other trusted community resource. To get connected with your local agency visit the Eldercare Locator at www.eldercare.gov or call 800.677.1116. To learn more about The Conversation Project visit theconversationproject.org.

About Eldercare Locator
The Eldercare Locator is the first step to finding resources for older adults in any U.S. community and a free national service of the U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA) that is administered by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a). Contact the Eldercare Locator at 800.677.1116 or www.eldercare.gov.

About The Conversation Project
The Conversation Project, co-founded by Pulitzer Prize-winner Ellen Goodman, launched in collaboration with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) and supported by Cambia Health Foundation, is a public engagement campaign with a goal that is both simple and transformative: to have every person’s end-of-life wishes expressed and respected. Too many people die in a manner they would not choose, so The Conversation Project offers people the tools, guidance and resources they need to begin talking with their loved ones, around the kitchen table, about their wishes and preferences. Have you had the conversation? Learn more at: theconversationproject.org.

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