

HOST LEDE:

Today, in California, a quarter of households care for an elderly family member.

That number is expected to rise.

Seniors will make up one-in-five Californians by 2030 and experts say there won't be enough caregivers to help.

As part of our series, "Graying California" CALmatters' Elizabeth Aguilera met a senior being cared for by his daughter.

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AMBI music playing

Francisco Rios holds onto the dining room table and starts to slowly move his feet.

The 91-year-old used to be a competitive ballroom dancer.

FRANCISCO: I put on music because to remember is to live. Like Glenn Miller, blues, tango and all that I used to dance to. I put it on and I'm happy, even if I'm just laying down.

Francisco has lived with his daughter Cristina Hernandez in Pomona for fifteen years.

When he first moved in, he was still fairly independent. He took care of the garden and walked his grandkids to school. He even went dancing regularly with a young neighbor who was a salsa dance instructor. She told people he was her grandfather.

Now, age and illness have caught up to him. He has diabetes, a pacemaker, high-blood pressure and glaucoma.

CHRISTINA: I became his legal guardian, I arrange the paperwork like power of attorney, the DNR, since I'm the one that takes him to the doctor and that's how it began.

Christina says caregiving is a tough, round-the-clock job.

In early winter Francisco was admitted to the hospital for a week, so Cristina slept there too.

CHRISTINA: There was a situation that I just end up in the bathroom in his room crying. I feel like ok I have to take the right decision, we have to choose the right treatments, you feel like his life depends on you.

Becoming a caretaker has impacted every part of her life.

CHRISTINA: At the beginning I was able to say, OK, you are good, I'm going to go with my girlfriends and have a coffee, and I was able to do that. Nowadays I don't have no social life.

She's cut-back her hours as a cashier at Target.

The state pays her minimum wage for about 22 hours of care a week.

The family depends on her husband's job and health insurance to get by.

Today, like every day....

AMBI stovetop sounds

She makes her dad his favorite snack, a taco.

FRANCISCO: She helps me with everything. She helps me bathe because I can't. I tell her 'Cristina, I'm an invalid,' and she says, 'No, you're not.'

When he's feeling bad Cristina reassures him that he is needed. These days his chores include watching over the guinea pigs and the dogs.

FRANCISCO: When Cristina comes I get up, I feel more secure.

Taking care of her father isn't something Hernandez ever imagined.

CHRISTINA: I didn't grow up with him. I didn't have a relationship so it was kind of like a surprise for me. It took me a little bit of time to get used to that situation having him living with me.

She calls him Paco, instead of Dad.

But over time, they've gotten to know each other.

And now neither of them would have it any other way.

CHRISTINA: I see myself taking care of him 'til I can't. I have, think about, what if he gets older, let's say hopefully, he make it to 100.

AMBI music

In Los Angeles, I'm Elizabeth Aguilera.