



Disability:

**70% Chance
of Showers**

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Disability: A 70% Chance of Showers!



With 296 days of sunshine in Phoenix (and Tucson slightly behind with 284 days)ⁱ, here in sunny Arizona we don't worry much about rainy days. However, if you read "70% chance of showers tomorrow", what would you do? Postpone your golf game? Cancel your picnic? Grab an umbrella?

While rain in Arizona can certainly upset your short-term plans, nothing spoils a long term retirement plan more than disability. Even more frightening is the forecast. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "70% of people turning age 65 can expect to use some form of long-term care"ⁱⁱ.

Wow! That's a huge number. Most people do not believe that disability can happen to them. To clear up some misconceptions, let's dive into the facts and fallacies of long-term care with this quick quiz. True or False?

1. "Most people who need long term care receive care in an institution".
2. "I don't have to worry, I'm covered by Medicare"
3. "I'm a veteran – I've heard that I can get care"
4. "Long-term care is primarily a woman's problem"

Answers:

1. "Most people who need long term care receive care in an institution". **FALSE**

Surprised? When people think of long term care, they typically think of skilled nursing or assisted living facilities. However, approximately 73% of all long term care is provided in the home – usually by unpaid caregivers. The primary caregiver for those needing in-home care is a spouse (38%), Daughter-in-Law or Daughter (33%), Son or Son-In-Law (9%) with other friends and family members making up the other 20%ⁱⁱ A colleague of mine – Elaine Beaver – was the mother of 3 boys. She used to say to me (as the mother of one boy) "Be nice to your daughter-in-laws – cause your son is probably not going to take care of you in your old age." This was her informal advice, but the statistics certainly bear this out.

2. "I don't have to worry, I'm covered by Medicare" – **FALSE** again

Many retirees assume that Medicare will take care of you when you are disabled. Unfortunately, Medicare is designed to fix you up and send you home – short of like a MASH for retirees. Medicare will pay for rehabilitative care "under certain conditions for a limited time."ⁱⁱⁱ Like the 4077 MASH, Medicare patches you up and sends you off to "Tokyo General". The problem is, that unlike the wounded soldier, the stay at "Senior Tokyo General" is not paid for after the first 100 days – and in some cases not at all! The rules are complicated, so check with your doctor or Medicare to find out if you are eligible for these limited benefits.

3. "I'm a veteran – I'm covered" – **maybe TRUE & maybe FALSE**

If you are a wounded soldier, (or the widow of a veteran), you may be eligible for what is known as "Aid and Attendance or Housebound benefits". It goes without saying there's lots of paperwork to claim this benefit, but it is available. It won't pay the full cost of skilled nursing care, but it will help. To apply, write to your local VA regional office and they will determine if you qualify. Keep in mind that you must meet financial as well as medical needs tests.

4. "Long-term care is primarily a woman's problem" **TRUE TIMES 2!**

Women often face a double burden for long-term care. Let's take the case of an "average" American married couple. Statistically, the wife will be 3 ½ years younger than her husband (in my case I'm 4.3 years younger than my husband). At age 65, according to the standard insurance mortality tables, the husband is going to live to be about 80 – the wife will make it to age 84. Sad to say, but based on these averages, a married



woman can expect to be a widow for 7 ½ years. The implications for long term care for the woman is enormous. Remember the home caregiver statistics above? 38% percent of caregivers are spouses. In this case, the loving wife takes care of her husband until he passes away – and then she desperately hopes that her daughter (or daughter in-law) – the next 33% -- will attend to her needs. However, if there's no family members who can care for her, she may well join the sea of female faces found in the cafeteria of your local assisted living or skilled nursing facility.

So after identifying the problem, what's the solution? Next month, I'll explore several options for planning for a potential disability.



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ⁱ *Current Results*. n.d. <http://www.currentresults.com/Weather/Arizona/annual-days-of-sunshine.php> (accessed 01 13, 2013).

ⁱⁱ Day, Thomas. *longermcarelink.net*. n.d. http://www.longtermcarelink.net/eldercare/long_term_care_at_home.htm (accessed 01 16, 2014).

ⁱⁱⁱ *Medicare.gov*. n.d. <http://www.medicare.gov/coverage/skilled-nursing-facility-care.html> (accessed 01 16, 2014).