

Seniors Rule

ON THE ROAD WITH RTPO

Eastern Oklahoma Development District
Area Agency on Aging
1012 N. 38th St. / P.O. Box 1367
Muskogee, OK 74402
Caring Assistance Line (800) 211-2116
https://eoddok.org

EASTERN OKLAHOMA DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

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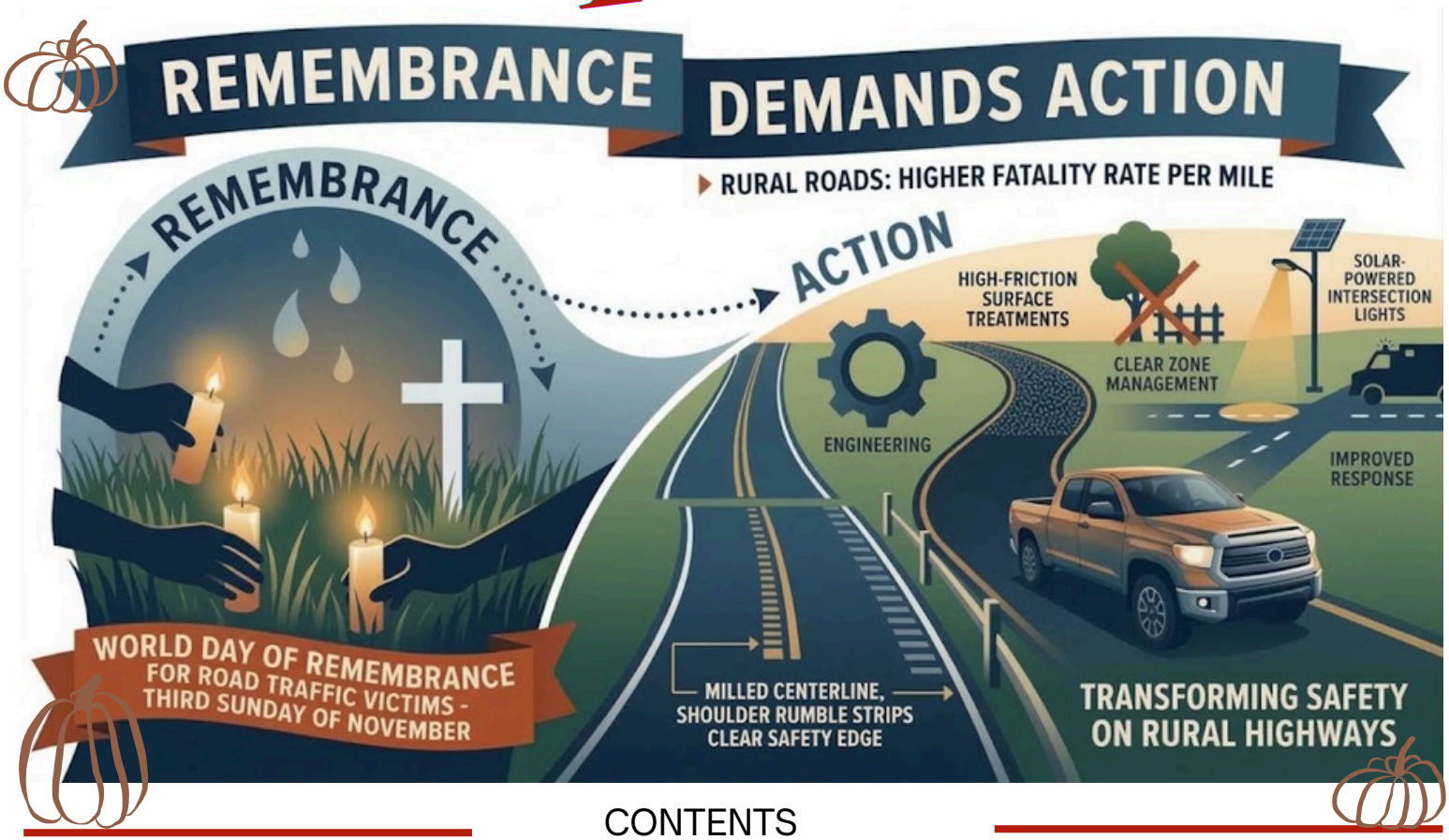

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Seniors Rule is a publication of the Eastern Oklahoma Development District Area Agency on Aging, serving Adair, Cherokee, McIntosh, Muskogee, Okmulgee, Sequoyah and Wagoner counties. Send submissions or suggestions to Janet Bowen at the EODD Area Agency on Aging office, 1012 N. 38th St. in Muskogee; by mail to EODD Area Agency on Aging, P.O. Box 1367, Muskogee, OK 74402; by phone at (918) 682-7891; or by email at info@eoddok.org. Funding for this newsletter is provided in part by state and Older Americans Act funds from EODD Area Agency on Aging and DHS Community Living, Aging and Protective Services. It is the policy of EODD Area Agency on Aging to serve all individuals who are eligible for its programs without regard to race, national origin, ancestry, color, religion, sex, age or disability.

NATIONAL FAMILY CAREGIVERS MONTH

Recognizing and Supporting Caregivers Across Our Communities — November 2026

by Tashanda Myers
Social Services Specialist

2026 National Theme: "Caring with Courage"

Each November, organizations across the nation observe **National Family Caregivers Month**, a time dedicated to acknowledging the essential contributions of family caregivers. These individuals provide critical support to loved ones managing aging-related needs, chronic illnesses, disabilities, or long-term health conditions. Their efforts form a vital component of the care continuum, ensuring safety, dignity, and quality of life for millions.

This annual observance offers an opportunity to highlight caregiver challenges, promote available resources, and reaffirm our commitment to supporting those who provide care.

"**Caring with Courage,**" underscores the strength caregivers demonstrate in both routine and complex situations. Courage is reflected in their willingness to learn new skills, advocate for loved ones, and navigate evolving care needs with resilience and compassion. This theme encourages organizations to elevate caregiver voices and expand programs that reinforce their well-being.

Caregiving Landscape in the United States

Family caregiving continues to grow in scope and impact:

- An estimated 53 million Americans serve as unpaid caregivers.
- Many devote 20 or more hours per week to caregiving responsibilities.
- Caregivers frequently balance employment, family obligations, and emotional stress.
- A significant portion provide care for older adults, though caregiving also extends to spouses, children, and individuals with disabilities or chronic conditions.

These figures highlight the importance of organizational support systems that address caregiver burnout, financial strain, and access to training.

Organizational Commitment to Caregivers

Throughout National Family Caregivers Month, organizations are encouraged to:

- **Promote awareness** of caregiver needs through internal communications, community outreach, and educational materials.
- **Offer training opportunities** such as skill-building workshops, care navigation sessions, and resource briefings.

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National Family Caregivers Month . . .

- **Expand access to support services** including respite care, counseling, and peer groups.
- **Collaborate with community partners** to strengthen networks that assist caregivers in managing long-term responsibilities.
- **Advocate for policy initiatives** that improve caregiver protections, workplace flexibility, and financial support.

By prioritizing caregiver well-being, organizations help sustain the individuals who sustain others.

Recommended Actions for November

To honor National Family Caregivers Month, organizations may consider:

- Hosting a caregiver appreciation event or recognition ceremony.
- Distributing informational toolkits on local and national caregiver resources.
- Providing professional development sessions focused on caregiving best practices.

Conclusion

National Family Caregivers Month serves as a reminder of the indispensable role caregivers play in the health and stability of families and communities. As we observe this month, we reaffirm our commitment to supporting caregivers through recognition, resources, and meaningful organizational action. Their dedication strengthens our collective capacity to provide compassionate, effective care.

Registration is officially OPEN for the 2026 Oklahoma Caregiver Conference!

Following the incredible momentum of last year—where we had over 1,800 registrations across the state—we are back and preparing for our best conference yet. Caring for a loved one is one of the most vital and selfless roles anyone can take on, and this conference is designed entirely to celebrate, support, and recharge YOU.

We are incredibly honored to feature keynote speaker Omarion Calloway, an inspiring national advocate for caregiving youth. You will not want to miss his powerful and uplifting message!

Here is what you can look forward to:

- 7 In-Person Locations & Virtual Access: Join us online or in person at one of our 7 host sites across the state! This year's locations include:
  - Muskogee-EODD conference room watch party
  - Oklahoma City
  - Tulsa
  - Ardmore
  - McAlester
  - Enid
  - Stillwater
  - Anadarko

- Completely FREE Admission: The event is 100% free for all attendees.
- Complimentary Lunch
- Exciting Door Prizes
- Vital Resources & Support: Connect directly with community resources, stress management techniques, and lifespan support options.

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National Family Caregivers Month . . .

Interested in Sponsoring or Hosting a Booth?

Sponsorships and exhibitor booths are currently available!

Put your organization directly in front of hundreds of family caregivers, community advocates, and healthcare leaders across Oklahoma. Help us empower Oklahoma caregivers while showcasing your services.

Register Today! Head over to the OK Cares website to secure your spot. Space at our in-person sites fills up quickly, so do not wait!

Link for registration: https://okcares.org/2026-caregiver-conference-registration/

WE NEED You!

PLEASE GIVE US A FEW MINUTES OF YOUR TIME TO COMPLETE THE SURVEY QR CODES BELOW.

RESOURCE DIRECTORY

RTPO ROAD SURVEY

MUST BE 18 OR OLDER TO COMPLETE SURVEYS

Donations now being accepted

Adair County PALS

(Provider Agencies Linking Services)

Regular meeting are 11AM, the first Tuesday every-other-month, listed below. Email a request to join us info@eoddok.org

February, April, June, August, October and in person in December at the Stilwell Public Library.

EASTERN OKLAHOMA DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

eoddok.org
1012 N. 38th st.
PO Box 1367
Muskogee, OK 74402
(918) 682-7891

MERRY Christmas 2026

Contact: Janet
(918) 682-7891
info@eoddok.org

Our annual Christmas Project is underway! During the holidays, many seniors can feel isolated and unseen. We want to make sure our homebound seniors in Adair County feel remembered by providing like items for 40 EODD Area Agency on Aging seniors who receive Home Delivered Meals.

We are now collecting like items to make 40 Christmas Bags full of surprises. We would like to include - no slip socks, lap blankets, word search puzzle books, small notebook, pens, personal hygiene items, Christmas kitchen towels, hot chocolate, Christmas Candy, etc.

Agency flyers are always welcome!

We will meet to put the bags together at the Annual Adair County Pals Christmas Pot Luck at the Stilwell Public Library in Stilwell at 11AM on Tuesday, December 1, 2026.

TRANSFORMING SAFETY ON RURAL HIGHWAYS

THIS NOVEMBER

by: Becki Word, RTPO Planner

Every year, on the third Sunday of November, communities around the globe pause for the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims. It is a solemn occasion designed to acknowledge a staggering reality: globally, roughly 1.19 million lives are cut short by traffic crashes each year.

Across America's heartland, however, this day carries a distinct and heavy weight. While metropolitan centers often capture national headlines regarding transit and pedestrian safety, a silent and disproportionate crisis continues to play out along America's two-lane highways, county secondary roads, and rural connectors. To honor those we have lost, we must look beyond the statistics, confront the unique vulnerabilities of rural infrastructure, and re-engineer our roadways to save human lives.

The Data: The Hidden Toll on Rural Arterials

Recent data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) reveals a persistent safety disparity between urban centers and rural communities:

- **The Population Disparity:** Rural areas account for roughly 20% of the U.S. population, yet consistently absorb over 40% of all traffic fatalities nationwide.
- **The Fatality Rate Gap:** On a per-mile-driven basis (Vehicle Miles Traveled), the fatality rate on rural roadways remains nearly 1.5 times higher than on urban streets.
- **The Roadway Departure Reality:** The vast majority of fatal rural crashes are not complex multi-vehicle intersection collisions. They are **single-vehicle roadway departures**—a driver drifting over the center line or off a narrow shoulder, striking a tree, culvert, or embankment, or experiencing a rollover.

The Emergency Care Gap: Geographic isolation means that emergency medical response and transport times in rural areas are often double those of suburban regions, turning survivable injuries into fatal outcomes due to sheer distance from trauma facilities.

Behind these technical metrics are empty chairs at family dinner tables, empty desks in rural classrooms, and tight-knit towns grieving neighbors who were simply driving home, heading to work, or hauling agricultural goods.

Moving Beyond "Accidents": The Safe System Approach

For generations, society treated traffic fatalities as inevitable "accidents"—unfortunate, unpredictable events caused entirely by driver error. **Vision Zero** and the **Safe System Approach** reject this fatalistic view.

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Transfering Safety on Rural Highways . . .

The core principle is simple: **Humans make mistakes, but those mistakes should not cost them their lives.** In rural transportation planning, adopting a Safe System approach means designing corridors that anticipate human error and accommodate human physical vulnerability. Rather than relying solely on driver behavior, regional transportation agencies are implementing systemic, low-cost engineering measures that proactively reduce severe outcomes across entire road networks:

1. **Centerline and Shoulder Rumble Strips:** Intermittent milled grooves in the asphalt provide immediate tactile and audible feedback to fatigued or distracted drivers, keeping vehicles in their designated lanes before a departure occurs.
2. **High-Friction Surface Treatments (HFST):** Applying specialized aggregate materials to critical curves drastically increases tire traction, preventing vehicles from sliding off the road during wet or icy conditions.
3. **Safety Edge & Clear Zone Management:** Eliminating steep drop-offs at the edge of the pavement allows drivers who drift off the road to safely re-enter the lane without overcorrecting. Clearing unyielding fixed hazards (like concrete headwalls and hazardous trees) creates forgiving roadsides.
4. **Rural Intersection Illumination & Sightline Clearing:** Installing solar-powered intersection lighting and clearing brush along high-speed corridors grants drivers vital extra seconds to react at remote rural junctions.
5. **Predictive Safety Analysis:** Utilizing data-driven modeling to identify high-risk corridor geometry allows planners to deploy targeted safety funding—such as federal *Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) grants—to locations with high risk factors before a fatal crash occurs. with high risk factors before a fatal crash occurs.*

Remembrance Demands Action

Remembrance without action is incomplete.

As a Regional Transportation Planning Organization, our commitment to our member counties goes beyond paving roads and monitoring bridge conditions; it is fundamentally about protecting human life. Every mile of shoulder widened, every rumble strip installed, every curve realigned, and every safety grant secured is an investment in ensuring that every family member in our region makes it home at the end of the day.

On this World Day of Remembrance, we honor the memory of those lost on our roadways by renewing our resolve: to build a transportation network where zero deaths on rural roads is not just a vision, but a realized standard.

Questions: reach out to Becki at (918) 682-7891 email rtpoplanner@eoddok.org

HomeCompanion

A Division of EODD Area Agency on Aging

Stay Connected.
Stay Independent. Stay Safe.

Supporting Older Adults Living Alone and Their Caregivers.

User-Friendly Technology Devices to Enhance Independence

1. The Need for Technology in Aging Care

Technology can advance senior independence, safety, and well-being by assisting with the challenges faced by older adults and their caregivers.

2. What HomeCompanion Offers

- *In-home smart devices designed for safety, reminders, and daily support*
- *24/7 communication tools to stay connected with family & caregivers*
- *Support for older adults living alone through simple, reliable home technology*
- *Guidance and updates for caregivers*
- *Friendly tech assistance & training included*

3. Benefits

- *Helps maintain independence at home*
- *improves well-being and daily confidence*
- *Strengthen communication between seniors and caregivers*
- *Reduce Caregiver Stress*

4. Choosing a Device

- *Call Alysa at 918-682-7891 to schedule a presentation to review the technology devices available for the HomeCompanion Program. The Presentation is a Zoom call and takes about 30-45 minutes*
- *You will need a current assessment on file*
- *We will provide assistance helping you select your device*
- *Depending on the device chosen, you may be interviewed by a representative of the technology company so that your device can be personalized*
- *It will be delivered to your doorstep, ready to use*

Expected Impact & Outcomes are to enhance quality of life for our aging adults and to be beneficial to Caregivers.

Eastern Oklahoma Development District Area Agency on Aging, 1012 N. 38th St, P. O. Box 1367, Muskogee, OK 74402 Phone: 918-682-7891, HomeCompanion Contact E-mail: akinnell@eoddok.org

DO YOU QUALIFY FOR EXTRA HELP ?
If you are 65, on Medicare, and are struggling to pay for prescription drugs, contact EODD Area Agency on Aging for information at (918) 682-7891.

MEDICARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
OKLAHOMA INSURANCE DEPARTMENT
MAP.OID.OK.GOV | 800.763.2828

SMP
Senior Medicare Patrol

EODD Area Agency on Aging

Is a partner agency with the *State Health Insurance Assistance Program* (SHIP) and *Senior Medicare Patrol* (SMP).

Report Suspected *Medicare Fraud* by calling

1 (800) 634-2273.

SHIP
State Health Insurance Assistance Program

BE SANTA for a SENIOR

AREA AGENCY ON AGING MUSKOGEE ELDER RESOURCE COUNCIL CHRISTMAS PROJECT



EASTERN OKLAHOMA DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

Who: Nursing home residents within Muskogee County.

What : You can sponsor or make a donation on behalf of a resident in need. If sponsoring, you will be assigned a resident.

When: Now through December 16, 2026.

Why: Nursing home residents can have limited income with as little as $1 a day to spend, forcing residents to make difficult choices between needed items such as clothing or hygiene essentials and unable to purchase items that could provide them comfort.

Where: Last day for drop off will be 11AM, December 16th, where we host a Christmas Pot Luck for sponsors and donors. We ask that items are in gift bags and unwrapped.

Drop off at 1012 N. 38th St., Muskogee, OK 74401

How: Contact us at **(918) 682-7891**

Navigating Medicare Can Be Hard!

Our SHIP certified counselors are ready to help you if you are Aging in to Medicare; with general Medicare Questions; during Open and General enrollment periods; understanding the Birthday Rule or the Medicare Prescription Payment Plan.

EASTERN OKLAHOMA DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

1012 N. 38th St.
Muskogee, OK 74401

MEDICARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Call (918) 682-7891 or Email info@eoddok.org

RECOGNIZING RESIDENT'S RIGHTS MONTH AND THE VITAL ROLE OF THE

OMBUDSMAN

BY SHELLI DUNHAM
OMBUDSMAN SUPERVISOR

October marks Residents' Rights Month, a significant observance. This annual event serves as a crucial reminder of the fundamental rights and protections afforded to individuals residing in long-term care facilities, such as nursing homes, assisted living communities, and board and care homes. It is a time to amplify awareness and ensure that residents are empowered, respected, and treated with dignity. Central to upholding these rights and providing a voice for residents is the independent role of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program.

The Ombudsman Program operates independently of the facilities it serves and acts as a vital advocate for residents. Ombudsmen are trained professionals and volunteers dedicated to resolving complaints and addressing concerns that residents may encounter. Their mandate is to protect the health, safety, welfare, and civil rights of residents in long-term care facilities.

The functions of an Ombudsman are multifaceted and critical to the well-being of residents. Firstly, they investigate and resolve individual complaints. This can range from issues concerning quality of care, medication management, and access to services, to concerns about resident abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation. By providing a confidential and impartial avenue for reporting, Ombudsmen empower residents and their families to seek resolution without fear of reprisal.

Secondly, Ombudsmen play a proactive role in promoting resident rights. They conduct regular visits to facilities, engaging with residents to assess their living conditions and identify any systemic issues. These visits are opportunities to educate residents about their rights, inform them about the services the Ombudsman Program offers, and foster an environment where concerns can be raised openly. This preventative approach is key to ensuring that rights are not merely theoretical but are actively lived experiences.

During October, as we collectively focus on residents' rights, it is imperative to remember the invaluable contribution of the Ombudsman Program. They are the dedicated champions who ensure that the rights and dignity of individuals in long-term care are not only acknowledged but rigorously protected. Understanding their role and knowing how to access their services is essential for residents, families, and anyone seeking to advocate for better care and respect within these settings. The Ombudsman Program stands as a cornerstone in the effort to make long-term care communities places where rights are honored, and residents are truly valued. For questions and concerns, please contact your local Ombudsmen, Shelli Dunham and Dominique Bonilla, at EODD, an Area Agency on Aging, 918.682.7891.

VOLUNTEER TODAY

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Online Support Group meets virtually at 2 p.m. every Thursday. Anyone needing support or information & assistance finding resources is welcome to attend.

McIntosh County meets the last Monday each month, 1-2PM, First United Methodist Church, 419 W. Gentry, Checotah.

Muskogee County C.A.R.E.S. (Cancer Assistance Resource Education and Support) meets the 3rd Wednesday, 2-3PM and Caregiver Support is 3-4PM, at Presbyterian Church of Muskogee, 2000 Haskell Blvd., Muskogee. Contact Alysa Kinnell at (918) 913-9560 or akinnell@eoddok.org for more information.

Visit our website at *eoddok.org*

OCTOBER

- Health Literacy Month
- Long-Term Care Residents' Rights Month
- National Breast Cancer Awareness Month
- National Dental Hygiene Month
- National Physical Therapy Month
- Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness Month

Oct. 6
- Adair County PALS (Provider Agencies Linking Services), meets virtually at noon. Call (918) 682-7891 for details.

Oct. 21
- Muskogee Elder Resource Council Meeting, 11AM, 3rd Wednesday each month, EODD AAA, 1012 N 38th St., Muskogee. Call Janet at (918) 682-7891.

NOVEMBER

- American Diabetes Month
- Bladder Health Month
- Diabetic Eye Disease Awareness Month
- Lung Cancer Awareness Month
- National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month
- National Family Caregivers Month
- National Hospice and Palliative Care Month

Nov. 18
- Muskogee Elder Resource Council (MERC), meets at noon. Call (918) 682-7891 for details.

Nov. 19
- Council on Aging, meets at 10 a.m. Call (918) 682-7891 for details.

Nov. 25-27
- Closed for Thanksgiving

DECEMBER

- National Drunk and Drugged Driving Prevention Month
- Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) Awareness Month
- National Animal Rights Month

Dec. 1
- Adair County PALS (Provider Agencies Linking Services), meets at noon. Call (918) 682-7891 for details. This will be an in-person meeting only at 11:30AM, Stilwell Library. It's pot luck finger foods! Drinks provided. After the gifts are put together, we will deliver them to the nutrition sites. From there, the gifts will be delivered with the seniors' Home Delivered Meals.

Dec. 16
- Muskogee Elder Resource Council (MERC), meets at noon in person only, at EODD. It's a pot luck finger food luncheon! Bring your favorite. Drinks provided. Afterwards we will deliver MERC Christmas gift baskets to the chosen nursing home residents. Please contact our Ombudsman, Dominique or Shelli, at (918) 682-7891 if you would like to be part of the special giving opportunity.

Dec. 24-25
Closed for Christmas

Email info@eoddok.org if you would like to submit an article for consideration.