

COMPASSION COUNTS

THE VALUE OF
SUPPORTING
EMPLOYEE
CAREGIVERS



health action council

HOW EMPLOYERS BUILD EMPLOYEE CAREGIVER CAPACITY

The number of Americans caring for aging parents, disabled spouses, and/or chronically ill children has risen to 53 million—over 1 in 5 adults.

Individuals provide important physical, emotional and financial support to friends and family, and make up roughly 15 to 20% of the American workforce¹. These caregivers are demographically diverse, a majority work at least part time, and 50% reported that they had no choice in taking on this role. In addition,

- 40% of caregivers are men
- Nearly 25% are millennials
- 10% care for a spouse

As America ages, caregiving employees will experience tension from balancing the priorities and needs of their employers with their caregiving responsibilities. Many employee caregivers feel spread thin and unable to do as good a job as they want in either setting. This dynamic can result in employees leaving their jobs to meet their caregiving responsibilities. Because of these trends, the Harvard Business Review 2019 Employer Survey reported employers are facing a caregiving crisis—one they refuse to acknowledge².

45% of employees have caregiving duties for which they miss on average 12 hours of work per month³. Aside from missing work, employee caregivers also have higher rates of physical and mental health disorders resulting in higher healthcare costs and lower productivity⁴. According to Harvard Business Review, employers need to act now to create a workplace culture that supports their employee caregivers because as caregiving demands increase employers will experience:

IMPACT ON EMPLOYERS

Increased Absenteeism: Difficulties in keeping up with the demands of attending loved one's medical appointments or hospitalizations.

Distracted Employees: Many caregiving employees suffer presenteeism as they are preoccupied with caregiving concerns while at work, making them less productive.

Lack of Data: Employees don't often admit they are caregivers for fear of being penalized. Only 25% of employees told their employers about their caregiving duties. Most were concerned supervisors wouldn't understand or be supportive. Many worried about not being given promotions or salary increases if they didn't present themselves as being 100% engaged. Nearly three-quarters of employees surveyed said they had care responsibilities but only half of employers were keeping track of which employees were taking care of family members.

We have identified seven actions employers can take to cultivate a workplace culture that supports and nurtures their caregiver employees.

1. Adapt your culture
2. Get input from caregivers
3. Implement flexible policies
4. Train middle managers to be caregiver-friendly
5. Create internal support groups
6. Measure and evaluate results
7. Offer employees the right benefits and resources



Employers can create a workplace culture that nurtures their caregiver employees overall wellbeing.

PROVIDING SUPPORT

INCREASING EMPLOYEE GRATITUDE AND LOYALTY

Employees who feel cared for and cared about by their employers feel increased gratitude and loyalty. Those who feel like their employers don't care about them regard their work as just another onerous job. Here are seven actions employers can take to improve support for employee caregivers:



1. Adapt your culture.

As the saying goes, “culture eats policy for breakfast”. The benefits in the compensation package and employee handbook matter. But what’s perceived to be in the hearts and minds of the company’s leaders matters more. Feature stories from staff members as well as quarterly profits.

Leaders should ask about and express empathy for employees who are under duress because of family caregiving. They will set a tone of warmth and support. When leaders share their own stories of caring for loved ones, or create forums for employees to share their caregiving stories with one another, then they create a culture that values those human journeys.

2. Get input from caregivers.

Conduct an internal caregiver survey. As the Harvard Business Review and other researchers have found, employee caregivers don’t often raise their hands to ask for help. Conducting a survey of all employees about their family responsibilities is a way to gather information and signal to employees that the company wants to be more aware of and supportive of their needs.

3. Implement flexible policies.

Employers should align HR policies to provide a complete continuum of support for employee caregivers. Many employers allow their caregiving employees greater freedom to set their own work hours so that they can get their work done and care for their loved ones.

4. Train middle managers to be caregiver friendly.

Managers who feel stuck between goal-driven VPs and caregiving supervisees will be caught in a dilemma. If they don't have personal or family experiences about how arduous and time-consuming family caregiving can be, then they need training and resources to help them understand what employee caregivers go through and need.

CASE STUDY⁵:

Bristol Myers Squibb gave 8 weeks of paid leave and 16 weeks of unpaid leave to employees who are new parents or caring for elders and children.



Liz tried hard to be supportive to her employees.

But this was the fourth time that Eleanor had asked for time off to take her mother to a doctor's appointment. Liz wanted to be supportive—again—but thought she also needed to be fair. How did her other employees feel about the special treatment she was giving Eleanor? What did her VP think about Eleanor's declining productivity level? For Eleanor's sake, shouldn't Liz tell her she had to make a choice—meet her job expectations or consider taking a leave? Maybe even seek another job?

From Eleanor's perspective, she was doing the best she could.

This was her mother who was suffering with worsening chronic pain. No one else in the family was available to take care of her. But Eleanor also needed her job and income to help support them. She thought Liz and the upper-level managers should understand that. She knew her fellow employees in her department did.

5. Create internal support groups.

Most family caregivers don't attend caregiver "support" groups because they don't want to be seen as needing support; for some, that would be tantamount to admitting to being weak. Instead, employers can create educational sessions or what AARP calls "affinity groups" to share information, ideas, and stories⁶. They help employee caregivers not only learn but to feel less alone with their difficult burdens.



6. Measure and evaluate results.

After employers adopt new policies and benefits to create a caregiver-friendly workplace they need to evaluate their results. Employers should ask themselves:

- Do you know how many employees are caregivers?
- Is there a stronger alliance with your caregiving employees?
- Does data show that employee caregivers are missing fewer work days or struggling less because of the supports you've put in place?
- Is there greater transparency on employee caregiver issues? Are they more apt to share information with you about their family responsibilities?

Gathering new survey information about the answers to these questions from everyone in the company will set the stage for further improvements as workers' personal and emotional needs continue to evolve.

7. Offer employees benefits and resources.

Not all traditional benefits are helpful. Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are underutilized and insufficient for meeting the emotional and informational needs of employee caregivers. Many caregiving employees feel stigmatized by the idea of seeing a counselor, so companies have been offering ancillary support and educational services, from specialized solutions like:

- **Carallel** (www.carallel.com), a Chicago-based vendor of family caregiver support services, offers employers a caregiver call center with expert caregiver advisors to help employee caregivers find the right resources. Carallel also offers a digital platform with caregiving education, support and care management.
- **Torchlight** (www.torchlight.care/about-employee-benefits-providers), a Boston-based vendor that specializes in supporting employee caregivers, offers a digital platform with relevant content and expert advising.



Nearly every community in America now has an infrastructure for supporting family caregivers, especially those caring for older adults. Employer's HR leaders need to expand their internal resources to include:

- **Eldercare Locator** (www.eldercare.gov), a federal website with links to every **Area Agency on Aging** (AAA) in the county. The AAAs have local information about available resources for older adults and those who take care of them.
- A list of local non-medical home care agencies and adult day care programs whose quality the company can confirm.
- A list of local Aging Life Care Managers (formerly known as geriatric care managers) who can provide guidance and support to employee caregivers about how to find the best services, including residential facilities, for their loved ones. The **Aging Life Care Association** (www.aginglifecare.org) has lists of Aging Life Care Managers by zip codes.

As America ages, employee caregivers face greater stress levels, rates of anxiety and depression and risk of chronic illnesses than the population at large. By investing in caregiver supports employers will see an increase in employee productivity and potentially a reduction in medical costs.

SOURCES

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Health Action Council also collaborates with key stakeholders health plans, physicians, hospitals and the pharmaceutical industry to improve the quality and efficiency of healthcare in the community.

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