



Caregiving:

Workplace Support Checklist





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The Costs to Employers

The cost of employees who have the dual responsibilities of work and caregiving is of growing concern for companies both large and small. Families represent the majority of caregiving for a family member with a chronic condition or an elderly loved one, and most of these caregivers are employed. Many of them are at the peak of their careers. These employee caregivers—now representing nearly 60 percent of all caregivers—are prone to more health problems from heart disease to depression, are less productive, and are more likely to be absent and leave their jobs.^{1,5}

The strain of caregiving and the attendant effects on the workplace costs employers an estimated \$33.6 billion a year for absenteeism, replacing employees, lost productivity and increased supervisory time, as well as another \$13 billion in increased healthcare costs.¹

These costs are likely to soar higher in the next two decades as the number of older Americans doubles. The fastest-growing age group are people over age 85—the group most likely to develop chronic conditions and to need care.²

The trend to “age in place” underscores the burden of the responsibilities, from daily care to traveling to doctor appointments, and handling post-hospitalization care.

Instituting family-friendly programs and policies that help workers better manage their caregiving and work demands makes good business sense. When workers are happier and healthier, production increases, costs fall, and recruitment and retention improve. Moreover, job applicants today rate family-friendly policies above salary in their decision-making.³

Family-friendly policies vary from organization to organization, depending on the size and type of company, and may or may not be available to all employees. The key to maximizing participation is to develop a supportive environment where all levels of the organization recognize and support caregiving responsibilities.

Take Stock of Your Needs

Provide a company-wide, confidential survey. Anonymity is essential, as many workers may not openly discuss their caregiver responsibilities for fear of consequences, such as being passed over for promotions. Keep in mind that while male workers represent about 60 percent of working caregivers, they are less likely than female caregivers to reveal caregiver responsibilities or needs.^{4,5}

Think through the survey questions. You may want to gather information that includes how many employees are caring for an elderly relative or friend, or a disabled child; their age, gender, and their employment status (full- or part-time, telecommuting, shift work, etc.). Ask specific questions about the impact of caregiving on their stress level, work, and health.

Evaluate productivity benchmarks. These include absenteeism rates, sick days taken, turnover rates and performance.

Form a caregiving task force. The team should include representatives from management, and all levels and departments of the organization.

Offer a Health Risk Assessment (HRA). This confidential online or print questionnaire can help identify risks for diseases from heart disease to diabetes—shown to be higher among caregivers—as well as contributing lifestyle factors, such as stress. Questions also relate to unhealthy coping habits, such as smoking.⁴

Learning about their risks for disease may help motivate employees to reduce their risks for health-related conditions that may be provoked or worsened because of their caregiving responsibilities. The HRA may also encourage them to enroll in wellness programs that help them adopt healthy lifestyle changes.

Consider the entire population. Singling out individuals who may have problems related to caregiving responsibilities is illegal, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).⁶

Start with Simple Strategies

The National Alliance for Caregiving offers a number of suggestions for implementing caregiving supports.²

Increase flexibility in work schedules. Among the most desired support, the range of options include: allowing employees to start or end their day earlier or later; reduced working hours; telecommuting and job-sharing.⁷

Distribute awareness communications early and often. Include information about handling caregiving conflicts, and finding community and online support. Use all communication channels, including print and electronic communication.

Train supervisors. Managerial support is crucial to the success of caregiving support programs. Supervisors need to know about the programs and how to communicate their availability, and to be sensitive in making decisions about work schedules and leave of absence. Managers should also be made aware of EEOC regulations relating to workplace discrimination. It is important that you document such training. Training can also ensure increased consistency with which policies are applied.

Extend the lunch hour. A longer lunch period can provide an opportunity for exercise, or errands that employees don't have time to do in the evening or weekends because of their caregiving responsibilities.

Offer referral services. One important resource: Eldercare Locator, a federally funded, toll-free number that connects caregivers with local resources.

Offer subsidies for services. Options can include vouchers or subsidies that reduce the costs for child care or adult daycare services, including respite and in-home care. Companies can also reserve slots at local day care or eldercare centers.



Implement Family-Friendly Benefits, Policies and Programs

These family-friendly benefits are recommended by the National Alliance for Caregiving and other leading advocates.²

Offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). EAPs, typically provided by the Human Resources department as part of the benefits package, offer employees professional help with work/caregiving issues, including bereavement, stress, locating eldercare support, crisis intervention and other issues.

Install onsite adult/child care centers. These can range from offering supervised recreational activities to providing nursing care. Companies with fewer employees in the same vicinity can partner to share the costs for onsite or near-site programs.

Offer broadened benefit plans. Some companies offer long-term care insurance that employees can purchase for their parents and allow employees to add adult relatives to their family health plan. A Dependent Care Assistance Plan is another option. This is a type of flexible spending account that allows employees to use pre-tax payroll deductions to pay for dependent care expense (including adult care).⁸ A cafeteria-style benefits plan allows employees to choose the benefits to meet their needs.

Revise “time-off” policies. A growing trend among businesses is “paid time off” (PTO) days rather than sick/vacation days. Employees can use PTO days for caregiving or any other need.

Make “phased retirement” available. Many older adults don’t want to retire completely, but find they have no other option if they are to manage their caregiving requirements. Offer part-time work or contract work for these employees, so they can continue to provide their expertise to the company while meeting their caregiving needs.

Expand wellness programs to support caregivers. A wellness coach, for example, can help employees learn strategies to successfully cope with the stress inherent in balancing work and caregiving duties.

Offer back-up child/eldercare. Contract with a local hospital to provide childcare for employees' sick children or back-up care for elderly individuals.

Consider geriatric care managers. An increasing number of companies arrange for a manager who can provide one-on-one help to assess needs and appropriate monitor care.

Invest in healthcare advocacy services. Such services offer employees personalized, telephone assistance from experts to help resolve a range of time-consuming healthcare and insurance-related issues, such as interacting with insurance companies and providers, helping to correct medical bills, and locating caregiving resources.

Implement a return-to-work program. Structuring work with less responsibility can help the transition after an extended absence to care for a loved one who has been hospitalized or requires daily care.

Periodically Evaluate the Success of Programs

Look at before-and-after benchmarks. Use company records to compare outcomes based on levels of turnover, absenteeism, tardiness, disability, productivity, and medical expenses.

Compare Health Risk Assessment results. This can help gauge the effectiveness of strategies to reduce the health-related effects of caregiving.

Maintain communications. Employees need to be made continually aware of the availability of the company's policies, programs and services to maximize participation.



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About the Publication

As the nation's leading healthcare advocacy and assistance company, Health Advocate offers this white paper as part of our ongoing webinar series that provides timely research about important health issues impacting the workplace and strategies to meet the challenges. This publication accompanies Health Advocate's webinar, "Caregiving: The Impact on the Workplace" co-sponsored by the National Women's Health Resource Center, the leading independent health information source for women. The paper provides comprehensive research about the scope, impact and costs of caregiving and its role in caregiving-related absences, turnover, replacement, lost productivity and stress-related illness. The research also reviews successful strategies demonstrated to help employees better manage the dual responsibilities of caregiving and work.

Additional Publications



Workplace Wellness

More companies recognize that having unhealthy employees has become a critical burden and that wellness programs can provide an effective solution to rising healthcare costs. Instituting wellness programs that help employees adopt healthier behaviors can be important ways to decrease illness, absenteeism, turnover, medical claims, to increase productivity and create a healthier bottom line.



Obesity in America

Obesity, an alarmingly increasing phenomenon in the U.S., is a major factor in a host of chronic—and costly—conditions from diabetes to heart disease that are correspondingly increasing. Workplace strategies that help promote weight loss can significantly lower risk factors, injuries, absenteeism and, ultimately, healthcare costs.



Stress in the Workplace

Job stress is a leading source of stress for Americans, costing businesses \$200-\$300 billion a year in terms of lost productivity, disability, absenteeism and presenteeism where employees are present but function below par. Workplace strategies that help employees develop resiliency are becoming a critical component of wellness programs to help lower costs.



Pandemic Planning

Our nation, indeed the entire world, potentially faces a pandemic of alarming proportions. As health experts and government officials monitor for early warning signs and make plans for handling the public health consequences of an avian flu or related influenza breakout, business leaders must also take steps to prepare for operating their companies under extremely challenging conditions.

About Health Advocate

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