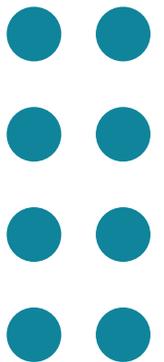


Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Working Caregivers: A Resource Guide



AMERICAN
PSYCHIATRIC
ASSOCIATION
FOUNDATION



CENTER FOR
**WORKPLACE
MENTAL HEALTH**

November 2024

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Foundation Center for Workplace Mental Health.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH

The Center for Workplace Mental Health, a program of the American Psychiatric Association Foundation (APAF), provides employers with the tools, resources and information needed to promote and support the mental health of employees and their families.

Our team works with employers, business groups on health, health-focused coalitions, and other strategic partners to solve challenges, highlight innovative approaches to improving workplace mental health, and make workplace mental health a higher organizational priority.

The Center engages employers and our other partners in eliminating stigma, reducing barriers to care, raising broader mental health awareness, improving/ implementing mental health programs, and designing benefits that improve employee mental health. This work is done through turn-key programs, toolkits, employer case studies, topical resources, publications and more.

Better workplace mental health policies and practices improve employee productivity and quality of life for all—not just those affected by mental health conditions.



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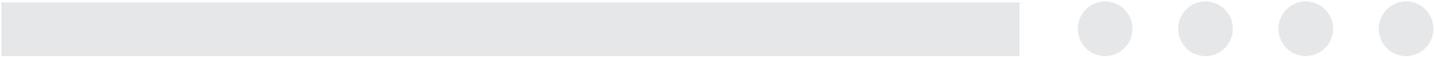


TABLE OF CONTENTS

About The Center for Workplace Mental Health 3

Introduction 6

Defining the Caregiver: Who Is the Working Caregiver? 6

A Case for Supporting Caregivers in the Workplace 7

Identifying the Caregiver: 8

Caregiver Mental Health in the Workplace 10

Caregiver Mental Health: Myths vs. Facts 12

Best Practices for Caregivers in the Workplace 14

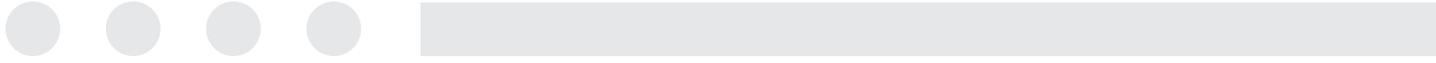
Conclusion 16

Resources 17

Appendix: Addressing the “Sandwich Generation’s” Mental Health Through Robust Caregiver
Employee Benefits 18

Citations 22

References 22



Introduction

Approximately 53 million U.S. adults serve as caregivers for family, friends, neighbors, or other loved ones with physical or emotional health needs.¹ Although many people with caregiving responsibilities value and draw a sense of purpose from being able to help their loved one, doing so can lead to significant physical, emotional, and financial strain on the caregiver. These difficulties are often amplified for the so-called “sandwich generation”—the one-quarter of U.S. adults, predominantly in their 40s, who are simultaneously caring for both children and aging parents.²

By definition, caregiving is focused on providing one’s time, support, and assistance to someone else. But caregivers themselves also need aid and comfort. Asking for help can be difficult, and it’s not always clear where to go or what resources are available. This is where employers can step in.

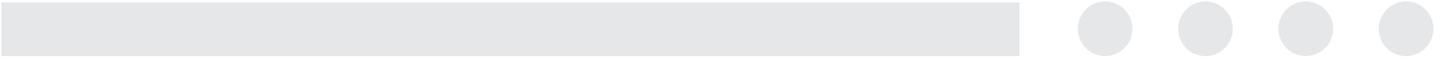
With support from Alkermes, the American Psychiatric Association Foundation’s Center for Workplace Mental Health developed this resource guide to give organizations, managers, and other business leaders a comprehensive approach to support working caregivers. Employers are an under-utilized resource that can connect working caregivers with the services, information, and validation they need. Many working caregivers do not self-identify as caregivers or realize how much help they need. Gig economy workers and hourly employees may have an even harder time accessing workplace benefits, including those designed to support caregiving. Employers can play a vital role in helping all working caregivers continue supporting their loved ones while remaining active participants in the workforce.

Defining the Caregiver: Who Is the Working Caregiver?

Caregivers are individuals who provide informal assistance for the short- or long-term physical, emotional, social, and functional needs of loved ones experiencing difficulties with everyday living and independence.^{3, 4} These difficulties are usually due to aging, illness, injury, and disability. Anyone can be a caregiver. Caregiving is not limited to people of a certain gender, age, marital status, income, or any other sociodemographic.

Some of us are caregivers without realizing it. In many cultures and families, watching over children and seniors is an expected and normal part of adult life. These individuals may not self-identify as caregivers and instead think of themselves as typical fathers, daughters, sisters, grandsons, and the like, who are simply fulfilling their obligations or just “helping out.” Although this is a noble perspective to take, it can make asking for help with caregiving even more difficult.

Most caregivers are also a part of the labor force. According to a [national survey](#) from the [Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers](#), an estimated 1 in 5 employees in the United States is a caregiver.⁵



Additional research from [the American Association for Retired Persons \(AARP\) and the National Alliance for Caregiving](#) found almost two-thirds (61%) of caregivers are employed to some degree, including 60% who work 40 or more hours per week.⁶ This translates to there being more than 26 million working caregivers in the United States.⁷

Moreover, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that by 2040, there will be over 80 million people aged 65 and older—that's more than double the number in 2000.⁸ This suggests a growing demand for caregivers as the aging population rapidly increases.

In short, if your organization does not already have caregivers on staff, it is highly likely that it will soon.

A Case for Supporting Caregivers in the Workplace

Caregiving directly impacts companies. Notably, caregiving costs employers an estimated \$34 billion each year due to productivity loss, turnover, and healthcare claims.⁹ But there are many other reasons why employers should be concerned about the well-being of the caregivers in their organization.

- **Supporting working caregivers is the right thing to do.** Caregiving affects nearly everyone. At some point in our lives, most of us will be caregivers, recipients of caregiving, or both. Further, as the life expectancy in the United States grows, the need for caregivers will increase.¹⁰ Many caregivers struggle to locate, and access needed resources to aid them in caregiving. However, employers can help change this by providing concrete information and tangible support while assisting working caregivers in staying engaged in the labor force.
- **Caregivers have unique strengths that can benefit companies while boosting their own career progression.** A survey from the Rutgers Center for Women in Business asked caregivers about skills they developed from caregiving and how those enhanced their paid work.¹¹ Participants reported that caregiving directly improved a wide range of vocational abilities, including efficiency, persistence, task prioritization, teamwork, multitasking, project management, and flexibility. Not only do these skills allow working caregivers to advance in their careers, but they also give companies a competitive advantage that can lead to better retention and innovation.¹²
- **Offering caregiver assistance is a form of preventative care.** Research shows that caregivers are vulnerable to poor physical and mental health outcomes, including an elevated risk for depression, anxiety, heart disease, cancer, gastrointestinal problems, obesity, pain, and immune system dysfunction.^{13, 14} These are all potentially chronic conditions that may require extensive healthcare resource utilization, such as multiple

prescription medications, outpatient services, and possibly hospitalization. Caregiver support could help offset some of these and other burdensome illnesses, which may result in reduced medical claims and cost containment down the road.

- **Protecting working caregivers is a smart approach to talent management.** Employed caregivers can experience significant work-related challenges, including having to leave work early, needing to miss work altogether, experiencing a reduction in their quality of work, and being unable to complete tasks or assignments on time due to caregiving.^{15, 16} The Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers found that 60% of working caregivers experience work disruptions due to caregiving, resulting in 3.2 missed days of work per month and one-third of caregivers quitting their job.¹⁷ Relatedly, data from Homethrive indicates nearly half of employees (54.5%) say they would change jobs in order to access caregiver support benefits.¹⁸ If unsupported, working caregivers could choose to leave their employer or voluntarily exit the labor market altogether, depriving companies of trained, talented employees.^{19, 20}

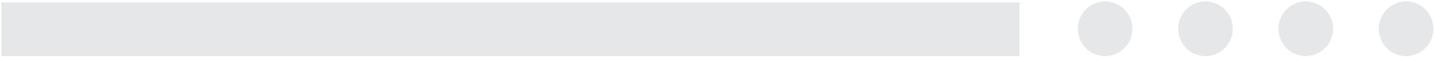
Identifying the Caregiver

Supporting working caregivers starts with understanding how many employees within the organization are impacted by caregiving. This can be accomplished by creating an assessment tool that identifies who in the company has caregiver responsibilities and what their unmet needs are.

Assessment tools are critical because working caregivers may not self-disclose their caregiving status.²¹ In the AARP survey, only about half (53%) of working caregivers said their supervisor knew they were a caregiver.²² In another survey, 22% of working caregivers reported having concerns about disclosing their caregiver role to their employer.²³ Common worries included losing their job, being discriminated against by a supervisor or colleagues, being judged as lazy or having poor job performance, being overlooked for promotions, and having their hours or wages reduced.

Rather than waiting for employees to volunteer this information, you can use a caregiver assessment tool, also sometimes called a caregiver census, to systematically gather data on everyone in the company who is a caregiver and the full range of their concerns, problems, and needs.²⁴ Caregiver assessments help reveal gaps between current benefit offerings and what working caregivers say they want and need. These instruments also serve a symbolic purpose, demonstrating organizational concern about and investment in employee mental health outside of work.





Ensure your caregiver assessment covers the following key areas:^{25, 26}

- The demographics of the caregiver
- Background information about the caregiving situation
- What supports are available to the caregiver and what supports they still need
- The type, intensity, and duration of caregiver tasks they perform
- The caregiver's perceived level of stress or burden
- Whether the caregiver is willing to provide support (versus the caregiver feeling obligated or required to do so)
- The health of the caregiver and their ability to carry out everyday tasks and functions
- The training opportunities and supports that might benefit the caregiver.

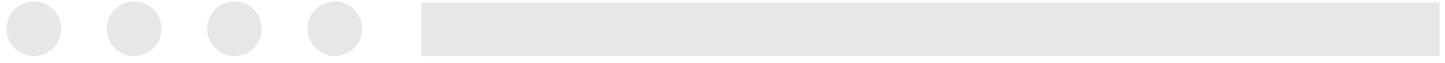
The University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension's [Employed Caregiver Survey](#) offers a good example of a tool you can use to assess the current state of caregiving in your organization. The survey is brief and takes less than 10 minutes to complete. It is largely written in checklist format but includes space for employees to provide additional information or explanations if they wish. It also includes a question for non-caregivers to gauge their interest in various resources should they be in a caregiving situation in the future.

Other examples of caregiver surveys that may be useful for organizations seeking to develop their own caregiver census include:

- The American Medical Association's [Caregiver Health Self-Assessment Questionnaire](#)
- Texas Health and Human Services' [Caregiver Assessment](#)
- The Family Caregiver Alliance's [listing of caregiver assessment tools](#) used in various state-funded caregiver support programs

Findings from caregiver assessments can also be leveraged to implement caregiver-focused employee resource groups (ERGs). ERGs are employee-led groups that come together over a shared interest, concern, or identity. ERGs are an excellent way for employees to connect with colleagues with similar lived experiences for the purposes of gathering resources, validating one another's experiences, and sharing empathy and support.²⁷ They also facilitate inclusion and help create an organizational culture that normalizes the group's shared identity or experience.²⁸

To aid employers in launching caregiver ERGs, the AARP developed a toolkit that includes detailed guidance on how a caregiver ERG can help a company meet its strategic goals, how to choose an ERG structure, and the necessary steps for launching a new ERG or expanding an existing one.²⁹ Learn more [here](#).



Caregiver Mental Health in the Workplace

Understanding the mental health of working caregivers gives organizations vital information to consider in selecting employee benefit packages. Employers need to recognize 2 aspects of caregiver mental health:

First, employers should understand what mental health problems in the workplace can look like and how to respond. Compared with non-caregivers, individuals who have caregiving responsibilities are at an increased risk of certain mental disorders and symptoms as well as negative emotional states. These include:^{30, 31, 32, 33}

- Depression
- Anxiety or constant worry
- Posttraumatic stress disorder
- Substance use disorders or problematic substance use (e.g., binge drinking)
- General distress
- Anger
- Frustration
- Guilt
- Poor self-esteem
- Emotional exhaustion
- Social isolation

The American Psychiatric Association Foundation's Center for Workplace Mental Health provides information to help employers [know the warning signs](#) of mental health issues in the workplace, including important changes in an employee's appearance, behavior, mood, and thinking.

Further, the American Psychiatric Association Foundation also offers [Notice. Talk. Act.® at Work](#)—an online training module to help managers, supervisors, and other leaders better recognize and respond to mental health concerns in their organization. It includes training materials that will teach you what clues suggest an employee may be experiencing a mental health concern, how to talk to employees about mental health, how to engage in peer-to-peer conversations about mental health struggles, and what actions to take next, including how to connect them with resources, supports, and services. In addition, NTA® at Work is available in several languages, making it more accessible to employees across the globe.

Second, employers should be aware of the unique problems and barriers faced by caregivers.

Using multiple research approaches—including focus groups, employer surveys, and discussions with key informants—the Center for Workplace Mental Health has identified several key learnings about working caregivers' needs and the challenges they face.

- 
- **Working caregivers need paid time off (PTO) programs and work schedules that are flexible.** Caregiving can be unpredictable, and caregivers worry about being perceived as lazy or unproductive for needing time off. Flexible schedules, such as rearranged hours or remote/hybrid work, allow employees to continue caregiving while also fulfilling their job responsibilities. There are numerous ways employees can be granted time off. For instance, the [University of Washington](#) offers caregivers reduced hours or schedule changes, sick leave, other PTO, shared leave, and leave without pay. Paramount offers 6 weeks of full pay that employees can use (intermittently or all at once) for the care of a person with any serious illness or related caregiving needs. Although it is not heavily used, it continues to serve as an employer selling point and is usually one of the first direct benefits employees ask about. (See the Appendix for more information about caregiver and related benefits at Paramount.)
 - **Working caregivers want support and validation from others who have walked in their shoes.** Caregivers often suffer in silence and may be hesitant to reach out for support, especially if they are supporting a loved one with a mental health condition or substance use disorder. Feeling seen and understood by others who have walked the same journey can be healing. In one of APA’s focus groups, a working caregiver with a high-demand job described feeling lonely and isolated due to caring for a family member with a substance use disorder. The one form of support he most wished for was a peer who worked at the same company and who had the same lived experience in caregiving for a family member with an addiction. This underscores the value of benefits like ERGs or peer support programs, which can help create a sense of community and belonging amongst working caregivers.
 - **Caregivers need more information about caregiving.** Caregiving is a skill that takes training, education, and practice. Unfortunately, many caregivers report not receiving enough information about how to engage in the full range of tasks they often juggle. These include balancing finances, performing certain nursing tasks (e.g., wound care, medication management), advocating for the patient, overseeing complex mental health needs, making legal decisions (e.g., power of attorney), and coordinating the patient’s care across multiple providers and settings. This lack of information can leave caregivers feeling disempowered and fearful they will hurt their loved one or fail to care for them properly.
 - **Working caregivers face discrimination, especially when providing care for someone with a mental health condition.** Despite the progress that has been made in raising public awareness about mental illness, bias around mental health conditions persists, especially for substance use disorders. That fear and misunderstanding can keep people from talking about their caregiving needs or asking for help. Working caregivers need to feel that their organization—and especially their manager or supervisor— understands their role as a caregiver and the specific challenges that may accompany caring for someone with a mental illness.



Other areas where employers or working caregivers have indicated additional help is needed include:

- Having time for self-care or respite care (i.e., “me time”)
- Understanding the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), including what it means, what benefits they are entitled to, and how to fill out FMLA forms.
- Completing other healthcare paperwork, such as insurance forms
- Knowing what home healthcare options are available.
- Navigating the healthcare system and related systems (e.g., social service system, legal system)
- Accessing legal advice or assistance (e.g., completing a mental health advanced directive, assigning power of attorney)

Caregiver Mental Health: Myths vs. Facts

There are several misperceptions about caregiving that can lead to caregivers not asking for help or to family, friends, and others in the community not offering support. Consider these common myths and facts about caregivers and caregiving:^{34, 35}

Myth 1: Caregiving for a mental health concern is the same as caregiving for a physical health condition.

Fact: Mental health conditions differ from physical ailments in several important ways that can affect the caregiver. One, mental illnesses tend to be less understood and, as a result, are often viewed more negatively than physical health conditions. Consequently, caregivers might not receive the same degree of assistance and empathy from family, friends, and the community when caring for a person with a mental health concern (especially a substance use disorder).

Second, mental illnesses can be unpredictable and hard to treat, meaning patients may experience drastic changes in their mood, thinking, behavior, and functioning. This instability adds to the burden of caregivers and can make their job more difficult.

Third, navigating the behavioral health system has unique challenges compared with the healthcare system. This includes factors like a shortage of behavioral health professionals (especially in rural areas), long wait times to see a provider or be admitted into an inpatient facility, lack of information on locating a treatment provider or facility, inadequate insurance coverage, and a lack of access to mental health specialty care (e.g., locating someone who specializes in treating a less common or especially hard-to-treat mental illness).



Myth 2: Caregivers should only focus on the person in need and not themselves.

Fact: Caregivers need self-care just as much as anyone else—perhaps at times even more so, given how stressful and intensive caregiving can be. The notion that caregivers should solely focus their efforts and energy on the person in need is wrong and contributes to the false perception that self-care is selfish. It is imperative that caregivers take the time to attend to their own physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual necessities. Failing to do so can lead to burnout, exhaustion, a wide range of emotional difficulties (e.g., resentment, anger), and possibly physical health problems (e.g., poor sleep). As the old adage says, you cannot pour from an empty cup.

Myth 3: Caregivers are primarily women who care for older adults.

Fact: There is no universal definition of what a caregiver looks like. Caregivers come in all shapes and sizes. In a survey of nearly 1,400 adult caregivers, approximately 40% were men and almost one-quarter (24%) were aged 18–34 years.³⁶ A majority of the people being cared for were older adults, but 34% were aged 64 years or younger. Although most respondents were assisting a parent or parent-in-law, a smaller but non-trivial portion was caring for a sibling, adult child, grandparent, or spouse/partner.

Dispelling the myth that only certain people are caregivers is important because not having access to help is a common source of caregiver strain. When a person does not self-identify as a caregiver, they may not ask for help or realize that available caregiving resources are there for their use.

Myth 4: Caregivers who truly know what they are doing have everything they need and don't require assistance.

Fact: This false belief often leads to caregiver guilt, but it is simply not true. No one is born knowing how to be a caregiver. Asking for help and seeking resources is not a sign that a caregiver is inadequate. Just the opposite; it is a sign of someone realizing they need assistance and reaching out so they can provide the best care possible. Caregivers should never be shamed or looked down upon for asking questions, wanting more information, or needing help. This is why normalizing help-seeking is a critical way that organizations can support working caregivers.

Myth 5: People with substance use disorders do not need a caregiver; they need “tough love.”

Fact: Some of the most damaging myths about caregiving for people with mental illness are related to substance use disorders (SUDs). People with addictions are highly discriminated against in our society, and even healthcare and behavioral healthcare providers may have false beliefs about and negative attitudes toward people with SUDs.³⁷



The truth is that individuals with SUDs are experiencing a brain-based illness that deserves the same level of respect and care as any other medical illness. Concepts like “tough love” and “codependency” are used to justify discriminating against and isolating people with addictions. They also pathologize caregiving and shame the caregiver. Showing care, concern, and support helps people with addictions adopt positive changes in their lives. The caregivers who sacrifice so much of their time and energy to help loved ones with SUDs should be praised, not scolded.

Best Practices for Caregivers in the Workplace

It is clear that employers should support working caregivers; the next step is making it possible. Implementing caregiver-friendly policies and practices is necessary to ensure that employees can access mental health care and to connect them with other resources for caregiving. Consider the following:

1. **Offer flexible work arrangements and time off options.** Flexibility is one of the most important benefits a business can offer its working caregivers. Organizations have many options; for instance, shared/donated time off, PTO rollover, a PTO company “matching” program, unlimited vacation, the option of working reduced hours, flexible schedules (e.g., alternative schedules, compressed schedules), job sharing, and remote or hybrid work. A flexible work environment not only shows employees that the organization cares about work-life balance, but it is also associated with increased engagement and productivity, better retention, higher employee satisfaction, and lower job stress.^{38, 39}
2. **Create a culture that is supportive of caregiving.** Providing caregiver-friendly benefits is a step in the right direction, but it’s not enough. The workplace needs to feel like a safe space for working caregivers to access those benefits. There are many ways to do this. For instance:
 - Conduct a caregiver assessment. This demonstrates the organization’s commitment to helping working caregivers and also can aid employees in self-identifying as a caregiver.
 - Establish a caregiver ERG or provide other forms of peer-based assistance (e.g., peer mentors, peer coaches). This gives working caregivers a much-needed connection to others with lived experience in caregiving who can assist in navigating the caregiving world, inside and outside the workplace.
 - Ensure employees learn about paid family leave and similar caregiving benefits. You can do this through activities such as new hire orientation and onboarding; holding formal information sessions, like Lunch and Learns; and leveraging written communications, such as monthly corporate newsletters, internal emails, and postings on the company’s internal website. Keep in mind that Human Resources is often the lynchpin of conversations about benefits and should be involved in efforts to educate employees about them. If employees aren’t using benefits, it might be because people don’t know they exist or how to access



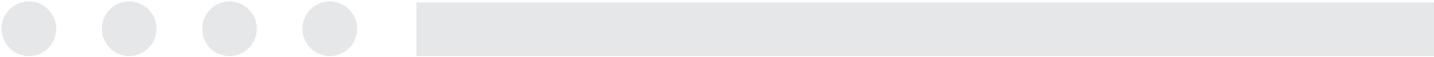
them—not that they don’t need or want them.

- **Share your story.** Employee education can be made even more effective by supervisors and others in leadership describing their own experiences of caregiving and the struggles they faced (e.g., a CEO video message that is part of onboarding). This is immensely powerful in normalizing caregiving, conveying to employees a sense of understanding about the value of caregiving, and modeling for workers the importance of asking for assistance.

3. **Take active steps to normalize and support mental health.** Employee caregivers are less likely to seek help for mental health needs exacerbated by caregiving if they feel discriminated against, ashamed, judged, or fearful. The onus is on organizations to elevate mental health awareness, normalize help-seeking, and demonstrate a commitment to employee well-being. Ways to do this include the following:

- Remind employees about confidentiality and provide reassurance about transparently sharing with supervisors their reasons for needing to take time off.
- Promote parity between physical and mental health conditions. For instance, ensure adequate insurance coverage is offered for mental health services. In written communications, use language that treats mental health with the same seriousness as physical health (e.g., make it clear that SUDs are brain-based disorders and not conditions of moral failing or weaknesses).
- Routinely provide public information about mental health benefits and how to access them.
- Shine a positive light on mental health by implementing activities such as Mental Health Mondays (weekly mental health programs as part of an overall comprehensive employee wellness initiative) and focused conversations on and presentations about mental health topics.
- Invest in a benefits package that supports mental health and includes flexible schedules and PTO, access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), free counseling or referral for community treatment, and onsite mental health programs and resources (e.g., a meditation room, yoga classes, mindfulness programs).
- For supervisors, maintain an “open door policy” to help employees feel safe to discuss their mental health concerns and ask for help.
- Provide manager training, such as Notice.Talk.Act.® at Work, so that managers feel prepared to support their employees when they seek help. Ensure that supervisors know how to refer employees to the available benefits and resources.

4. **Provide as comprehensive a range of caregiver-specific benefits, programs, and supports as you can.** Not all organizations will have the resources, finances, personnel, and infrastructure to offer the full list of benefits and programs described here, but implementing even a few of the options can lead to improved health and business outcomes. Caregiver-specific benefits and resources can include:

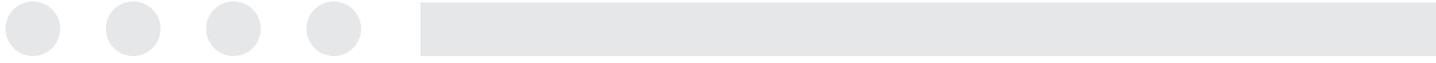
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- Guidance around FMLA, including basic education about what it is and how to complete the necessary forms.
 - Assistance with other healthcare and social service forms
 - Social Security Disability Insurance
 - Medical directives
 - Connection to a legal consultation or providing basic legal information on-site.
 - Engage in-house counsel to host a Lunch and Learn about advanced medical directives, mental health advanced care directives, or power of attorney
 - Ensure that the EAP covers legal consultations
 - Support groups for caregivers
 - Onsite
 - Virtual
 - Referrals to community-based groups
 - Miscellaneous care services through an Employee Assistance Program or similar resource. EAPs typically provide services and sessions for all members of a household, not just the employee or those on the employer insurance plan.
 - Childcare
 - Pet care
 - Senior services
 - Counseling
 - Assistance with care navigation.
 - Education about how to coordinate care
 - How to connect with a patient navigator
 - Information about how to access local chapters of national patient advocacy and family support groups related to the employee's caregiving situation.
 - [Alzheimer's Association](#)
 - [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
 - Connection to relevant online resources.
 - [American Psychiatric Association Patients and Family](#)
 - [care.com](#)
 - [Homethrive](#)
 - [Family Caregiver Alliance](#)

Conclusion

Caregivers are frequently unsung heroes who help tend to, advocate for, and emotionally support those in their family and the community. Caregiving strengthens our society, making it easier for everyone to live with dignity, compassion, and respect. Employers are critical in helping caregivers fulfill their responsibilities at and away from work. By providing a system of support and education that helps employees complete their caregiving duties while maintaining their careers, business leaders are helping to protect the longevity and well-being of society as a whole.

Resources

Resource	Description
Harvard Business School's The Caring Company	This report makes a business case for why employers should address caregiving in the workplace, including information about how caregivers affect the labor market. It also includes guidance on assisting working caregivers with job productivity and maintaining work-life balance.
Northeast Business Group on Health's Supporting Caregivers in the Workplace: A Practical Guide for Employers	This toolkit includes tear-out checklists, guidance on getting buy-in from leadership, fact sheets for employees and employers, and recommendations on establishing caregiver-friendly policies, benefits, and programs.
New York Office of the Aging's Caregivers in the Workplace: Finding Balance for Your Employees	This resource guide discusses how companies benefit from supporting working caregivers and an action plan for doing so. Although some of the information is specific to laws and resources in New York state, much of the information is applicable to organizations anywhere
Mid-America Regional Council's How to Care for Caregivers: A Toolkit for Improving Workplace Policies and Practices	This toolkit offers useful information for creating a caregiver-friendly organizational culture, a listing of internal and external supports to consider, and an example evaluation tool for companies (and their employees) to rate the degree of caregiver support currently available within the organization.
The Center for Workplace Mental Health's Supporting Caregivers in the Workplace	This brief guide explains approaches organizations can take to create a more caregiver-supportive environment, as well as policies to consider adopting to enhance working caregivers' well-being.
Rosalyn Carter Institute for Caregivers' Invisible Overtime: What Employers Need to Know About Caregivers	This white paper discusses the published research and survey data that demonstrate the challenges faced by working caregivers. It also provides information about next steps and how organizations can best respond to the outcomes depicted in current research by implementing effective policies and practices.
Homethrive's The Employer's Guide to Caregiver-Friendly Workplaces	This toolkit includes useful information to guide companies in initiating caregiver supports in the workplace, including starting steps; policies and practices; reference sheets.



Appendix: Addressing the “Sandwich Generation’s” Mental Health Through Robust Caregiver Employee Benefits

Topic: Caregiver Employee Benefits

Organization/Company: Paramount

Global Headquarters: Manhattan, New York

Number of Employees: 17,238 (Domestically) and 23,137 (Globally) per 2022 statistics

Industry: Media Entertainment

Organizational Overview

Paramount is a media and entertainment company that delivers content through studios, networks, streaming services, live events, and more¹. Paramount Global, which is the result of a merger between CBS and Viacom, now employs approximately 17,000 employees in the United States, and 23,000 globally per 2022 statistics³. In 2022, about 51% of all Paramount employees (global and US-based) were male and 49% were female³. As Paramount employs a large workforce both domestically and globally, they aim to provide robust employee benefits that cater to the diverse needs and roles of their workers, especially caregivers.

Caregiver Burnout and Healthcare Costs

Two-thirds of U.S. adults, an estimated 48 million, work full-time or part-time while balancing the responsibility of providing care and assistance for an elderly or disabled loved one according to the 2020 AARP Report on Caregiving⁴. Oftentimes, employees serving as caregivers experience additional stress and burnout, with 67% reporting difficulties with balancing both roles and 27% having reduced their work hours to accommodate their caregiving responsibilities⁵. Following these trends, employee caregivers also report higher rates of absenteeism and turnover, and increased healthcare costs –costing employers an estimated extra 13.4 billion per year⁶.

Notably, many caregivers are supporting the older generation, but children and young adults as well. The term sandwich generation characterizes adult individuals typically 40 to 60 years old that provide care and financial support for both their children and elderly family⁷. According to a 2013 survey by the Pew Research Center, 15% of middle-aged individuals provided financial support to both an aging parent and child⁷. In turn, as the number of caregivers in the workforce is expected to grow, employers must be ready to support their workforce’s diverse needs.

Creating a Culture of Wellness for Caregivers

Getting Started. Paramount aims to support the health and wellness of their employees and their families by offering comprehensive insurance options, wellness programs, and more⁸. For Paramount’s Head of Benefits, Michelle Martin, employee mental health starts with the family – more specifically, the caregiver.



Hearing about the challenges of being a caregiver directly from employees and seeing firsthand the impact of caregiver burnout on the sandwich generation, Martin along with the leadership at Paramount made it a prerogative to investigate what other organizations were doing and what would be best in class to support their caregiver employees. Aligning with Paramount's mission as a family first organization, expanding employee benefits is pivotal to support this often-overlooked employee population.

To support their workers' diverse roles and responsibilities, Paramount's current wellness initiatives focus on providing caregivers with paid time off and additional support through the Bright Horizons' backup care programs, and Cancer Navigator and Health Advocate services.

Current Caregiver Initiatives

The Paid Time Off program offers employees six weeks of paid time off (PTO) to care for a loved one with a serious illness or in need of care. To offer further flexibility, employees can use their PTO intermittently or all at once. As Martin notes, it is usually one of the first programs employees ask about and continues to serve as an employer selling point.

If the thought of taking time off to care for a loved one evokes more stress than relief, Paramount also offers backup care for adults, children aged 3 months to 13 years old, and pets through their partnership with Bright Horizons. Through this initiative, Paramount covers the cost of care for employees with a parent, in-law, or adult siblings in need of at-home care for up to 25 days per dependent per year. This initiative aims to accommodate employees living away from loved ones or to support changes in health needs, by alleviating employee stress around meal preparation, at-home care, and more. Aside from adult care, Bright Horizon's backup services also cover ten days of care for employees' pets.

Caregivers must balance at-home care and often manage loved one's medical appointments and insurance coverage. To further support the diverse responsibilities of caregivers, Paramount offers the Cancer Navigator and Health Advocate programs to help employees, and their families traverse the complex healthcare system. The Health Advocate Program assists employees and/or parents with Medicare claims, locating doctors, and additional social services. Employees or their parents can call directly to access these services. As Martin notes, this flexibility allots employees the option to not have to coordinate the services themselves.

The Cancer Navigator Program, which is available to employees' parents and in-laws, supports employees' loved ones by coordinating treatment, scheduling appointments, and accessing medical records. As Martin mentions, "it may not sound like it's directly related to mental health, but it's great to have a resource to have someone take on the coordination role" and provide that extra support while your parent is facing an illness.



Communicating their wellness initiative organization wide

Furthering their dedication to employee mental health and well-being, on-site counselors are also available weekly at five locations, although service hours vary. These sessions are free, confidential, and scheduled online. If employees need additional mental health and therapy services, the Paramount Employee Assistance Program (EAP) connects employees to services while offering eight free counseling sessions for employees and their family members.

At Paramount, ensuring that employees are aware of these services is crucial to promote a culture for workplace wellbeing. Currently, Paramount uses a variety of outreach strategies such as direct mail, emails, Slack messaging, and on-the-ground tabling to connect with employees about their benefits. For example, Paramount sends employees and their families one home mailer and a gift each year. This year, they sent a postcard with scratch off labels about their benefits, along with directions to the Paramount employee benefits website and a Paramount branded luggage tag. Also, updates and information are available through the communication channel Slack and the employee benefits portal. Lastly, the Benefits team hosts monthly webinars about employee benefits and resources, in addition to in-person tabling events.

Making a Lasting Impact

Paramount's paid time off, backup care, navigator and advocate programs, and on-site counseling demonstrate an organizational effort to cultivate a family-centered, mental health forward, and caregiver-first workplace. Leadership at Paramount recognizes the impact of these initiatives, and notes that the high utilization rates for the Bright Horizon's adult, children, and pet programs pay testament to the immense success of Paramount's current initiatives.

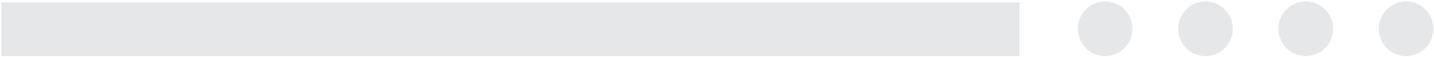
Moreover, despite the lower utilization rates of the caregiver paid time off program and on-site counseling services, the sustaining need for said services reaffirms Paramount's dedication to their employees' well-being and mental health.

Recognized for their dedication, Paramount has been featured on numerous best employer lists including Best Places to Work in Los Angeles in 2023⁹. As Martin notes, Paramount's recognition is attributed to their robust programming benefits.

Lessons Learned, Challenges and Recommendations

Paramount's success is not without its challenges, as they faced barriers to implementing the paid time off program and other caregiver support services including the following:

- Low utilization of on-site counseling services, but there is enough of a need to maintain these services.
- Lower than expected utilization rates for the PTO caregiver program. Oftentimes, individuals do not typically use the entire 6 weeks.

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- Family and Medical Leave Absences (FMLA) requires provider proof. However, for Paramount’s caregiver leave, employees do not have to provide additional proof, further dismantling barriers to caregiver leave.

Despite these challenges, Paramount is grateful for its impact on the mental health and wellbeing of their employees. Moreover, the company hopes to expand services to further support the broad range of needs and roles that their employees fulfil, whether that be at home or at work.

In the future, Martin aims to extend legal support services to caregivers such as support in filling out FMLA forms, understanding what “power of attorney” means for caregivers and loved ones, and additional legal services.

When asked about their organizational recommendations for implementing policies focused on caregiver mental health and wellbeing, Martin recommended “not focusing on where abuse could happen.” She noted that “these [PTO] programs are rarely abused. When I speak with other employers, they are worried that six weeks of caregiving leave is too much and everyone will use it, but really, they use it as intended –when it is truly needed.”



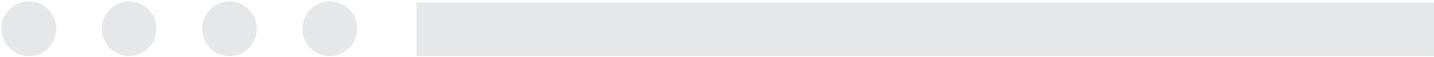
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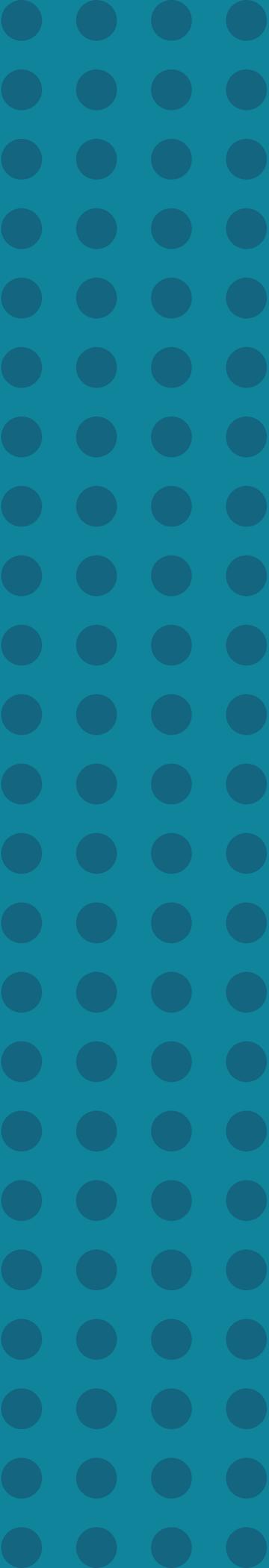
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