

Supporting Caregivers in the Workplace



The
John A. Hartford
Foundation

Addressing caregiving responsibilities while in the workplace will likely affect most — if not all — workers at some point. It is estimated there are [53 million people](#) providing informal, often unpaid care to loved ones in the United States. Without proper support, these workers must juggle significant familial and professional responsibilities that can either hinder their ability to work or completely remove them from the workforce. The loss of income connected to family caregiving amounts to an estimated [\\$522 billion each year](#).

Employers that wish to help their workers with caregiving responsibilities may not know where to begin. The [National Strategy to Support Family Caregivers](#) — developed jointly by two U.S. advisory councils, with extensive input from the public — includes nearly 500 actions that can be adopted at every level of government and across the public and private sectors. As HR professionals, [SHRM](#) members drive positive workplace policies that create better workplaces and better worlds. Organizations need to assess their ability and capacity to offer support for their workers.

As a starting point, SHRM recommends HR practitioners take the following three steps:

1. Design benefits that reflect the needs of your workers with caregiving responsibilities.

While every employer is not able to offer the same benefits, offering benefits that would appeal to workers with caregiving responsibilities is a way to attract and retain top talent while enabling the worker to remain in the workplace. Shaping benefits to accommodate these workers will signal the organization's support of caregivers. While differences in organizational size, industry and profit-level will affect the level of benefits, below are some suggestions to consider:

- a. **Flexible work arrangements** such as allowing family caregivers to use flexible work hours, compressed work weeks, paid leave programs that allow for “life events,” telework or structuring job descriptions around tasks that can be completed remotely at flexible times of day.
- b. **Financial wellness benefits** — including access to emergency funds, financial planning, and tuition and student loan assistance — offer

an important promise of financial health and security. They can also be welcome incentives when choosing a new workplace, as caregivers often face financial costs associated with the direct cost of care, loss of income due to missed work and diminished earning capacity due to prolonged absences from the workforce.

Financial wellness programs typically seek to improve employees' “financial literacy” by addressing challenges and include programs like webinars, online articles, interactive tutorials, in-person meetings and/or virtual “lunch ‘n learn” sessions.

- c. **Additional benefits** such as dependent care flexible spending accounts; health care offerings that allow for telemedicine; subsidized or unsubsidized childcare centers or programs; eldercare centers or programs; employee assistance programs (EAPs) and other referral services; and emergency child/eldercare benefits.

One in six employees in the United States provides care to a relative or friend, and the number of caregivers is expected to grow exponentially over the coming decade. SHRM would like to acknowledge the tireless efforts of the [National Academy for State Health Policy \(NASHP\)](#) and [The John A. Hartford Foundation](#) in collaboration with the [U.S. Administration for Community Living](#) to curb the caregiving crisis.

2. Create a culture of inclusivity that seeks to support workers and destigmatize caregiving.

Fostering a positive [workplace culture](#) is a powerful tool to retain and empower workers. It is imperative that organizations remain vigilant and prioritize culture. Workers who are in environments that make it harder to balance professional and personal obligations have higher levels of stress and irritability and lower levels of energy.

Organizations that invest the time and energy to establish positive work cultures create workplaces that are less susceptible to burnout, loss of productivity and increased absenteeism. Additionally, workers who rate their employer's culture as positive have higher levels of job satisfaction and are less likely to leave. Actionable steps HR professionals can take to improve workplace culture include:

- a. **Verbalizing the importance and value of family caregiving.** It is important for HR professionals or people managers to validate the worker's caregiving challenges and provide a listening ear.
- b. **Forming one or more support groups,** depending on the size of the organization and needs of the workers, to connect with other colleagues who have caregiving responsibilities. A support group can provide a safe environment for workers to share their challenges of balancing work and caregiving.
- c. **Adopting other caregiver-friendly workplace programs** such as joining an employer certification program for identifying and credentialing caregiver-friendly workplaces and/or hosting family caregiver events.

3. **Train HR professionals, supervisors and people managers on the needs of family caregivers in the workplace.** Start off small — there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Training should encompass the full range of family caregivers in the workplace, from workers balancing school and caregiving responsibilities with part-time jobs to full-time professionals juggling career and caregiving. These are important steps to ensuring that caregivers are not needlessly — [and perhaps illegally](#) — pushed out of the workforce. It is okay for an employer not to have all the answers, but here are some first steps:

- a. **Available resources.** HR professionals should rely on existing resources and toolkits when formulating internal processes. Organizations like [SHRM](#), the [National Academy for State Health Policy \(NASHP\)](#) and the [Administration for Community Living \(ACL\)](#) can provide HR professionals with toolkits and resources to serve as a jumping off point.
- b. **Local support services.** HR professionals should research and share lists of free local and national community caregiving resources to ensure that workers have current information on local support services and community- and faith-based organizations, among others. Information about these programs is typically available at employee benefits fairs and local county offices that may have referral resources.
- c. **Communications and oversight.** HR professionals must ensure that supervisors and people managers are communicating the potential benefits and services afforded to workers with caregiving responsibilities and ensure they are administered correctly and fairly.

In 2022, SHRM established [Generation Cares](#), a coalition of organizations with diverse missions working to find solutions that improve the quality and quantity of care for children, people with disabilities and older adults. If your organization is interested in learning more about advocacy opportunities to support the caregiving needs of working families, email generationcares@shrm.org.