



News Notes

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Care for Your Organization's Caregivers

No longer in the shadows, COVID-19 has put caregivers in the spotlight. Much has been written about doctors and nurses who have selflessly served on the front-lines of this pandemic. But there is a legion of less visible family caregivers who generously give essential support to family, friends and neighbors who are ill, disabled, elderly or special-needs children.

Before the pandemic, there were 53 million family caregivers in the US. With the advent of COVID-19, 1 in 3 Americans unexpectedly assumed caregiving responsibilities, and are impacted like never before. Because of day-care and school closures, working parents struggle with the impossible task of juggling their roles as parents, "substitute teachers" and employees.

Sons and daughters face distressing options as in-home and day programs for seniors are interrupted; and senior living facilities restrict visitation. Due to social distancing, untrained spouses or parents providing complex in-home care with little or no help have become isolated, frustrated, and exhausted.

COVID-19 has amplified caregiving challenges. Providing care is more emotionally, physically and financially difficult. Since the start of the pandemic, 83% report increased stress. Many (57%) report clinically significant levels of stress, anxiety and depression. By managing stress with food (50%), medications (18%), or alcohol (14%), caregivers don't always make healthy self-care choices. Those at greatest risk are: female, young millennials, and minorities; those with lower income or education, living with their care receiver or providing mental health care.

Whether your valued associates are "employees," "associates," "members," "retirees" or "policy holders," these caregivers need your support. Here are two ways you can help.

Cultivate a "Caregiver-Friendly" Culture

Caregivers need an environment in which they feel comfortable to let others know about their caregiving. It's an often-hidden fact; caregivers worry that they'll be seen as less committed to work. Leaders must make it OK to be a caregiver and to access available benefits.

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Managers and supervisors should openly discuss caregiving. Be aware that words and tone can either stifle sharing OR encourage openness and support. To learn how other employers view caregivers and caregiving, read this NEBGH report: 2019/2020 Caregiving and the Workplace: Employer Benchmarking Survey: <https://fluxconsole.com/files/item/574/75979/CaregivingWorkplace-EmployerBenchmarking.pdf>

Given how COVID has intensified caregiver stress, and for caregivers' well-being, acknowledge the challenges of providing childcare, eldercare and everything in between. For the why, what and how of creating a caring culture, check out Harvard Business School's study, The Caring Company: https://www.hbs.edu/managing-the-future-of-work/Documents/The_Caring_Company.pdf

Finally, learn about caregiving in your organization. Add caregiver-related questions to employee surveys. Use this information to develop a plan for creating a caregiver-friendly culture. There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to caregiver support. When designing your organization's approach, focus on caregivers across the life-span; not just on childcare or eldercare. For "promising practices" that other employers recommend, download this report: Supporting Working Caregivers: <https://respectcaregivers.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/AARP-ReAct-MASTER-web.pdf>

Provide Helpful Resources

There is a growing number of reputable organizations providing evidence-based solutions to caregivers' problems. Accessing safe and reliable help during the pandemic can be challenging, but it's of vital importance to the health of caregivers. Below is a curated sampling of online information and community agencies. Be sure to examine your organization's existing resources; many could be "re-branded" as caregiver support.

- Caregiver Action Network: <https://caregiveraction.org> Toll-free helpline 8am-7pm ET: 855-227-3640
- Family Caregiver Alliance: <https://www.caregiver.org>
- Veterans Administration: <https://www.caregiver.va.gov>
- AARP: <https://www.aarp.org/caregiving>
- National Alliance for Caregiving: <https://www.caregiving.org/resources/general-caregiving>
- Easter Seals: <http://www.easterseals.com/explore-resources/for-caregivers>
- Condition or disease-specific non-profits: Search online for reputable non-profits; many have specific resources for those caring for loved ones with this condition or disease.

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- Digital Tools and Solutions for Caregivers: An Employer's Guide. Northeast Business Group on Health: https://nebgh.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Digital-CG_121218.pdf
- Community Agencies
- During the pandemic, local organizations are on the front lines, continuing to support those in most need. Refer caregiving employees to reputable local providers for information, advice and services.
- Meals on Wheels: <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org> (Food)
- Local Area Agency on Aging: <https://www.n4a.org> (Senior Services)
- Home Care Nurses: Local visiting nurse agencies and hospital home care providers (Medical Home Care)
- In-home companions and home care assistants: (Non-Medical Home Care)
- Easter Seals: <https://www.easterseals.com> (Disability Support)

Organization-Based Resources

Existing programs and benefits offered by your organization's Human Resources Department can be promoted as important benefits for caregivers. These include your:

- Employee Assistance Program
- Wellness programs
- Policies on taking leave, personal time and vacation

Your organization can establish a virtual caregiver affinity group. Additionally, recognize and honor caregiving employees during November, National Family Caregivers Month:

<https://caregiveraction.org/national-family-caregivers-month>

Care for your organization's caregivers. Whatever you do will be good for one and all!



About Jane Hamilton, MSN, RN

Jane has been a registered nurse and family caregiver for decades; her professional calling is to help caregivers preserve their health, well-being and capacity to care. For more information about the online Help4Caregivers Program, or her book, *The Caregiver's Guide to Self-Care*, contact: jane@PartnersonthePath.com

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