

## 3 Ways to Support Employees Who Are Caregivers

Meaningful things you can  
do to help



**As the U.S. population ages, more and more members of the workforce find themselves responsible for helping a parent or other loved one with medical or day-to-day needs.**

Others may care for a child with special needs or a spouse with a serious health condition. Then, of course, there are the many parents with young children at home—a responsibility that has taken on new meaning in the age of remote schooling due to COVID-19.

All told, 73% of U.S. employees are caring for a child, parent or friend, according to a Harvard Business School study.<sup>1</sup> And the logistical, financial and emotional pressures of being a caregiver can take a major toll. In fact, 80% of those surveyed in the Harvard study said that caregiving had an effect on their productivity at work and interfered with their ability to do their best work.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> [The Caring Company](#), Harvard Business School



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The stress of being a caregiver frequently affects employees' physical and mental health as well, with between 40 and 70% of caregivers showing clinically significant symptoms of depression.<sup>3</sup>

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It can be hard to know how, as an employer, you can help ease the burden for your caregiving employees. Fortunately, there are a few meaningful things you can do—which may, in turn, help improve employee wellness, productivity and morale.

## **1 Create a culture of awareness and empathy**

It may sound simple, but it's critical for your employees who are caregivers to know that you understand and empathize with the pressures they face. You can start by openly acknowledging the fact that many employees are in caregiving

<sup>3</sup> [Caregiver Health](#), Family Caregiver Alliance®

roles and making it clear that your organization values the role those caregivers play. This will help foster an environment where employees feel they can speak up and seek out the help they need to successfully balance their work and caregiving responsibilities rather than suffer in silence.



## **2 Consider new strategies for time off**

Traditionally, organizations separate paid time off into vacation, personal and sick days. In this scenario, caregivers are forced to choose which days to “spend” on their caregiving responsibilities, and then lose the option to use them for their intended purposes. An alternative approach is to simply allow a certain number of paid days off, which employees can take as needed for whatever purpose, no questions asked. This makes it easier for employees to plan and also demonstrates respect for each employee’s honesty and judgment.

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Some organizations, including Tufts Health Plan, even allow for employees to “gift” their time off to their colleagues. If an employee has unused vacation time that they don’t plan to use in a given year, they could donate it to a colleague who needs time to take their elderly parent to dialysis or their child to chemotherapy appointments, for example.

### **3 Make sure caregivers are fully aware of their benefits**

Make sure your employees know about benefits that may help them with their caregiving responsibilities and make their lives easier. This might include:

#### **Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**

Many EAP programs offer assistance for caregivers, including information about respite care, local eldercare resources (homemaker and home health aides, transportation services, home-delivered meals, legal assistance, etc.) and help with navigating Medicare/Medicaid and assisted living options. Some programs also offer one on one counseling and support for managing caregiver stress.

#### **Behavioral health support from your health plan**

Many health plans, including Tufts Health Plan, offer behavioral health support for Caregiver Stress Syndrome to eligible members. Characterized by physical, mental and emotional exhaustion, caregiver stress typically occurs when a member neglects their own physical and emotional health because they are focused on caring for an ill, injured or disabled loved one. At Tufts Health Plan, our behavioral health care management team can help eligible caregiver members locate support groups, connect with professionals and create a personalized self-care plan.



## Family Medical Leave Act Time (FMLA)

Your employees who are caregivers may be eligible under The Family Medical Leave Act for up to 12 work weeks off in a 12-month period to care for immediate family members with a serious health condition, without losing their job or benefits. This would be either paid or unpaid time off, depending on your company's specific benefits (starting in 2021, paid family and medical leave will be available to all eligible employees in Massachusetts).

Whether paid or unpaid, leave can be taken all at once, in multiple, distinct blocks of time, or through a reduced work schedule. For caregivers who need to temporarily be more available to their loved ones, it can be an extremely useful tool.



It's not easy to juggle the demands of work and caregiving. By showing your employees that you understand what they're facing and offering them solutions, you can help them stay balanced, productive and healthy.

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