

HELPING EMPLOYEES BALANCE WORK AND CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS



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Tips for Employers

Introduction

As the population grows older, more and more people are assisting in caring for a family member or friend, and that includes your employees. Did you know that there are more than 6.1 million employed Canadians, or 35 percent of our national workforce, providing care to a family member or friend? Helping with medical appointments, meal preparation, medication management, shopping, dressing, and bathing are just some examples of caregiving.

Employees of all ages are caring for, or may one day care for, a family member or friend with a short or long-term health condition, disability, or aging-related need. Canada's economy¹, employers, and families all benefit greatly from this unpaid caregiving.

Most employees successfully manage their caregiving responsibilities with help from their family and friends, as well as community supports and services. Some employees, however, face some barriers when it comes to finding balance between work and caregiving responsibilities. This can result in challenges for these employees and their employers.

¹ The economic value of the contribution of Canada's informal caregivers is reported between \$24 and \$31 billion in 2007. [Hollander, Liu, and Chappell (2009)].

For example, an employee with caregiving responsibilities may need to be absent from work more often, may request flexible work arrangements, may be more distracted at work, or may feel pressured to leave the workforce due to competing demands on their time. As a result, employers may face pressures associated with a loss of productivity, the loss of talented workers, increased hiring and retention costs, and greater employee stress. Therefore, opportunities exist to adapt to the realities of caregiving, and develop appropriate policies.

Solutions to these situations reside in building an inclusive and flexible workplace to help employees meet their work and caregiving responsibilities. Developing proactive strategies to support employees with caregiving responsibilities creates a win-win situation for both employees and employers.

How can employers benefit from supporting employees with caregiving responsibilities?

- ❖ Increased employee commitment and loyalty.
- ❖ Improved staff morale and relationships.
- ❖ Decline in staff turnover and reduced cost of replacing employees.
- ❖ Reduced employee stress.
- ❖ Fewer unplanned employee absences from work.

What do employees with caregiving responsibilities need from their employers?

- ❖ Flexibility with regard to how, when and where work is completed.
- ❖ Clear information on available workplace, community, and government supports.
- ❖ Sensitivity and timely responses when they ask for help.
- ❖ Assurance that time taken off work for caregiving does not put their job at risk.
- ❖ Understanding that workplace accommodations may need to change over time, if the caregiving needs change.



How can employers support employees with caregiving responsibilities?

Supporting employees with caregiving responsibilities need not be burdensome or costly. Often, minor changes can make a big difference.

- ❖ Learn about community programs and services for caregivers.
- ❖ Consult with other companies and organizations to share and explore promising practices and consider innovative solutions and measures.
- ❖ Review and build on existing workplace policies and supports to be sure they take account of and meet the needs of employees with caregiving responsibilities, such as:
 - diversity and wellness strategies; and
 - employee assistance programs².

² A program to identify, and provide, short-term counselling and referral services to employees with personal or work-related problems to resources within the work place or the community, when appropriate, and provide follow-up.

- ❖ Create a caregiver-friendly environment. Develop supportive policies and practices that encourage employees to share their caregiving situations. For example:
 - provide clear communication from senior leadership that recognizes work-life balance;
 - consider expanding the definition of “family” in workplace leave and insurance policies. Consider including family members who do not live in the same household and relationships not defined by blood or legal bonds;
 - offer training and tips for managers and supervisors on how to respond to the workplace needs of employees with caregiving responsibilities;
 - raise awareness and provide information sessions for all staff on this issue; and
 - encourage staff to share ideas on how to find balance between work and caregiving responsibilities.

- ❖ Offer options to increase flexibility in the workplace, such as:
 - flexible work hours;
 - telework (performing work at an approved alternate work site);
 - compressed work week (longer working hours in exchange for fewer workdays or days off in the future);
 - possibility of making up time at a later date;

- job sharing (typically two or more employees working part-time to perform a job normally done by one person working full-time);
 - part-time work;
 - unpaid/paid leave of absence; and
 - personal days off.
- ❖ Share information about available workplace and community resources that support employees with caregiving responsibilities and the people they are caring for.

For example:

- display caregiver-related information in high-traffic areas, such as the lunchroom;
- organize lunch time learning opportunities on important caregiving topics;
- encourage employees to attend and share strategies; and
- provide in-house resources to promote employee wellness, such as lunch time walks, yoga or relaxation and meditation classes.



- ❖ Consider policies such as a compassionate care benefits top-up, funeral or bereavement leave, and a gradual return-to-work program.
- ❖ Recognize that protection from discrimination on the grounds of family status includes caregiving in most human rights codes. To prevent discrimination on this basis, consult human rights laws and employment legislation in your jurisdiction, and develop policies to ensure your workplace accommodates employees with caregiving responsibilities.

For more information on this topic, you can read and distribute a Guide to Balancing Work and Caregiving Obligations published by the Canadian Human Rights Commission, available at www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/eng/content/guide-balancing-work-and-caregiving-obligations.

- ❖ Inform employees about government resources that may be available to them.
 - Information on federal, provincial and territorial government resources for caregivers is available at Canada.ca/Caregivers, by calling **1 800 O-Canada** or **TTY 1-800-926-9105**, or contact your provincial or territorial government.

Québec contributes to the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Seniors Forum by sharing expertise, information and best practices. However, it does not subscribe to, or take part in, integrated federal, provincial, and territorial approaches to seniors. The Government of Québec intends to fully assume its responsibilities for seniors in Québec.

In Alberta, to access an electronic version of this document or to order print copies please visit the *Caring for caregivers* page at www.seniors-housing.alberta.ca.

Other information about supports and services for seniors in Alberta is also available on the site.

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