**Employers Benefit by Providing Elder Care Support**

Caring for aging parents is taking a toll on employees' productivity and well-being

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/employers-benefit-by-providing-elder-care-support.aspx>

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|  | By [Stephen Miller, CEBS](https://www.shrm.org/authors/Pages/Steve-Miller.aspx)September 10, 2021 |

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LAS VEGAS — One in six employees in the U.S. provide care to a relative or friend. The number of caregivers is expected to grow exponentially over the coming decade as people live longer, often with complex care needs, and family members step in to fill caregiving gaps, explained Lisa I. Perez, SHRM-SCP, founder and president of HR consulting company HBL Resources Inc. in Miramar, Fla.

During a concurrent session at the SHRM Annual Conference & Expo 2021, "Support Your Employees in Their Caregiving Roles," Perez shared her own story of caring for ailing parents—particularly her father, who needed to be transported by van from New York City to south Florida while receiving oxygen.

Her father's final care required Perez to create a first-floor room off her kitchen and arrange round-the-clock help, taking a daily shift of several hours herself while working as an HR leader.

Although challenges with child caregiving are more public and more often acknowledged, "your workforce has 'unseen' caregivers taking care of elderly parents," Perez said, and studies show those caregivers are doing so, on average, 20 hours per week, she noted.

"As HR professionals, our employees look to us to be supportive of their needs. We need to look at policies and practices that allow for greater flexibility," Perez said. This is true of remote workers as well, she noted, as they, too, need flexibility with schedules and hours.

"Hold employees accountable for doing their jobs, but provide resources and support—the human touch—for caregivers as well," she advised.

The results of offering resources and support often include increased productivity and employee engagement, Perez said. Caregiving support also can be a talent-recruitment lure, as "employers of choice are addressing caregiving issues."

Another positive outcome for employers is reduced health care costs, as caregiving stress and anxiety take a toll on employee health and well-being.

"Remember, employees will not leave their problems at the door," Perez cautioned.

**Action Steps**

Perez advised employers to take steps such as the following:

* **Help managers identify those with caregiving challenges.** Signs of caregiving stress can include tardiness and distraction.
* **Prepare managers to assist and support caregivers**. They can do so with flexibility around scheduling and time off. Also, train managers in what to say and how to ask the right questions to open up conversations.
* **Be sensitive to the caregiving stigma.**Encouraging C-suite executives to share their own stories can be an effective tactic, letting employees know that it's OK to talk about their challenges.
* **Network with local caregiving support services**. Share resources with employees and invite services providers to speak with them about caregiving issues on their own well-being, including your health insurer and employee assistance program vendor. Local organizations focused on elder care can teach employees how to take vital signs such as blood pressure for those they're caring for, and how to respond to parents with dementia who are "sunsetting." Hospice and palliative care providers can help to clarify emotionally fraught issues around final care.
* **Offer accommodations under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).** Employees may need FMLA leave in increments of less than a full eight-hour day, "such as two to three hours to take mom to her chemotherapy," Perez said.

Large employers are beginning to offer adult day care centers onsite, similar to child care centers, she noted. Other employers are subsidizing elder care expenses, as they do with child care.

*[Related SHRM article:*[*COVID-19 Reveals the Value of Caregiving Benefits*](https://www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/hr-topics/benefits/Pages/coronavirus-pandemic-reveals-the-value-of-caregiving-benefits.aspx)*]*

**Where to Get Help**

AARP [offers useful tools for those caring for older parents](https://www.aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/planning-and-resources/), Perez pointed out, including:

* Helplines.
* A "Find Senior Care" locator.
* Forms such as [advance directives](https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/financial-legal/free-printable-advance-directives/).
* Long-term-care resources.

A 2021 AARP study, [Working Caregivers' Concerns and Desires in a Post-Pandemic Workplace](https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys_statistics/ltc/2021/working-caregiver-survey.doi.10.26419-2Fres.00482.001.pdf), found that the majority of working family caregivers surveyed say the great strain of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased their stress levels, especially with many workplaces reopening.

AARP's July survey of 800 adult caregivers nationally showed that caregivers who must return to in-person work are experiencing concerns that include guilt and fear of leaving their loved ones unattended, as well as fear of contracting the coronavirus at work and potentially bringing home the virus and infecting the person for whom they care.

AARP also reported that during the pandemic, it became more normal to talk about caring for a loved one, with "greater acceptance among employers and more awareness about caregiving."

Perez also cited the [National Alliance for Giving](https://www.caregiving.org/) as another useful resource.