

The Pandemic's Effect on Unpaid Caregivers



INTRODUCTION

Hello,

Providing care for a loved one facing health challenges, psychological issues, or mental disabilities is among the most rewarding sacrifices a person can make. However, these responsibilities often have a significant physical, mental, emotional, and financial toll on caregivers, many of whom suffer from stress, burnout, and their own health issues as a result. And, for those unpaid caregivers who also perform paying work, the balance between responsibilities can be overwhelming.

Family First is committed to working with employers, payers and other organizations to ensure family caregivers have access to the expert caregiving solutions they need. Our Expert Care Teams include licensed and accredited nurses, social workers, mental health professionals, and physicians, who have years of specialized training and experience navigating the intricacies of caregiving.

For employers, we hope you find inspiration in the pages that follow. Inspiration to accept the challenge of meeting the needs of your employees who also have themselves accepted the challenge of caregiving through new policies and benefits.

To the unpaid, working caregivers, we first say a heartfelt Thank You for all you do each and every day. We hope you find some solace in knowing you are not alone in any challenges you are facing, and we hope that these findings provide an opportunity for you to open a candid conversation with your employer on how their support of your caregiving journey can help you bring your best, fullest self to work.

Take care,






Chief Executive Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prior to the pandemic, more than 50 million adults in the U.S. served as primary, unpaid caregivers for loved ones with illnesses, disabilities, and other special needs. An additional 3 million unpaid caregivers were forced to leave their jobs when COVID-19 closed care facilities, adding additional strain on an already fragile population. Family First conducted a national survey of caregivers to learn about the impact of the pandemic on their ability to care for their loved ones while also thriving professionally.

Key Takeaways

-  COVID-19 hit hard, increasing caregiving responsibilities for 83% of respondents
-  40% left their job during the pandemic, and almost as many more (38%) are thinking about it
-  72% of caregivers want more support from their employers

A Closer Look at **Caregiving During COVID-19**



FINDINGS: ADDED RESPONSIBILITIES

Nearly three-quarters (72.5%) of caregivers were between the ages of 25 and 44, the same years when the average employee is establishing a career and professional path. Working caregivers, however, carry additional responsibilities of ensuring the health, wellbeing, and happiness of a loved one.

Many respondents (66%) reported looking after school-age children; 65% of that group also were responsible for the care of a parent or other older adult. This “Sandwich Generation” feels pressure on both sides and has been especially prone to physical fatigue, mental burnout, and anxiety.

For 20% of our respondents, caretaking is a full-time job of its own, requiring 40 hours or more on a weekly basis. An additional 43% report spending between 6 and 20 hours a week caring for loved ones.

BY THE NUMBERS

Which of the following do you provide care for?

- School-age children: 65.96%
- Young children (not in school): 48.57%
- Parent, in-law, or older adult: 61.56%
- Someone with a physical health issue: 50.43%
- Substance abuse disorder: 34.31%
- Mental health condition: 29.25%

How many hours per week do you provide unpaid care?

- 0-5 hours: 9.86%
- 6-10 hours: 21.52%
- 11-20 hours: 21.52%
- 21-30 hours: 16.86%
- 31-40 hours: 10.19%
- 41-50 hours: 5.73%
- 50+ hours: 14.32%

FINDINGS: PANDEMIC PRESSURE

The pandemic increased caregiving responsibilities for the vast majority (83%) of respondents. While a labor of love, caregiving can exhaust those ensuring the wellness of others.

For many caretakers, the administrative tasks involved with caretaking – navigating insurance, coordinating care instructions with doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals, and making appointments – take as much, if not more, time than providing care itself.

TOP 5

Caregiving Responsibilities

1. Talking with medical providers about care instructions: 67.89%
2. Making medical appointments: 67.16%
3. Dealing with insurance providers: 53.83%
4. Monitoring medication: 58.23%
5. Transporting loved ones to/from care appointments: 50.90%

83% report increased caregiving responsibilities during the pandemic

FINDINGS: FAMILY DYNAMICS

When a loved one needs care due to illness or special needs, there is often a significant impact on caregivers' relationships with other family members. In our survey, 68% of caregivers reported disagreements with other family members about care.

Also, factoring into strained family dynamics is the financial toll many caregivers face – especially when they are required to reduce work hours or leave their jobs altogether.

TOP 5

Challenges Faced in Caregiving

1. Family Dynamics **76.35%**
2. My own mental health: 71.62%
3. Financial burden: 66.69%
4. Not enough time to help others: 66.16%
5. Logistics and administration of coordinating care: 65.69%

68% of caregivers have disagree with a family member about a loved one's care

FINDINGS: MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT

Caregiving can be mentally challenging and emotionally exhausting for those balancing unpaid caregiving with work. Nearly as many (69%) caregivers reported feeling overwhelmed as said they questioned whether they were making the right decisions about care (70%).

And, while more than 85% of respondents said they were happy to take care of their loved ones, almost as many (82%) reported feeling stress, the most frequently cited mental state, followed by anxiety (74%) and fatigue (72%). Perhaps most alarming, more than a third (38%) of caregivers reported having suicidal thoughts as a result of the stress of caregiving.

These mental effects of caregiving flow into other areas of caregivers' lives, with more than half (55%) of respondents saying caregiving left them too burned out for their paying job.

BY THE NUMBERS

Have you experienced any of the following during the pandemic?

- Stress: 82.08%
- Anxiety: 74.08%
- Depression: 62.82%
- Fatigue: 71.95%
- Trouble sleeping: 67.02%
- Substance abuse: 44.50%
- Suicidal thoughts: 38.31%

How do you feel as an unpaid caregiver?

- Overwhelmed: 69.09%
- Question my decisions: 69.89%
- Happy to take care of loved ones 86.74%
- Alone: 54.43%
- Too burned out for my job: 55.36%

FINDINGS: CAREERS ON HOLD

How has caregiving during COVID affected your job?

- Took paid leave: 59.89%
- Took unpaid leave: 55.16%
- Left my job: 40.97%
- Reduced hours: 64.09%
- Changed work schedule: 72.55%
- Turned down promotion: 45.64%

Do you anticipate doing any of the following in the next 6-12 months?

- Taking paid leave: 60.09%
- Taking unpaid leave: 49.23%
- Leaving my job: 38.1%
- Reducing work hours: 59.03%
- Changing work schedule: 64.76%

Has caregiving negatively impacted the following?

- Job performance: 63.49%
- Career progression: 59.16%
- Ability to focus at work: 69.35%
- Participation in work activities: 62.69%
- Socializing with colleagues: 65.96%

Closure of schools and some care facilities due to the COVID-19 pandemic forced many in the workforce to step back from their jobs and careers, with some resigning paying work altogether. More than 40% of respondents left their jobs, and 38% stated they were considering resigning in the next 12 months.

On a more positive note, 60% of respondents were able to take paid leave during the pandemic, while the same number of caregivers said they might do so within the next 12 months. Similarly, 72% of workers' employers were willing to change work schedules for more flexible options, with 65% stating they might make a similar move in 2022.

The impact on caregivers' careers is striking – 60% or more of respondents said that their caregiving duties impacted their careers in a negative way.

A Closer Look at Caring for the Caregivers



FINDINGS: GETTING SUPPORT

Does your employer provide any caregiving support?

- Flexible schedules: 80.88%
- Telecommuting: 67.75%
- Paid time off: 66.56%
- Family medical leave: 70.29%
- Peer group support: 53.43%
- Access to expert support: 56.76%
- EAP: 66.82%

Employers are increasingly offering options to support unpaid caregivers. The most frequently offered option was flexible scheduling, which allows caregivers the ability to accompany their loved ones to doctor visits, lab tests, and other appointments. Family medical leave was an option for 70% of respondents who needed to care for an ill or disabled loved one. Other popular support options included telecommuting (68%), employee assistance programs and paid time off (both at 66%), access to expert support (57%), and peer group support (54%).

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents reported they felt comfortable talking to their company about their caregiving responsibilities, and 62% reported doing so.



FINDINGS: HOW EMPLOYERS CAN HELP

Do you feel like your employer could be doing more to support you as a caregiver?

- Yes 72.42%
- No: 16.66%
- I don't know: 10.93%

As much as employers are doing today to support their caregiving workers, 72% of employees say companies could do more. In fact, 82% of respondents stated that support for caregivers should be an essential employee benefit, on par with healthcare, dental insurance, and other wellness programs.

Do you believe caregiving support should be an essential employee benefit?

- Yes: 82.21%
- No: 8.26%
- I don't know: 9.53%

What would caregivers want that support to look like? Better access to nurses, physicians, or other clinical support rated highest (76%); however, all options received close to three-quarters of respondents' votes. This is an indication that unpaid caregivers who remain in the workforce need additional help on the home front.

Would any of the following be useful to you as a caregiver?

- Access to clinical support (nurse and/or physician): 75.55%
- Counselor or mental health professional to help me cope with caregiving: 75.42%
- Help with administrative and logistics: 74.08%
- Accredited expert to develop an action plan: 73.16%
- Service to match loved one with in-home care: 74.08%

FINDINGS: RETURNING TO THE OFFICE

Like their non-caregiving colleagues, respondents indicated some serious concerns as companies begin calling employees back to on-site work routines. Most frequently, their concerns centered on their ability to handle both work and caregiving responsibilities successfully (75%). Financial pressures (66%) and having less time for caregiving (64%), or for their own professional development (63%) also weighed heavy on respondents' minds, as did having to either pay for a professional caregiver (66%) or leaving a loved one home alone (63%).

Have you experienced any of the following during the pandemic?

- Juggling work and caregiving: 74.95%
- Getting sick myself: 65.96%
- Having to pay for professional caregiver: 65.62%
- Not having enough time for caregiving: 64.02%
- Less time to focus on professional development: 63.42%
- Leaving loved one at home unattended: 62.96%

A Closer Look at
**Employer Support
for Caregiving
Employees**



EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR CAREGIVING EMPLOYEES

As the world continues to adjust to life under pandemic conditions, employers have an incredible opportunity to reassess policies and benefits to create workplaces that enable employees to thrive personally and professionally.

Here are a few steps to get you started:

What Employers Can Do

- ✓ Recognize the scope of the problem
- ✓ See the whole picture
- ✓ Question the “always on” culture
- ✓ Promote mental health and wellbeing
- ✓ Ease back-to-work concerns

EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR CAREGIVING EMPLOYEES

Recognizing the Scope of the Problem

It's not always obvious who is a caregiver – even to the caregiver themselves. Caregiving can be taking care of a sick child or spouse, but it is also worrying about parents who live far away, disagreeing with siblings about whether mom can stay at home, wondering if your child's health problems are a sign of something more serious. More employees than you think are caregivers, whether they identify that way or not.

Seeing the Whole Picture

Providing patchwork backup care or logistical help isn't the solution to a caregiving employee's challenge. Expert, experienced professionals are uniquely capable of identifying key issues that are too often overlooked and coming up with sensible, practical, effective plans to solve caregiving problems.



EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR CAREGIVING EMPLOYEES

Question the “Always On” Culture

Americans work hard and COVID helped create the expectation that employees are always available. This new culture just isn't compatible with the lifestyle of employees trying to juggle work and caregiving, and it's no wonder that so many caregiving employees are leaving the workforce. Providing company-wide flexible working hours for all employees can give caregivers the freedom and support they need to care for their loved ones, while still being able to get their work done.

Promote Mental Health and Wellbeing

The emergence of mental health benefits in recent years is a tremendously positive development. Recognize that caregiving can trigger mental health challenges for employees and position mental health and wellbeing benefits in the context of those triggers. Be proactive in encouraging employees to take time off for self-care and to use current mental health benefits offerings. Additional paid time off for mental health care can be key to avoiding caregiver burnout.

Ease Back-to-Work Concerns

Minimize the adjustment of the return to on-site work through personalized return plans that provide caregiving employees the ability to accommodate both their professional and personal priorities.



NOTES

Family First conducted the survey via Pollfish to better understand the impact caregiving has on caregivers' wellbeing, their careers, and their expectations for employers to support them. The survey was conducted by phone among adults who provide unpaid care for someone in their lives and was fielded in August 2021.

Participating caregivers also were asked to provide information about the care they provide, how often, and how those responsibilities affect different aspects of their lives.

To learn more about Family First, please visit **www.family-first.com**.