

THE COST OF CARE: MAKING ADULT CARE A STRATEGIC EMPLOYEE BENEFIT

Close to half of the U.S. workforce cares for an adult relative. As the nation's population ages, this trend is accelerating. And there's no question that balancing caregiving responsibilities with paid work poses challenges. Even the most dedicated professionals find themselves taking time off or struggling to concentrate at work when distracted by caregiving issues.

Research has made it clear that caregiving is a fact of professional life neither workers nor employers can afford to ignore. For employees, the implications are enormous. Workers who take unpaid time off to care for family often have to sacrifice earnings and Social Security benefits.

Lost wages are just the beginning. Many caregivers also risk career mobility and job security, as well as work-related health insurance and retirement benefits.¹ The outlook for caregivers in the 50+ age range is especially grim. Older workers who leave the workforce to care for relatives face a loss of about \$304,000 in lifetime wages and benefits.² Research has also indicated that accepting caregiving responsibilities in midlife puts women at a significantly increased risk for poverty as they age.³

RELATED LOSS TO EMPLOYERS ESTIMATED AT \$33 BILLION IN ANNUAL PRODUCTIVITY COSTS

The impact of the caregiving crisis is huge for employers, as well as workers. Workplace disruptions caused by caregiver stress and absenteeism exact a toll on enterprise productivity. Experts estimate that the total productivity loss to employers is \$33 billion yearly.⁴ Studies also indicate that the stress of holding down a job while caring for dependent adults puts caregivers at risk for more health problems than non-caregivers. The ensuing complications result in increased medical benefit costs for employers as well as workers. According to one study, the potential medical costs to employers add up to as much as \$13.4 billion per year.⁵

ADULT CARE BENEFITS BOOST INDIVIDUAL AND ENTERPRISE-WIDE PRODUCTIVITY

Increasingly business and non-profit organizations are starting to understand that the cost of caregiving is more than a private burden. The most visionary employers have already adopted benefits that help balance work and caregiving responsibilities. Doing so puts these employers in a unique position to boost overall workplace productivity.

¹ Lynn Feinberg, Susan C. Reinhard, Ari Houser, and Rita Choula (AARP Public Policy Institute), "Valuing the Invaluable: 2011 Update - The Growing Contributions and Costs of Family Caregiving," (2011).

² MetLife Mature Market Institute, National Alliance for Caregiving, and Center for Long Term Care Research and Policy, New York Medical College, "The MetLife Study of Caregiving Costs to Working Caregivers: Double Jeopardy for Baby Boomers Caring for Their Parents," (2011).

³ Chizuko Wakabayashi and Katherine M. Donato, "Does Caregiving Increase Poverty among Woman in Later Life? Evidence from the Health and Retirement Survey," *The Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 47 (2006): 258-74.

⁴ National Alliance for Caregiving, University of Pittsburgh Institute on Aging, and MetLife Mature Market Institute, "The MetLife Study of Working Caregivers and Employer Health Care Costs: New Insights and Innovations for Reducing Health Care Costs for Employers," (2010).

⁵ Ibid.

SUPPORTING THE “SANDWICH GENERATION”

With 8,500 staff/faculty and 19,000 students on three dynamic campuses, some Northwestern employees have complex and ever-changing caregiving needs. A primary goal of the university’s Work/Life Resources program is to help employees stay productive at work while managing the demands of family life. According to Henderson, adult care is potentially one of the greatest challenges for the Northwestern workforce. She explains: “Many of our employees fall into the 40–60 age bracket, also known as the ‘sandwich generation.’ That means they may be working at Northwestern while caring for aging relatives and, in many instances, their own children. We already had work/life programs that addressed child care needs, and wanted to ensure that our programs were also responsive to the needs of our employees with other types of caregiving responsibilities. We heard from caregivers that they needed help with stress management, resources, and access to information. We also looked at our workforce demographics and found that the cost of providing adult care was relatively modest. There was definite management support for moving forward with an eldercare program.”

CARE.COM: A SOLUTION FOR NORTHWESTERN’S DIVERSE, DISCERNING, AND WELL-EDUCATED POPULATION

Henderson was convinced that an adult care solution would only succeed if it addressed the scope and complexity of Northwestern’s caregiving needs. “With the size and diversity of our workforce, we knew there would not be a one-size-fits-all solution...that we would have to provide employees with customizable options and a very high standard of service,” she explains. “We have a very discerning and well educated population, so it was critical to provide a deep level of expertise in adult care. Our employees would not be well served by a firm that utilizes entry level staff to make referrals based on zip codes and a database.”

SETTING GOALS FOR PROVIDERS AND IMPLEMENTATION

In 2011, Henderson assembled a set of criteria for managing adult care issues at Northwestern:

- 24/7 access to in-home adult care providers nationwide, including backup providers
- Nationwide support for locating a full range of other adult care resources (including geriatric management, home care, assisted living, rehab, and hospice)
- Unlimited access to highly trained adult care specialists that help employees navigate myriad options and decisions (providing information on everything from care facilities to Medicare/Medicaid issues to resolving sibling tensions over “what’s best for Mom”)
- Identification of vendors with broad support for long-distance caregiving
- Web-based tools that are easy-to-use and customizable
- Comprehensive review protocols so that caregivers and resources are thoroughly

CARE.COM: SUPPORT THAT’S FLEXIBLE AND COMPREHENSIVE

Checklist in hand, Henderson worked with an interdepartmental committee to review five separate adult care providers. Care.com was identified early on as a strong candidate. Says Henderson: “Mary Stehle, one of Care.com’s senior care advisors, met with us in person. Talking to her gave us a real sense of how professional the Care.com advisors would be. Often your primary contacts are with sales people during a bid process, so Care.com’s emphasis on service and delivery—the fact they would bring in a professional at this stage—was really impressive. None of the other firms who participated made that extra effort.”

Henderson's team was also impressed with Care.com's level of commitment to reviewing care providers more fully than some of the other firms being considered. She says: "Many vendors use state and federal databases to assess provider quality, but Care.com takes it a step further, and uses more stringent criteria to determine whether providers are included in their database."

EXPERTISE IS CRITICAL FOR ADULT CARE PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

Access to Care.com's Senior Care Advisor group provides Northwestern employees with even more comprehensive support for the complexities of adult care resources, from choosing assisted living facilities to understanding financing options. Annette Czech, who works in compensation at Northwestern, says that relying on Care.com's senior care advisors has saved her a tremendous amount of time and stress. Czech has especially high praise for a particular advisor: "Jill Martinelli does two invaluable things. She's not only giving us the facts, she's guiding us through our options, and she's doing all this in our price range. She interviews us, asks questions, and she knows all the options out there—including Medicare and Medicaid information. After talking with us, she develops a plan. Then she puts it all together in a message with links and everything you could possibly need, right down to details like directions to each facility she finds."

"WITHOUT CARE.COM, I'D HAVE TO TAKE TIME OFF WORK"

Czech also applauds Martinelli's ability to counsel family members until consensus is reached, even when there is discord over how best to care for Mom and Dad. "She is so diplomatic, asking questions and making suggestions without pressure, never overselling or underselling."

Czech has extensive experience caring for elderly relatives. Recently her family has been helping two ailing aunts who must transition to assisted living. As Czech says: "We had very specific needs: subsidized housing and a waitlist of less than a year. Jill Martinelli talked to all the family involved and came back to us with three options. I know the value of this because I cared for my father and father-in-law before I came to Northwestern. Finding that information on my own would have taken hours and hours. Without Care.com, I'd have to take time off work."

SUPPORT FOR WORKFORCE UTILIZATION

Making sure that Northwestern employees take full advantage of the Care.com benefit is another priority for Work/Life director Henderson. "Our goal was to communicate this new benefit to a decentralized faculty and staff population. We used a mix of existing channels and a series of presentations on topics like 'How to Put the Share in Family Caregiving' and 'A Proactive Approach to Caregiving.'" To foster maximum utilization, Henderson also focused on presentations to managers to help them understand the benefit and how it might help their employees. "If we can create better awareness of these support programs, we can reach those who have the greatest need. When we do that we create a win-win situation for employees and the organization."

ADULT CARE: NOT JUST FOR SENIORS

Henderson notes that a wide range of circumstances (developmental delays, mental health issues, injuries, and chronic or short-term illness) can put an employee in the position of caring for much younger adults. As she says: "Care.com provides resources for any adult in need of caregiving—whether the recipient is a senior, a spouse, or the actual employee herself."

A STRATEGIC CAREGIVING BENEFIT THAT'S COST-EFFECTIVE

The Northwestern response to Care.com has been immediate and overwhelmingly positive. As Henderson says: "This is the kind of benefit that goes a long way to making people's lives easier. We had many calls, completely unsolicited, thanking us for bringing Care.com to Northwestern. Navigating the eldercare terrain can be time consuming and complex. Accessing the right type of information and resources can be difficult. As employers, we must understand how to manage the trends that affect our workforce, and implement benefits and policies that bring out the best in employees. Without support, there are so many adverse ripple effects. If we don't deal with these issues, we are risking absenteeism and other challenges to productivity."

Henderson's colleague Czech agrees: "For me," she says, "Care.com has been priceless."