

SUPPORTING WORKING CAREGIVERS

Shaping future workplaces



Employee caregivers are labour force participants who also take on an unpaid caring role for someone in need.

Facts & Figures

How many employee caregivers are there?

- As many as **6 million** people combine work with some level of unpaid care.
- Employee caregivers make up **35%** of the total Canadian workforce, representing 1 in every 3 employees.
- **The majority** of caregivers (60%) are juggling work and care responsibilities.

Read more evidence about caregivers from the [2012 census](#).

How can caring affect a person's job?

Taking on a caring role is like having a whole other job in addition to regular employment, other family commitments and hobbies or interests. Caring is unpredictable and can be hard to fit around a paid job. Many caregivers must stop working, reduce their work hours, change jobs and accept lower income in order to balance their work and care responsibilities.

Caregivers feel they have no choice but to make changes to their work situation because:

- They **can't get the flexibility** they need
- Their caring responsibilities are **not recognized** by their employer
- They **can't get the time** off they need
- They **can't get the replacement care** services they need

How does our aging population affect this issue?

Caregivers, such as family members and friends, have become increasingly important, particularly with the changing age structure of Canadian society. Longer life expectancies and the transition of baby boomers into their senior years mean that more Canadians require assistance and care related to aging, now and into the future.

According to the 2018 Canadian General Social Survey, at some point in their lives, nearly one in four Canadians aged 15 years and older, or **7.8 million Canadians, have provided some type of care to a family member or friend with a long-term health condition, disability or aging needs.** As our population ages, this number will grow and more employees will need to juggle work and care. This is the picture of the future workforce. Employers need to widen their recruitment pool and create workplaces that acknowledge and adapt to the demands facing employee caregivers.

What is the business case for supporting caregivers at work?

Research shows that creating a flexible, caregiver-friendly workplace positively impacts employees and employers. Whether an employer wants to gain a competitive advantage or ensure compliance with local legal requirements, creating a caregiver-friendly workplace is a sound investment. The benefits include:

- **Enhancing recruitment** and retention
- **Reducing employee stress** and decreasing claims costs
- **Reducing turnover** and training costs
- **Increasing productivity** and employee engagement
- **Reducing sick leave** and decreasing sick time payments
- **Improving service** delivery and quality
- **Encouraging greater workforce participation** with wage and job equity
- **Creating a competitive advantage** in a post-COVID labour market
- **Increasing staff morale** and commitment

Why is it important for caregivers to participate in the labour market?

Research clearly shows that **caregivers face economic and health challenges related to their caregiving activities.**

The economic impact on caregivers mainly results from work-related factors.

A reduction in paid work hours has consequences for both employee benefits and household income. According to the [Canadian 2012 General Social Survey](#), 14% of employee caregivers who reduced their hours of work reported losing some or all of their benefits, such as extended health benefits, dental benefits, employer-provided pension, life insurance and prescription drug plans. While reduced hours can also impact pay, the largest proportion of caregivers (31%) reported a household income of \$100,000 or more, followed by an income of \$60,000 to \$99,999 (22%). In fact, caregivers were more likely than non-caregivers to report an income of \$60,000 or more.

What steps can employers take to become caregiver friendly?

Executive-level leadership is imperative for creating a culture where caregivers feel comfortable discussing their work-life balance concerns.

Many Canadian employers are adapting existing workplace practices and provisions to meet the needs of employee caregivers on a case-by-case basis. However, it is vital to take the next steps to develop and adapt corporate policies and procedures that support caregivers. For example:

- Build an organizational structure that offers paid and unpaid leave, flexible hours, use of technology and access to in-house programs.
- Clearly communicate the values of the organization.
- Ensure consistent processes are in place for all managers to use as a resource when supporting caregivers.

The goal is for all workplaces to value and respect all employees.

How has COVID-19 impacted employee caregivers?

The COVID-19 pandemic has shined a light on the importance of supportive workplace policies. Working from home, taking on increased care responsibilities (both child care and elder care) and navigating shifting routines has posed new challenges for employers and their employees. During 2020–2021, employee caregivers faced a number of challenges unique to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following data was collected through the 2020 Carer Well-Being Index,¹ which detailed ways in which unpaid carers around the globe have been negatively affected by the pandemic. The following responses reflect 479 Canadian employee caregivers' experiences.

- **15%** indicated they **became a caregiver for the first time** as a result of COVID-19 while still balancing their work responsibilities.
- **79% were concerned that they will get COVID-19** and there won't be anyone to provide care to their care-receiver.
- **72%** felt they **need to spend more time providing care** as COVID-19 has made them distrust assisted living homes.
- **34%** said they are having more **difficulty balancing their professional/paid job responsibilities** with their caregiving responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **53%** agreed that **their employer did not support them** in ways they needed in order to be a caregiver.

Employees who are balancing work and care are especially vulnerable to external pressures and anxieties, many of which are impacting the workplace and Canada's economic stability. Employers dealing with the post-COVID environment are facing retention issues and risk losing skilled employees. Increased employee turnover and a diminished workforce affect both operational productivity and costs.

1. The 2020 Carer Well-Being Index includes information from over 9,000 unpaid-carers from 12 different countries: United States, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Australia, Brazil, Taiwan, India and China. The study was conducted September 3–October 27, 2020 using online and phone methodologies. Light weighting was applied in select countries to achieve better national representation. At the 95% confidence level, the full global unpaid carer sample has an estimated margin of error of +/-1.03 percentage points. Of the 9,000 respondents, 755 were from Canada. Of these, 479 were employee caregivers.

Information about Canadian survey respondents:

- 60% of employee caregivers were female, 40% were male
- 66% of employee caregivers were married/partner, 25% were single and 10% were formerly married
- 1% of employee caregivers had a low education (some high school), 56% had a middle education (high school graduate to college/CEGEP degree), 44% had a higher education (university degree)
- 24% of employee caregivers had low income (under \$50,000), 44% had a medium income (\$50,000–\$99,999), and 32% had a high income (\$100,000+)

About the Shaping Future Workplace Campaign

Recognizing the impact on community health workers and unpaid family caregivers, the Canadian Home Care Association is promoting promising practices to contribute to the design, establishment and maintenance of post-COVID workplaces where employees are valued, respected and nurtured.

Supporting caregivers at work is the first phase of the campaign. Our goal is to build awareness among Canadian employers of the need for caregiver-friendly policies and programs as they create and shape their workplace structures post-COVID. The campaign was launched in September 2021 through Carers Canada using the expansive reach of social media channels (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram).

www.carerscanada.ca    