

## Supporting the Caregivers on Your Staff

It's estimated that U.S. businesses lose up to \$33.6 billion per year in lost productivity from full-time working caregivers. Costs associated with replacing employees, absenteeism, workday distractions, supervisory time and reductions in hours from full time to part time all take a toll. A study from the Families and Work Institute found that employers paid about 8% more for the health care of caregiver employees compared to noncaregiver employees.

The National Alliance for Caregiving and the Association for the Advancement of Retired People say the average U.S. caregiver is a 49-year-old woman who works outside the home and spends nearly 20 hours per week providing unpaid care to her mother for nearly five years. The Harvard Business School estimates that 73% of employees in the workforce are caring for a child, parent or friend.



Chances are, many of your employees are caregivers outside of the workplace. As an employer, you can provide support to those employees. Here are several suggestions:

- **Create an organization-wide understanding of the challenges caregivers face.** Creating a culture where employees can express their challenges and ask for support can help keep your employees healthy and productive.
- **Know what challenges employees face.** Regular employee surveys can help you assess your employees' needs in terms of caregiving, so you can tailor benefits your organization offers to help meet those needs.
- **Communicate the benefits that are available.** Let your employees know about the programs you have available, such as an employee assistance program or caregiver referrals.
- **Consider flextime and remote work options.** Depending on the employees' work responsibilities, employers can offer flexible work arrangements to allow caregiving employees to work different hours or telecommute.
- **Change the approach to paid time off.** Rather than dividing paid time off into vacation days, sick days and personal days, consider grouping all time off into one category to allow employees to take time for caregiving as needed.
- **Connect employees with resources.** Employers can offer programs to connect caregivers with resources for both their caregiving role and for the self-care they need to stay healthy and handle both their job and caregiving roles better.
- **Measure how well your support is working.** Ask employees for feedback on how effectively what your organization provides is helping them with the issues they face as working caregivers.

Sources: [caregiver.org](http://caregiver.org)\*, [aarp.org](http://aarp.org)\*, [benefitnews.com](http://benefitnews.com)\*

\*Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Blue Care Network don't own or control these websites.