

## Work & Caregiving

**“Minnesotans are workaholics. We are among the states with the highest employment rate and the highest number of hours worked per week.”**

**Thomas Gillaspy, State Demographer**

**“Employed caregivers often underestimate both the time and the impact of their family obligations on their work. They also underestimate the financial impact of their unexpected responsibilities.” AARP Prepare to Care booklet**

### Impact of Working Caregivers – The Stats

- According to the Caregiving in America study of over 1300 caregivers published in November 2009:
  - 73% of caregivers were employed at some time when they were caregiving
  - 66% of employed caregivers have gone in late, left early, or taken time off during the day to deal with caregiving issues
  - 20% of employed caregivers reported taking a leave of absence
- 63% of family caregivers in Minnesota are employed (Minnesota Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Systems (MN BRFSS), 2008).
- Working caregivers are just as likely to be male as female.
- According to “Business, Caregivers, and the Bottom Line published by FamilyCare America, Inc. in June 2009:
  - Average cost to employers per working caregiver is \$2,110/year. This costs U.S. employers \$33 billion a year.
  - On average each caregiver loses \$659,000 over a lifetime due to lost wages and benefits, and miss promotions

### What Do Working Caregivers Want?

- Flexibility - Literature on work and caregiving identifies this as the primary desire of employed caregivers. This may include flex time and place, choices in managing time, reduced time, caregiving leaves, time off, and a culture of flexibility within the organization.
- Information and assistance - Most caregivers of elders have had little or no previous experience either with providing care to an elder or with negotiating the aging services system. Thus, information about caregiving, health conditions, and where to turn for help is a critical need for working caregivers.
- Emotional support – A recent study found that, not surprisingly, lower levels of family-related supervisor support were associated with higher levels of work-family conflict. Similarly, a less supportive workplace culture was associated with work-family conflict (Barrach & Shultz, 2001).
- Other tangible assistance – Often this includes help with legal, financial, and health insurance matters and the paperwork associated with these.

### The Challenges of Being a Working Caregiver

Many caregivers are reluctant to discuss their caregiving in their workplace. It’s an attitudinal issue, actual time issue, and a financial issue.

Caregivers fear losing their jobs, losing promotions, and even status. They may be embarrassed that their work is impacted by their personal life. Because caregivers fiercely protect family and work responsibilities, many times at their own personal expense, they have increasing levels of stress. We have been socialized to not let our personal life come into our workplace. Like taking time off to care for children, there may be a stigma associated with taking off time for caregiving. Even worse, surveys

show that employees were less comfortable talking with managers and coworkers about parent care than talking about childcare issues.

Men are even less willing to talk about their caregiving responsibility at work. They feel that it's going to be held against them, they'll be looked down upon, and perhaps there will be repercussions. Will their boss assume that they care more about family than their job? Even if the company has eldercare programs in place, it is unlikely that men are going to self identify by using those programs. Just as how most men don't use available parental leave.

Caregivers may also perceive a lack of understanding from their employers and coworkers. In addition, they don't want to be a burden.

The financial burden of caregiving coupled with today's economic realities are causing caregivers either to be more reluctant to take time away from work for caregiving or decide to take on additional work to cover caregiving costs. These are from Evercare's survey of Economic Downturn and Its Impact on Family Caregiving publication April 2009:

50% of working caregivers said they were less comfortable taking time off from work to provide care.

One in three working caregivers reported they had to work more hours or get another job.

43% of working caregivers have had their work hours or pay cut.

### **How Can Caregiver Support Providers Help Working Caregivers?**

Addressing caregiving in the workplace has been discussed for many years, but real change is slow. Here are some things to do to help working caregivers:

1. Help your client assess the kind of workplace and position they have: Are they the boss? Are they in charge of their work day or are they in a structured setting with little freedom? Are they self employed? Do they work at a desk and have time to make personal calls or use a computer during their day? When can they do their caregiving tasks? Is their job flexible so they can be work at home? Do they work nontraditional or on call hours? Can they make decisions independently or need to consult with a boss?
2. Ask your client to honestly assess their job. Does it make sense to continue to work in the same job at this time? Are there possibilities of a job share or to lessen their hours? Most caregivers say what they truly desire is flexibility to do the caregiver tasks. Can they modify their work hours? If possible, help client consider a flexible work schedule to accommodate the caregiving. This may be temporary or permanent.
3. Then ask your client to make a list of what they need to cope day to day and to share that with their supervisor and/or the human resources manager to see what is possible.
4. Provide your client with information on the Family and Medical Leave Act if appropriate. FMLA requires covered employers to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave to "eligible" employees for certain family and medical reasons.
5. Discuss if being open with others at their workplace would be beneficial. If their manager and key co-workers know what is going on, would they provide support and better understanding if they knew more? Help them recognize if their caregiving is interfering with their job performance and options to lessen that.
6. Help your client think of their employer's/company's point of view. Recommend that they be specific with their supervisor to identify what changes would allow them to continue to be a valuable employee. If your client has an Employee Assistance Program, help them learn how to use it.
7. Encourage your client to show appreciation to their co-workers.