

## Caregiving and Employment: Assets and Opportunities Report

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### Context

Caregivers provide care to family members and friends living with an illness, disability or aging. They are the children of aging parents, the spouses of those with cancer or MS, the parents of a child with a disability.

The need to recognize and support caregivers is pressing. In 2012, 28% of Canadians over 15 provided care for a family member or friend living with challenges owing to illness, disability or aging (Sinha, 2013). The number of caregivers will continue to grow: as the population ages and care is moved from institutions into the community, family members will be increasingly relied upon to provide care.

The impacts of caregiving are well documented: caregivers have higher rates of depression, are in poorer physical health and are more likely to be socially isolated. Caregiving also impacts economic well-being, with out-of-pocket expenses and employment consequences affecting caregivers even after their caregiving journey is over.

Caregiving is an issue that disproportionately affects women. While only 54% of caregivers are females, women are more likely to spend more time with their care recipients (Sinha, 2013) and caregiving women are more likely make adaptations to their work demands (Keading, 2013). This can have a significant impact on the long term financial well-being, as their savings, career advancement, pension entitlements and benefits may be significantly affected. Given that the income of women is, on average, lower than their male counterparts, providing care can compound existing challenges to a woman's economic well-being.

Given the prevalence of caregivers - about 35% of the Canadian workforce in 2012 (CECP, 2014) - supportive work environments are essential to ensure that caregivers are able to fulfill their potential: both at work and at home. It is to the employer's advantage to promote the environments: beyond the impact of stress and poor health, balancing care and employment has impacts on an employee's productivity, absenteeism, tardiness and presenteeism.

While there is limited available research to pinpoint the exact cost to employers, studies suggest it is costing the nation billions in lost productivity, employee absences and in some cases employee replacement. "A recent study by the MetLife Market Mature Institute and the National Alliance for Caregiving states that U.S. companies pay between \$17.1 billion and \$33.6 billion annually, depending on the level of caregiving involved, on lost productivity. That equals \$2,110 for every full-time worker who cares for an adult." (AARP, 2007) "If we convert and inflate this figure to 2011 Canadian dollars (\$3,147.38) and apply it against Statistics Canada's General Social Survey 2007 estimates of full-time (35+ hours) employed caregivers nationally (1.75 million), we can estimate the cost to Canadian employers to be approximately \$5.5 billion today, assuming they otherwise face comparable costs" (Meredith B.

Lilly, 2011). The Conference Board of Canada estimated the cost to employers in lost productivity alone to be \$1.28 billion per year (CECP, 2014).

The good news is that there are steps that appropriate caregiver intervention strategies can take that will not only provide caregivers with some much needed support and improve their well-being, but it can also reduce the negative work related effects of caregiving. Donna Wagner, Ph.D., director of the Center for Productive Aging at Towson University in Maryland say “small modifications are likely to result in large benefits in terms of retention of valued employees, recruitment of talented workers, and a more productive workforce overall. (Health Advocate, 2010)”

## **Overview of the Employer Supports Project**

The Alberta Caregivers Association (ACGA) aims to empower caregivers and promote their well-being. As an organization grounded in the caregiver experience, the ACGA’s activities and priorities are determined by the needs identified by caregivers themselves.

The financial and employment consequences of providing care is one issues most commonly identified. Given that current demographic and societal trends indicate that the demand on family caregivers will only increase, the ACGA believes that it is in the best interest of employers to start addressing the needs of caregivers now. This project aims to help employers do that by providing them with the information, tools and resources they need in order to effectively support their caregiving employees.

### **About the Needs Assessment Process**

To inform the development of effective tools and resources, the Alberta Caregivers Association conducted a needs assessment to identify the needs, challenges and benefits of supporting caregivers. This assessment consisted of:

- A literature review to better understand what is currently known about the challenges caregivers and employers experience.
- Focus groups with employers and caregivers to:
  - Affirm that issues identified in other literature reflected their experience.
  - Determine if there were factors that were unique to Alberta and/or not captured in the literature.
  - Identify where there was agreement between employers and caregivers on potential, workable supports.
  - Identify resources, tools, and practices that would help employers better understand and support caregivers.
- An environmental scan to determine what resources exist/or could be adapted and what gaps still exist.

## **Findings**

Through the assessment, several themes emerged. They can be broadly grouped into the following categories:

1. The impacts of caregiving on employers and individual caregivers,
2. Available supportive options and additional supports that would be helpful
3. Enabling and complicating factors in the creation of a supportive work environment
4. The benefits of a supportive environment for both caregivers and employers

## Impacts of Caregiving in the Workplace

### *Impacts on Individual Caregivers*

Both caregivers and employers identified a number of impacts that balancing care and employment could have on a caregiver:

- Quitting or losing a job because of caregiving:
  - Several participating caregivers reported that they had left a job or been terminated because of their caregiving role.

“You have a choice, to place him and stay employed or to keep him and you’re terminated.” Your choice. I was terminated and there went my income of \$10,000 a month, right out the window.”
  - For the most part, participants found new jobs that allowed for more flexibility, rather than leaving the workplace.
  - Employers in the focus group reported that caregivers leaving employment altogether was fairly rare and their caregiving was a factor, rather than the sole reason the caregiver left. For example, an employee was thinking of retiring and when the caregiving demands increased she decided that this was the time to go.
  - The employers’ perception of the rarity of caregiving leaving employment is reflected in research. According to findings from Statistics Canada’s 2012 General Social Survey, Quitting or losing a job was rare, but was experienced by 2% of employed women caregivers and 0.5% of employed men caregivers (Lero et Al., 2012).
  - Early retirement to provide care was reported by 4.4% of women caregivers and 1.1% of their male counterparts (Lero et Al., 2012).
- Unable to progress in career
  - Caregivers in the focus groups reported being unable to progress in their careers and either had to refuse management positions or were forced to take jobs with fewer responsibilities in order to have a more flexible schedule.

- Among those aged 45 and older, almost 5% of employed women caregivers and 3% of their male counterparts turned down a job offer or promotion because of caregiving responsibilities (Fast et Al, 2013).
- A recent Canadian study reported that almost 30% of caregivers decreased their work hours (Fast et Al, 2013).
- Broader family situations were also considered. For example, if the caregiver's partner's career had more potential, then the woman would 'become the caregiver' and limit her career.
- Taking time off
  - Caregivers reported the need for flexible working hours in order to balance appointments and other care needs. If the employer was unwilling or unable to accommodate the caregiver, the caregiver often had to use vacation days to manage these needs.
  - Employers reported that the first sign that an employee was caregiving was often an increase in absenteeism and tardiness.
  - Caregivers are more likely to reduce hours than stop working all together (Fast et Al, 2013). The most frequent accommodation (self-reported by 65% of US caregivers) involved getting to work late, leaving early, or taking time off during the day to accommodate caregiving (Keating, et Al, 2013).
  - In 2012, 15% of paid caregivers reduced their paid work hours to provide care (Fast et Al., 2014).
- Lost income due to unpaid leave
  - Generally paid leave options, including sick days, were not available for caregivers. The employer group reported that unpaid leave was an option, however it was generally not feasible, as caregivers could not afford to lose the income. This is also supported in much of the literature.

### ***Impacts on Employers***

The employer focus group identified several impacts of having caregiving employees in the workplace:

- Employers reported that caregivers often did not self-identify themselves to their employer, the first sign they would see is an increase in absenteeism and a decrease in productivity.

“We had a really great, wonderful performer and all of a sudden they're not and there's complaints coming in...”

“It's sporadic and it's calling in and 'I won't be in today'”

- This aligns with the impacts identified in the General Social Survey. In 2012 44% of caregivers reported missing work to provide care. Caregivers missed an average of 8-9 days per year (Fast et Al., 2014).
- Both absenteeism and partial absenteeism costs employers.
  - Employee benefits often include the use of paid sick days which is an expense that is often tracked by payroll
  - The most common consequences of caregiving observed by employers were partial absenteeism, including employees arriving late or leaving early (84%), and taking unscheduled part or full days off (74%) due to caregiving (Keating et Al., 2013)
    - According to the Metlife study (2006) 58% of employees leave work early or come in late and 22% of those caregivers are unable to make up the time
- According to a 2004 Harvard Business School report - presenteeism is actually more costly to employers than absenteeism (Haslanger, 2010). Presenteeism is less visible to employers since it is not something that can be as easily calculated as “direct costs” defined by Keating et Al. (2013) as items tracked through payroll, benefits and other administrative systems.
- Employers in the focus group did reported that projects had been delayed and deadlines were sometimes not met because family care needs pulled caregivers away from work in one way or another. Missing work related deadlines is reported as a great source of stress for many caregivers when they are trying to juggle work and family care needs.
- Employers in the focus group also incurred expenses to cover temporary or contract staff person to replace the absent employee and in some cases ended up hiring a contractor to assist in workload and help meet important deadlines
- Literature supports the employers from the focus groups reports that other staff will often step up and take on extra work to fill the gap left by caregiving employees. This can cost companies money as well because
  - Supervisors often have to take time problem solving and reassigning tasks
  - Overtime of the other staff costs money since they may need to come in early or leave late in order to do both their own job and make up their caregiving coworkers missed tasks
- While leaving employment due to caregiving is rare (less than 3%) the cost of replacing employees who were unable to remain in the workforce.

- The MetLife Caregiving Cost Study used a conservative base of 50% of median annual wage as the cost of replacing an employee who left their job because of their care responsibilities.
- Additional benefits costs
  - Over time, high levels of caregiver strain and associated states of anxiety and depression can lead to higher medical and prescription drug costs, greater use of sick days as a result of caregiving, and higher rates of short-term disability leave (Keating et Al., 2013)
  - In one study, employers paid about 8% more for the health care of caregiver employees compared to non-caregivers, potentially costing U.S. businesses \$13.4 billion per year (Choula & Feinberg, 2012).
- Keating et al. identified that there are some “discretionary” costs that may be incurred that are not a requirement but are strategies implemented by employees that can reduce avoidable costs. These costs are often considered an investment because it makes companies more competitive in the job market, and has proven to increase employee productivity and commitment (Small, 2013). Some of these benefits include senior care planners, adult day care subsidies and vouchers, or flexible scheduling.
  - Employers in the focus group reported offering flexible scheduling, earned days off programs, and partnerships with daycare/eldercare providers.

### ***Available supportive options and additional supports that would be helpful***

#### **Policies**

- Flexible work arrangements are the most commonly requested support made by caregivers according to the WorkLife Resource centre (EMORY). Some benefits that employers and caregivers reported to be helpful include:
  - Option to switch between full and part-time
  - Compressed work week
  - Flexible scheduling
- Caregivers also reported that the ability to telecommute or work from home, would be helpful.
  - Cisco Systems’ telecommuting program reported \$195 million savings in 2003 from increased worker productivity (Health Advocate, 2010).

- Caregivers need more than flexible time and emotional support because caregiving can cause financial hardships and therefore it is not feasible to take unpaid time off work. Caregivers and employers in the focus groups suggested:
  - A change to sick day policies to include family care or family medical appointments
  - Earned days off as an alternative to assist employees who have regular caregiving demands. Some companies offer this benefit allowing workers to work a certain amount of time over the regular workday allowing them to take a day off every other or every third week. This helps employers plan ahead to cover the caregiver's absence.
  - Sharing vacation and sick days.
    - This benefit allows coworkers to donate their vacation days or sick days to a caregiving employee who needs it. Employers who implemented this in supportive work environments found this program to be successful.
  - Caregivers reported that they would like to have some sort of income averaging, similar to the way a teacher's salary might be distributed. This would allow caregivers to take time off when they need it and still receive the same regular paycheck.
- Sensitivity training is something that employers felt would be beneficial.
  - Management plays a central role in workplace culture. Sensitivity training for management would help alleviate caregiver's fears of the negative repercussions of their dual roles. When employees can work with management to find solutions that balance work and care needs the whole team organization can benefit. Some caregivers reported having use of an informal buddy system where supervisors assigned backup presenters in case the caregiving presenter has an emergency situation.

## Services

- Employers in the focus group reported having some form of eldercare benefit for their staff. Services included partnering with a local day program. Literature suggests that other companies used subsidies, vouchers or discounts for child/eldercare, including respite (Health Advocate, 2010).
- Caregivers in the focus group suggested that having a private room on site that allows caregivers to make private calls from or just have space to take a break that is away from other noises and distractions. Limited research supports this fact, however the importance of quiet has been a recommended strategy for managing with stress and depression, in hospitals, and in many caregiving environments.

*“Stress comes not just from too much work and not enough control, but also from the constant onslaught of daily stimulation: emails, phones and all manner of entertainment and distraction. The best antidote [Quiet] is the cheapest—and the hardest to come by (Clores, 2012)”*

- Some employers offer employee wellness programs and workplace benefits that can be very useful for caregiving employees.
  - Some companies offer massage services as part of their employee benefits. Dwyer (2007) suggests that many caregivers are touch deprived which can lead to physical and emotional challenges. Massage can directly improve a person’s immune system, digestion, respiration, circulation, nervous system, and muscle health. Massage allows caregivers to be “cared for” and many caregivers reported feeling that the tension in their bodies melted away during massage.
  - For many caregivers, finding information and resources can be time consuming. Caregivers and employers have identified a need to support caregivers in this but offering some sort of referral service or caregiver support information sheet.
- Caregivers reported fear of stigma in the office, as well as feeling that they were being treated differently. Employers suggested that caregiver awareness education would be helpful.
  - Research suggests that it is best for the company to support of culture of care holistically, in involve the whole team - not just the caregiver and supervisor (Snelling S., 2013). This can be done through office lunch and learns or providing pamphlets in common areas such as break rooms.

## ***Enabling and complicating factors in the creation of a supportive work environment***

### **Enabling Factors**

- Workplace culture.
  - Work-life balance is a corporate value that is becoming increasingly important to younger generations of employees. Literature suggests that it does not matter what kind of benefits are offered in a workplace if an employee does not feel safe from discrimination or judgment. Employers confirmed this notion in the focus group.

*“One of our corporate values, and it’s been that way since ’98 is wellness and balanced lifestyle... I think because of the other values, people are more inclined to self-disclose ...”*

- Employers in the focus group recognized the importance of the quality of relationship between multiple levels of management and employees.
 

*“I’m fortunate, the area that I work in, I’m a manager and my director is supportive as well. So it allows me, as the manager, to be able to better support my employees.”*
- Creating a workplace culture where caregivers feel safe to communicate with management and coworkers, and to utilize services and benefits available gives the company a significant advantage.
  - Employers in the focus group said that open communication and caregivers being able to plan absences ahead where possible allowed them to accommodate caregiver’s family responsibilities and better plan and manage their department’s workload.
- The BC Employer Toolkit reported research suggests that productivity actually increases approximately 20% after employers implement family friendly workplace policies, staff turnover decreases by 50% (Small, 2013).
- Similarly in the *Best Practices in Workplace Eldercare* one employer states that the benefits that the company received from implementing family friendly strategies included improved retention, increased loyalty and productivity as well as higher employee engagement; which they felt far outweighed the cost invested into the programs (Wagner D. L. et Al., 2012).
- Knowledge of legal requirements. Not only is accommodating caregiving employees special circumstances a compassionate act that will increase productivity and loyalty; it has actually found by the courts to be a legal obligation.
 

*“The duty to accommodate means that sometimes it is necessary to treat someone differently in order to prevent or reduce discrimination... In the case of caregiving, a duty to accommodate may arise when an employee’s obligation to care for a family member, combined with the employer’s existing rules or policies, make the employee unable to participate fully at work. (OHRC, 2008)”*
- Employers felt that guidelines and knowledge about accommodation for caregivers would make it easier to enforce supporting caregivers in the workplace.

## Complicating

- Work still needs to get done. A common theme in the focus group with employers was the tension between cost and compassion.

- Employers reported that while they had compassion for and wanted to support their employees, ultimately the bottom line is important to the business and there are deadlines that still need to be met.
- The type of work limits the type of support available
  - Examples include teaching in educational environments.
 

*“We don’t have that ability to telework, we don’t have that ability to do compressed, we’re dealing typically with people working in the school environment. They have to be there....They have to be in the classroom. Either they’re an education assistant or teacher, what have you, so they’ve got the ability to apply for leave without pay. Most of them don’t want that, they want to be paid and so we’ve had some struggles. It’s been awful, to be honest because our insurance plan doesn’t have a niche for this.” - Quote from the employer focus group*
  - Employers in the focus group also talked about union involvement as a complicating factor.
    - Despite the fact that unions are bound by the same Human Rights “Duty to Accommodate (OHRC, 2008),” employers reported that having union involvement added a layer of complexity since they have to be wary of setting a precedence.
- Perception of accommodations
  - Caregivers identified the risk of resentment from work colleagues who were asked to take on more work in order to accommodate the caregiving employee.
    - In the employed caregiver focus groups, there were two caregiving employees who worked at the same company. One worked full time while the other worked part time. It was perceived that the part time employee received more accommodations than the full time employee.
  - “Almost half of employed caregivers feel that they cannot use flex work arrangements without it having a negative impact on their careers (RAPP, 2014).”
  - The Shriver Report “A Woman’s Nation Takes on Alzheimer’s” found 46 percent of female employees asked for time off for caregiving were denied (Snelling, 2013).

## **The benefits of a supportive environment for both caregivers and employers**

- Work schedule flexibility and other work-based supports offered by employers to their employed caregivers have generally been perceived quite positively and has led to increased loyalty, commitment, and satisfaction (Neal & Wagner, Goyer, 2013). Caregivers in the focus group reported:
  - That they are happy to stay in their current jobs because of the positive work environment
  - That they were motivated to ‘work harder’ to prove that they deserved the accommodations they were receiving to their supervisors and other coworkers.
- Caregivers develop skills that benefit the workplace. Caregivers in the focus group said these skills include: ability to focus, problem solve, research and have empathy for others.
- In the focus groups, caregivers identified that work actually gives them a ‘break’ from their family responsibilities. Similarly, in the focus group conducted with employers it was felt that some caregivers did not want to be identified in the workplace, because work was their place to be ‘normal’, essentially working was a form of respite for the caregiver. Anecdotally, this sense of respite at work has been identified by Alberta Caregivers Association’s clients as well.
- Employers in the focus group want to invest in good staff and foster good employee/employer relations. Literature supports that companies truly value experienced hard working employees and want to retain them in the workforce (Health Advocate, 2010). Caregivers have identified that feeling supported and valued made them feel a strong sense of loyalty to the company.
  - Workplace flexibility and an environment that supports a work-life balance has been identified as a key motivator for higher responsibility positions and it is proven to improve retention and moral (AARP, 2007).

## **The Intersection of Caregiving, Employment and Gender**

Caregivers face restricted work hours, decreased work productivity, career limitations and in some cases are forced to leave work all together. The issue runs even deeper than that. Many caregivers will then incur health expenses from their own declining health, and as a result of lost income due to caregiving responsibilities their pensions can be impacted significantly. Bittman and associates (2007) reported that the average annual incomes of those who have had caring responsibilities for 1 to 2 years is 30% lower than for non-caregivers (Keating, et Al, 2013).

While both men and women give care, the impacts of caregiving disproportionately affect women.

- Women spend more hours caregiving on average (Sinha, 2013)

- Women are more likely to miss work, and work reduced hours than men (Fast, Et Al., 2013)
- Women were also substantially more likely to assist with medical treatments (27% versus 18% of males) and housework, such as preparing meals (59% and 41% of male counterparts) (Sinha, 2013)
- It's telling that the focus groups were open to men and women, but only women attended, this is maybe not surprising since women tend to face greater employment consequences
- Women are also more likely to take over in cases where they are not the families larger wage earner

Research indicates that gender roles play a part in caregiving decisions and that it is “difficult to move fathers from the financial responsibility”. It is often the case that due to the fact that women on average earn less money, they will likely take over the primary caregiver role. For many families, the financial impact of losing or minimizing the male's salary tends to be far more substantial. This is reflected in countries that offer parental leave benefits for both mothers and fathers. According to Stats Canada report in countries where parental leave allocated to the father and is not transferrable to the mother 84-90% of men participate in parental leave - Compare to 10% of fathers filing for parental leave if the benefit is transferrable (Marshall, 2008). In the focus group with employed caregivers one of the participants stated that the outcome of a family discussion around caring for ageing parents was that because she was the lowest income earner of the family, she would be the main provider of care.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Awareness and Understanding***

A common theme running throughout the focus groups was the lack of awareness and understanding of caregiver issues. In a 2012 report, a majority of employers said that caregiving was a low priority or low on their radar (RAPP, 2014). Within the workplace, a lack of awareness and understanding leads to caregivers being reluctant to disclose their caregiver status for fear of negative repercussions or perceptions that they aren't 'pulling their weight'. Caregiving is an invisible issue socially as well as in the workplace.

### **Strategies to Enhance Awareness and Understanding**

1. Develop a business case for employers to better understand the advantages of supporting caregivers.
2. Develop and implement an awareness campaign to educate employers on the impact of caregiving in the workplace including:
  - a. Engage with media to gain attention to caregivers in the workplace.

- b. Provide presentations at HR conferences, lunch and learns, and at staff meetings.
- c. Create and distribute information materials at trade shows, networking events, industry groups and online.

### ***Legislation and Policies***

Employer's duties and responsibilities in relation to supporting caregivers in the workplace are mostly unknown to many employers and human resource professionals. Employers should offer reasonable and dignified solutions to accommodate the employee, up to the point of undue hardship (CHCC, 2014). An article titled "Caregiving is a corporate issue" enforces the idea that caregiving in the workplace is a challenge that needs to be met from a top down approach (Snelling, 2014). Despite the growing numbers of employed caregivers and the productivity and absenteeism costs caregiving can have, most employers are not prepared to address it (Snelling, 2014). Employers revealed that both changes in legislation and some best practice guidelines would help them better manage caregivers in the workplace.

### **Strategies to Impact Legislation and Company Policies**

1. Advocate for the recognition of working caregivers at employer level, as well as the provincial and federal level.
2. Provide employers with examples of corporate policies around flexible leave, work-life balance and family status as well as best practice guidelines for both hiring and supervising/managing caregiving employees.
3. Using the business case developed for awareness and understanding, develop a fact sheet to enforce the employer responsibilities similar to the Canadian Human Rights Commission "Guide to balancing work and caregiver obligations."

### ***Improve Workplace Culture***

Some employers have reported that implemented caregivers strategies went underutilized and therefore felt there was not a need at their organization (Snelling, 2014). It is important that new programs need to be promoted consistently and that the use of these programs remain confidential and without strings (Creating a Supportive Work Environment, n.d.). Evidence confirms that "the key factor between success and failure when implementing new caregiving and eldercare programs is whether one makes improving the culture a priority. Employees must feel sufficient corporate level support for caregiver programs in order to feel that it is safe to participate... (Small, 2013)" Immediate managers set the tone for sharing concerns in the workplace (Creating a Supportive Work Environment, n.d.) thus making it important to management to make sure employees feel safe and that caregiver support programs are visible to the employees.

## **Strategies to Improve Workplace Culture**

1. Develop training material for supervisors, managers and human resource professionals to:
  - a. Inform supervisors and management about issues in caregiving and impact on business,
  - b. Increase awareness of legal obligations to employers with caregiving responsibilities,
  - c. Provide examples of strategies others have employed that help reduce tension between work and family goals,
  - d. Promote awareness of caregiver resources, and
  - e. Increase understanding of the importance of maintaining an open door policy.
2. Create a toolkit for employers to develop their own action plan to manage caregiving employees that balances which could include a quick fact sheet for supervisors as well as a checklist to review with caregivers
3. Develop an awareness campaign that employers can implement in the workplace to increase awareness and understanding for the non-caregiving employees to reduce stigma and negative perceptions of caregiving peers. This could involve:
  - a. Promotional posters and pamphlets for employers to set out in communal areas such as break rooms to help start the conversation and demonstrate that family and work-life balance is a corporate value.
  - b. Articles about caregiving in company newsletters.
  - c. Presentations or lunch and learns at meetings centered on caregiver related topics.

## ***Improve Caregiver Supports***

There are many low or no cost options that employers can implement that would significantly improve the overall wellbeing of caregivers in the workplace. A common theme identified by caregivers and employers and was supported in literature was the need for information and emotional support. While many smaller independent companies will not have the resources to provide this onsite, the Alberta Caregivers Association has a registered social worker available during office hours by phone and in person that provides a very similar referral service. The Alberta Caregivers Association also offers group programs that could be made available in the workplace. There are many other community resources available that could assist employers in supporting caregivers.

## **Strategies to Improve Caregiver Supports**

1. Develop a list of low to no cost changes employers can implement to support caregivers such as the quiet room, workplace seminars, a resource library or changing “sick days” to a more accommodating, open ended employee leave day.
2. Increase awareness of programs and services offered by the Alberta Caregivers Association’s programs and other local resources that inform and emotionally support caregivers using promotional materials, resource information sheets, and caregiver information presentations in workplaces.

## ***Empower Caregivers***

Employers in the focus groups said that caregivers need to self-identify as soon as possible because a series of unexplained last minute absences or missed deadlines results can frustrate supervisors and management causing the situation to spiral into something that could have been avoided. According to the National Family Caregivers Association, in their 2001 survey of self-identified family caregivers, it says that “employees who self-identify as a caregiver are more than 90% become more proactive in seeking assistance and can begin to address their stress, guilt and health decline resulting in higher productivity and lower healthcare costs for employers (Centipede Health Network, 2014)”

## **Strategies to Empower Caregivers**

1. Create workplace related newsletter articles, pamphlets and online resources to empower caregivers in the workplace including:
  - a. Informing employees of their rights in the workplace, and
  - b. Employee responsibilities to their employer that will help caregivers such as communicating early and planning ahead where possible.

## ***Summary***

Caregiving is an issue that impacts individuals, communities, workplaces and the overall economy. Despite the prevalence of caregiving, it is an issue that is not widely recognized or thoroughly understood. It is imperative that employers take steps to understand and address the needs of working caregivers, as well as how a supportive workplace can benefit their company by increasing loyalty and productivity, and decreasing staff turnover.

*“If an employee is forced to choose between caring for a loved one and devoting themselves to work, the company will lose. That loss will most certainly be in work quality and, more deleterious in the long term, in the loss of the hearts and minds of employees in their commitment to the firm.”*

– Maureen Corcoran

Vice President of Health, Life and Inclusion, Prudential Financial, Inc.2 (Small, 2013)

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