

SUPPORTING FAMILY CAREGIVERS AT WORK

Why connection is the missing link for caregiver mental
health and workplace resilience



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REPORT

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Invisible and Essential: Caregivers at Work

Sarah is a mid-career project manager who enjoys her work and her team. Her colleagues and supervisors know they can rely on her to meet any deadline or client demand. She's sharp, punctual, professional, and respected across the firm.

At the office, her demeanor is calm and steady. But behind this exterior, Sarah is juggling far more than her projects. Between team meetings, she fields a stream of texts from her mother who is living with dementia. In her few breaks, she answers urgent calls from the home health aides coordinating her mother's care. Her inbox pings with updates from her children's schools—permission slips, schedule changes, reminders about sports practices. In the notes app on her phone, she keeps a running list of what each child needs this week, which medications her mother is running low on, and which deadlines she can't miss. Though unseen to most of her colleagues, this constant balancing act shapes how she moves through her day and, in many ways, how she leads.

While at times overwhelming, **these caregiving responsibilities sharpen the very qualities that make her exceptional at work.** Sarah's caregiving has honed her ability to prioritize under pressure, anticipate needs before they become problems, and adapt quickly to shifting demands. She brings empathy and active listening skills to her team, making her a trusted advisor in moments of stress. Her ability to coordinate across multiple systems, manage sensitive information, and persist in the face of uncertainty translates seamlessly into her work. **In short, caregiving has not held Sarah back. Instead, it has equipped her with skills that strengthen her work life and make her an invaluable team member.**

Still, Sarah does not call herself a "caregiver," although her unpaid caregiving responsibilities rival the demands of a second full-time job. She identifies as a mother, a daughter, and a project manager.

Sarah's story is not unique. In fact, caregiving is the hidden reality for nearly **three out of four employees**—whether or not they use the word "caregiver" to describe themselves.

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There are only four kinds of people in the world—those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers.

- Rosalynn Carter

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Who Is a “Caregiver?”

The definition of a caregiver is “anyone who provides support to a family member or loved one, including children of any age, parents, siblings, partners, and friends.” Support can include bringing a person to their medical appointments, taking care of household chores, or financially supporting someone who cannot support themselves.

But many people don’t identify with this label. They see themselves as daughters, sons, partners, parents, grandparents, neighbors, or friends doing what their loved one requires.

This identity gap matters. Also worth noting that if employees don’t recognize themselves as caregivers, they may miss out on critical support even when they desperately need it.

Reframing caregiving as a **universal life experience** is essential. Nearly everyone, across their lifespan, will provide care at some point. It is not a niche or exceptional condition but a stage of life that ebbs and flows.

The Number of Caregivers Is Growing

The numbers show just how profound this population shift is: **63 million Americans** are family caregivers, a 45% increase since 2015. 70% of caregivers are or were employed while providing care, and for the first time in U.S. history, eldercare has surpassed childcare as the most common caregiving responsibility for working adults.

- **8.4 million Americans** provide care to an adult living with a mental or emotional health issue, such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia. These caregiving roles can carry unique emotional strain and require specialized understanding and support. 16 million are in the “sandwich generation”, simultaneously supporting children and aging adults.
- **44% of caregivers are under 50**, making caregiving a defining feature of mid-career employees.
- **Caregiving is disproportionately diverse:** Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino caregivers are more likely to manage multigenerational responsibilities.

Caregivers in Conversation

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There is an exhaustion with caregiving, and it’s not the type of exhaustion that sleep will cure. It’s also not an exhaustion that you can easily or succinctly describe. Because of that it gets overlooked and underestimated by caregivers and people who know them. It’s all-encompassing. That’s what makes access to as many types of resources as possible so important.

- Kay, Caregiver

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70%

70% of caregivers are employed, and for the first time in U.S. history, eldercare has now surpassed childcare as the most common caregiving responsibility for working adults.



The intensity of care is rising too:

- 30% of caregivers have been providing care for five or more years.
- Nearly one in four provides 40+ hours of care per week.

By 2030, the caregiver support ratio will shrink to just four adults ages 45–64 for every one adult age 80+, down from seven to one in 2010. That means every workplace will feel the strain. The caregiving demands of employees are already threaded across workplaces. Supporting these employees just makes good business sense through increased retention, attendance, and a happier company culture.

And supporting the growing number of employees who are caregivers, like Sarah, is not just a matter of compassion. It is a strategic advantage for companies.

The Return on Investing in Caregivers

Far from being a liability, **your caregiving employees bring unique strengths** that organizations can leverage. Research shows caregivers often develop exceptional problem-solving skills, adaptability, and resilience as they navigate complex medical, logistical, and emotional challenges on a daily basis.

Nearly 60% of caregivers report improvements in core productivity skills like efficiency and task prioritizing, directly helping their ability to stay organized and meet competing demands at work.



The ROI

72%

Establishing caregiving benefits can deliver up to 72% ROI through reduced turnover, lower absenteeism, and higher engagement

77% of caregivers report growth in human skills like empathy and teamwork, which drive effective leadership, collaboration and inclusive workplace cultures.

By recognizing these strengths and creating policies that support them, employers not only reduce turnover but also benefit from a workforce that is deeply skilled in compassion, persistence, and creative problem-solving, traits essential in today's dynamic and human-centered workplace.

Chances are you recognize yourself, a loved one, or a colleague in Sarah's story. Without workplace support, caregiver strain can lead to absenteeism, distraction during work hours, and higher stress levels that directly impact productivity. Employers who implement caregiver-friendly benefits such as flexible schedules, paid leave, or digital tools that help coordinate care can reduce turnover, lower health care costs, and foster loyalty.

In fact, research shows U.S. businesses lose up to \$34 billion annually from employees managing caregiving without adequate support.



The Loss

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At the same time, employees who feel supported are more likely to stay engaged, healthy, and committed to their workplace. **Caregiving benefits send a message that a company values the whole person, not just the employee role.** This builds trust and strengthens culture, which pays off in retention and recruitment. In other words, helping employees balance caregiving and work is an investment in a more resilient and productive workforce, one that can sustain both business performance and employee loyalty over the long term. When evaluating supports and benefits, understanding the landscape of the company employee population is critical.

The Unequal Divide of Care Work

Caregiving is not experienced equally across employee demographic groups, and for many, is associated with a sense of loneliness. Caregivers of someone with a mental health condition may face additional challenges, including navigating stigma, treatment systems, and unpredictable symptoms. These hidden stressors can compound the emotional and financial weight of care, especially in workplaces where mental health is often still stigmatized.

Women, in particular, can face both professional setbacks and deep emotional strain. Among spousal caregivers, female caregivers notice higher levels of loneliness and show a steeper increase in loneliness over time than their male counterparts. In a broader sample of family caregivers, researchers have found that the demands of prolonged care are strongly associated with social isolation and loneliness, with women often reporting higher subjective loneliness scores.

For caregiver employees of color, the weight is heavier still. African American/Black (27.9%) and Hispanic/Latino (24.6%) adults are more likely to be caregivers than white adults (23.2%). They are also more likely to juggle multigenerational care, often with fewer financial resources and less workplace flexibility. This combination—race, income, and care—can create profound inequities, at work and in the home.

Uneven Burden of Care

27.9% African American/Black

24.6% Hispanic/Latino

23.2% White

African American/Black (27.9%) and Hispanic/Latino (24.6%) adults are more likely to be caregivers than white adults (23.2%).

Less than half of all caregivers are men (40%) however, the data says they struggle with loneliness more than in previous decades. According to data published by the Survey Center of American Life: “Fifteen percent of men have no close friendships at all, a fivefold increase since 1990.” The result for those with fewer friends is loneliness and isolation. For male caregivers, this growing social isolation can magnify the quiet burdens of care, especially in environments where vulnerability is seldom discussed.

And then there is the sandwich generation. Nearly one in four adults now supports both a child and an aging parent. Among caregivers under fifty, 47% are in this dual role.

These patterns show that while caregiving carries emotional cost for everyone, the ways caregiver loneliness manifests vary across gender, race, and life stage. This variation matters in both theory and in designing supports that truly meet different needs for all employees.



Caregivers at Work

Caregiving is not just an “at-home” role. Like Sarah, whose caregiving responsibilities don’t go away at the office door, caregiving is already embedded in workplaces.

52% of organizations do not keep track of their caregiving demographics, which means employers don’t know the weight their employees are carrying. And employees are not volunteering the information. While juggling multiple to-do lists, the data shows that fewer than half of employees ever tell their manager about their caregiving responsibilities. When employers don’t take an active role in tackling mental health stigma, evaluating if their culture is inclusive, or offering other benefits to caregivers, caregivers in the workplace fear being seen as less committed, less promotable, or a burden on the team. So they stay quiet and grow isolated, adding to their strain.

The strain is clear:

- More than one in three working caregivers reported balancing caregiving with their jobs was their biggest source of stress.
- 66% of working parents meet the criteria of parental burnout, and 61% describe their work stress as overwhelming.
- 40% of working parents are open to or actively seeking new roles.

Silence prevents working caregivers from accessing support, whether that’s flexible scheduling, employee assistance programs, or even being open about their needs with their supervisor. Instead, they compartmentalize,

managing two identities: the professional persona they show at work, and the caregiver self they keep hidden. The gap between these roles creates disconnection, which over time accelerates burnout and drives regrettable, costly attrition.

For employers, the stakes are enormous. Across industries, Gallup estimates that replacing a leader or manager can cost the company up to 200% of the lost employee’s salary. **The lesson is straightforward but urgent: caregiving is not a private matter happening off the clock. It is a workplace reality.**

Stressed Out

66% Parental Burnout

61% Overwhelming Work Stress

66% of **working parents** meet the criteria of parental burnout, and 61% describe their work stress as overwhelming.

The Real, Lived Experience of Caregiving While Working

For working caregivers, every day is a balancing act of visible and invisible tasks. When caregiving remains unseen and unrecognized, both individually and systemically, the weight can feel heavier.

The heavy mental load—anticipating needs, coordinating logistics, staying on high alert while managing paid work responsibilities—creates a constant state of stress. Over time, it corrodes mental and physical health. Research shows that chronic stress keeps the body locked in fight-or-flight mode, fueling cardiovascular strain, immune suppression, and disrupted sleep. [NAMI research](#) has found that caregivers of individuals with serious mental illness experience particularly high rates of chronic stress and guilt. Many feel they must be “always on,” which can lead to burnout and despair if left unaddressed.

Encouraging caregivers to reach out—to peers, counselors, or groups like NAMI Family Support Groups—can make a profound difference. Caregivers are effectively on a constant fast lane to burnout.

And yet, many caregivers also describe the role as deeply meaningful. Providing care to a loved one can bring a sense of purpose, fulfillment, joy, and real moments of connection that strengthen bonds and affirm values of love, loyalty, and resilience. The challenge is not that caregiving lacks value, but that without

adequate workplace recognition and support, the costs too often overshadow the rewards. When organizations acknowledge both the strengths and the strain, caregivers are better able to sustain the vital roles they play—at home and at work.

Caregivers in Conversation

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Having a good therapist has been critical to care for my own mental health while caring for my son, who has his own mental health challenges... I need room in my life to take care of others and myself. **I can't take care of others if I'm not taking care of myself.**

- Jeannette, Caregiver

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The Mental Health Reality of being a Working Caregiver

The statistics show what caregivers are already quietly feeling:

- **47% of caregivers have experienced increased anxiety, depression, or other mental health concerns in the past year.**
- 40% to 70% of family caregivers have clinically significant symptoms of depression, often exacerbated by feelings of isolation and loneliness.
- Caregiver employees consistently rate their mental health worse than their counterparts.

- Due to their caregiving responsibilities, 23% of caregivers report difficulty in caring for their own health. This figure is even higher for females (26%), LGBTQ+ caregivers (33%), Hispanic/Latino caregivers (27%), and lower-income caregivers (31%).

The way these statistics show up at work are in the migraines that won't go away, the medical appointments caregivers skip to pay for someone else's, and the financial juggling act that increases stress and mental burden.

Caregivers report higher rates of work-related mental health challenges compared to all employees

 In the past year, have you ever experienced the following at work? % selecting yes	CAREGIVER?	
	TOTAL	YES NO
Felt burned out because of your job	52%	60% 49%
Felt so overwhelmed it made it hard to do your job	40%	49% 35%
Felt your mental health suffer because of demands at work	37%	46% 33%
Felt your productivity suffer because of your mental health	34%	45% 28%
Considered quitting because of work's impact on your mental health	25%	33% 22%
Resigned or quit because of work's impact on your mental health	7%	9% 5%

Base: All respondents (n=2,376), Caregiver (n=835), not Caregiver (n=1,541), Age 18-29 (n=241), Age 30-49(n=1,107), Age 50-64 (n=902), Age 65+ (n=126)

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Loneliness: The Silent Epidemic

When caregivers feel uncomfortable opening up about their responsibilities at work—or seeking support at work—isolation and loneliness creep in. Caregivers may often feel like “I’m the only one,” adding to a heavier burden because they are not able to process what they are experiencing. They miss out on sources of connection, which is a first step in building resilience and mental wellness at work. There is no one to help empathize or carry the load, providing even a semblance of relief.

The U.S. Surgeon General has warned that parents and caregivers are experiencing loneliness at a much higher level than other adults, and that loneliness is as harmful to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. It’s harmful to mental health, too. Lonely people are twice as likely to be depressed, and in the U.S., absenteeism attributed to loneliness costs employers an estimated \$154 billion annually. Keep Company’s research adds a workplace dimension: employees who report loneliness are three times more likely to consider reducing or ending their participation in the workforce. (Keep Company)

Loneliness compounds invisibility, and invisibility drives attrition. **The antidote is connection.**

The Facts

47%

experienced mental health concerns in the past year.

40-70%

have clinically significant symptoms of depression often exacerbated by feelings of isolation and loneliness.

23%

of caregivers report difficulty in caring for their own health as a result of their caregiving.



Why Connection Is the Antidote

When Sarah finally admitted to a colleague that she was struggling to care for her three kids and mother with dementia, she felt a weight lift. The workload and family demands—and her commitment to both—didn't change, but being heard gave her a moment of relief. She didn't feel invisible and like she had to juggle two personas anymore. In fact, she was met with a surprising response: **“You are not alone.”**

That moment of recognition is not just “nice to have.” When people experience connection, they feel a genuine sense of understanding, care, and reciprocity with another person. It's this erosion of organic connection—at work, in neighborhoods, and even in families—that the U.S. Surgeon General pointed to as a driver of the public health crisis.

When people lack space to share their experiences with another person, the load grows heavier, not lighter. But when even one trusted colleague listens—without minimizing or problem-solving—the psychological relief is significant. Neuroscience research shows that sharing emotional burdens reduces activation in the brain's stress circuits, offering a measurable sense of calm and reduced strain.

Social support is a critical protective factor for resilience; connection with others is as fundamental to health and well-being as nutrition and physical activity. Without it, caregivers are at heightened risk for depression, anxiety, and burnout.

Keep Company's own data confirms the organizational opportunity. Of participants in connection-focused groups, after just a few weeks:

95%

report feeling less alone and more supported.

79%

report taking better care of their mental health.

78%

report advocating for themselves more often, asking for help when they need it.

How To Drive Connection at Work



1. Normalize open dialogue. Fewer than half of workers have ever told their manager about their caregiving responsibilities and the potential mental health impacts. Employers can change this by training managers to ask open-ended, empathetic questions, sharing about their own caregiving status, and signaling through policies and actions that caregiving is a universal life experience.



2. Create spaces for shared experience. Caregivers often describe the pain of thinking...“I’m the only one.” Peer groups, ERGs, or facilitated spaces like group coaching can help dismantle that isolation and bolster mental resilience.



3. Train managers. Too often, a caregiver’s experience at work hinges on a single manager’s response. Training managers to recognize signs of stress or overwhelm, respond with empathy, and point employees to resources can transform an employee’s trajectory. A NAMI poll found that 75% of workers believe it is appropriate to have mental health conversations at work. Managers who know how to start those conversations reduce stigma and build trust.



4. Update policies for modern realities. For the first time, more U.S. employees are providing eldercare than childcare. Yet eldercare remains largely absent from benefit design. Additionally, considering all kinds of caregiving, such as caring for an adult child with a mental health condition, can decrease stigma. Flexible schedules or work sharing, expanded leave (paid and unpaid), and eldercare-specific or adult.



5. Measure the ROI. Supporting caregivers at work is a business need. Establishing caregiving benefits can deliver up to 72% ROI through reduced turnover, lower absenteeism, and higher engagement. When three in four employees are navigating caregiving and work, responding to this demand is critical. Creating a sense of belonging boosts performance: Employees who feel seen and supported are more productive, more committed, and more likely to stay.

Five Ways Colleagues Can Support Caregivers

Culture is also built by everyday interactions between teammates.

Colleagues who know how to respond can erase stigma and create micro-moments of relief.

There are some simple reframes colleagues can try to help their coworkers feel seen.



1. Normalize empathy. Empathy is a state of being, not an action. Even brief interactions can help caregivers feel supported, rather than isolated. The key is to respond without problem-solving or offering your opinion.

Instead of: “Why are you leaving early again?”

Try: “It seems like you’ve got a lot going on right now. How can I help?”

Instead of: “I don’t know how you do it all.”

Try: “I know it takes a lot of effort and energy to do as much as you are right now.”



2. Offer practical relief. Covering a meeting, swapping a shift, or sharing notes is practical relief that helps caregivers feel supported in the workplace—not because they don’t want to do their work, but to feel like they have colleagues who will support them when times are especially difficult.



3. Open the door to hold space. Allowing caregivers to discuss what they’re going through can help open the door to social support, a crucial protective factor against stress and burnout. ERGs or affinity groups focused on supporting caregivers are a powerful signal for support, and an impactful, tactical solution.



4. Point to resources. Colleagues can help remind one another of support systems like the NAMI HelpLine (1-800-950-NAMI), peer support groups, company benefits, and local support.



5. Model recognition and support from the top: A culture of connection can be created from the top and carried forward by colleagues. When a senior leader recognizes their personal caregiving responsibilities, or even recognizes that employees may be navigating their own caregiving, it creates a powerful, implicit permission to show up at work as a whole person.

Connection is not optional. It's the future of work with caregivers on the rise.

Caregiving is not happening on the edges of workplaces. A universal life experience, it touches everyone. Caregiving is a defining workplace challenge of our time, and employers can meet this moment by choosing to acknowledge and support them.

Caregivers in Conversation

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What I would tell any caregiver is to really utilize that community. The best gift a caregiver can give themselves is community. Don't make rules about how "big" it has to be, or how "small". Feel comfortable asking for what you need. Period.

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- Kay, Caregiver

Connection is key. For too long, it has been dismissed as a “soft” benefit—one that is nice to have but not critical to business outcomes. The evidence says otherwise. Connection is foundational to overall employee health. It is the infrastructure that allows employees to collaborate effectively, and carry out their dual roles without burning out.

Without it, caregiving remains invisible and isolating. With it, employees stay, thrive, and bring the very skills caregiving sharpens—empathy, adaptability, and resilience—back into their work and are able to maintain their mental health.

The call to action is clear: Invest in caregivers, not only with policy but with structures of connection. Normalize open dialogue. Create spaces for caregivers to speak about their mental health and caregiving needs without shame. Train colleagues and managers to respond with empathy. Provide benefits that reflect today's reality, where caregiving is the assumption rather than the exception.

Investments that strengthen caregivers strengthen the entire workforce.



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NAMI

NAMI is the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. NAMI works to educate, support, advocate, listen, and lead to improve the lives of people with mental illness and their loved ones.

Through NAMI StigmaFree Workplace, partnering organizations engage in the mental health dialogue for employees at every level. By building mental health awareness, encouraging a culture of care, and ensuring all employees have access to mental health support, NAMI StigmaFree partners ensure their employees have the support they need to thrive.

NAMI HelpLine is available M-F, 10 a.m. – 10 p.m. ET. Call 800-950-6264, text "NAMI" to 62640, or email. In a crisis, call or text 988 (24/7).
<https://stigmafree.nami.org/>

Keep Company

Keep Company is a coaching and mentoring platform re-building the infrastructure for human connection at work. By connecting similarly situated employees to each other, Keep Company's platform and programs equip organizations to more meaningfully support key employee segments, like caregivers. The company's patented matching technology organizes employees into curated peer groups, built to maximize human connection, and then automates program management, scheduling, and engagement tracking. Keep Company is re-thinking how meaningful human connection happens at work.

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