



Trends

CARE PACKAGE

Employers can help employees who are struggling with eldercare responsibilities

BY CAROLYN TINGLIN

The workforce demographic is changing and so are the needs of employees caring for seniors. More than eight million Canadians are caregivers, providing supervision and/or care for adults with a chronic illness or disability, according to 2012 figures from Statistics Canada. Many of these

caregivers are employed, dealing with work and, often, childcare at the same time.

Caregiving responsibilities affect the workplace in many ways. In 2012, 43% of employed caregivers said they arrived at work late, left early or took time off during the day to care for ill loved ones, Statistics Canada notes.

Juggling work life with family life can leave employees stressed and anxious, leading to higher absenteeism and lower productivity. And employers will become more vulnerable to eldercare issues as Canada's population ages—unless they give workers the support they need. Here are a few ways that companies can help.

1) Education – Provide education to managers and employees about stress management and conditions afflicting the elderly, such as dementia and Parkinson's disease.

2) Flex Time – Allow compressed work weeks, earlier or later start times and weekend work. The notion that a nine-to-five schedule is necessary for high productivity is increasingly considered outdated, with more firms

focusing on results rather than on physical presence.

3) Compassionate Care Leave – This kind of leave (particularly paid leave) is rarely promoted in the workplace. And unpaid leave options are underused by employees, compared with childcare benefits. As a result, employees often use vacation days to take care of family members once they are out of sick leave time.

4) Programs – Provide access to social recreation day programs for seniors. These programs usually operate during work hours, allowing seniors to socialize, exercise, challenge their minds and enjoy

they can research and recommend community services. When EAPs provide such referral services, the employee pays out of pocket directly to the program provider.


Another way that companies can facilitate access to eldercare programs is by contracting with agencies that provide these programs. For example, in British Columbia, some private and publicly funded adult day programs are available, although publicly supported programs have long waiting lists. For instance, according to the Fraser Health Authority, the average wait for subsidized adult day programs in the Lower Mainland is from six weeks to six months, depending on

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planned outings. Employees who use these programs get peace of mind knowing that their loved one is cared for while they're at work and therefore are less likely to take time off to manage emergent issues. Depending on the type of contract that the employer negotiates, employees can pay a nominal fee for using these programs, or the employer can cover the fee directly.

Organizations can provide access to these programs in different ways. One way is to renegotiate the employee assistance program (EAP), ensuring that it includes access to senior programs. EAPs can't provide eldercare directly, but

the needs of the individual. Other provinces, such as Ontario and Alberta, have similar services, most of which are run by the provincial government at the regional level.

As Canadians age, eldercare is becoming an issue for more workers. Given the direct link between eldercare duties and work productivity, it makes good business sense for firms to support their staff. 

Carolyn Tinglin is director of operations with Wellness Centers of Canada. carolyn@everydayresilience.net