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When a Workforce Shortage Crisis and a Caregiving Crisis Meet “Wisconsin Working Caregivers: Strategies and Resources for Employers”

Madison, WI - The workforce shortage crisis being felt by businesses across Wisconsin includes a characteristic that is often overlooked: The need to support family caregivers in the workplace.

Employers experience a drain on productivity when employees struggle to balance their work lives with the responsibilities of caring for children, aging relatives, or disabled family members. In a recent survey, more than eight in ten employed caregivers in Wisconsin reported having their work life interrupted, resulting in workplace accommodations such as using flex time, reducing work hours, or quitting work entirely.

“Without adequate support, working caregivers and their employers suffer,” said Lynn Gall, Family Caregiver Support Programs Manager for the Wisconsin Department of Health Services and member of the survey project conducted by the Wisconsin Family and Caregiver Support Alliance (WFACSA). *“The results showed us the challenges faced by working family members and friends and the businesses that employ them. Our goal at WFACSA is for every employer in Wisconsin to know about our state’s free Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs), family caregiver support programs, and other community organizations available to help support their employees.”*

Conducted in partnership with UW-Madison Division of Extension, the [Wisconsin Working Caregivers Strategies and Resources for Employers](#) report published by WFACSA provides insight into challenges of recruiting and retaining employees in the current job climate. It also identifies opportunities for businesses to make positive changes simply by tapping resources already available in every Wisconsin community.

Numerous studies, including a [Harvard Business School](#) project called *“Managing the Future of Work: The Caring Company,”* note that employers can attract and retain more workers by helping staff balance work and family caregiving responsibilities. Employers may not realize that one in four working-age adults provides care or financial assistance to an older family member or loved one with a disability or long-term such as an adult child, spouse, or other loved one. This means that at least one quarter of potential hires and those currently working are balancing home and job responsibilities in addition to traditional child rearing.

“We learned that a few small changes can transform businesses into a place where employees will want to build a long career,” says Harriet Redman, Executive Director of WisconSibs and member of the WFACSA project. *“That is why we are excited to share our survey results and open the conversation around the free and low-cost strategies and resources already available to support businesses.”*

The survey also found that nearly 3/4 of respondents were not meeting their own personal needs, such as taking care of their own health, and 2/3 had difficulty balancing care for someone at home. Seventy-two percent said they were tired or worn out all the time, while 90 percent said their

emotional or physical health had worsened since taking on a caregiving role. (2-page synopsis of survey findings [here](#).)

Approximately 40 million Americans are providing care to an adult family member or friend, and nearly 60% of them (approximately 24 million adults) also work a paying job. Even more workers are providing care for a child with disabilities or special healthcare needs. Not only do employed caregivers experience high levels of stress, but their dual roles also impact their careers and employers.

The UW Division of Extension Employed Caregiver Survey is free and available to any employer interested in surveying their own workforce. Click the “How To Host a Survey” tab at <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/agingfriendlycommunities/employed-caregiver-survey/>.

The mission of the [Wisconsin Family and Caregiver Support Alliance](#) is to raise awareness of family and caregiver support needs and increase the availability of and access to services and supports - both paid and unpaid - which will keep people across the lifespan engaged in their community as long as they desire. For information about the Alliance and to find resources to support families and provide care for a loved one, visit <http://wisconsincaregiver.org/alliance>.