THE CAREGIVING IMPERATIVE:

ORGANIZATIONAL SOLUTIONS FOR SUPPORTING CAREGIVERS AND ELEVATING BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. *Organizations that take a proactive, instead of reactive, approach to supporting caregivers perform better on key business indicators, including employee engagement (71% versus 48%) and recruitment (72% versus 53%).* One way that organizations can take a proactive approach to caregiving is by evaluating their policies and benefits that impact caregivers on a regular basis: Organizations that regularly evaluate their policies are more likely to rate employee engagement at their organization as good or very good **(67%)** compared to organizations that evaluate their policies reactively **(57%)** or not at all **(38%)**. They are also less likely to report struggling to support caregivers of all types.

2. *Organizations often provide support and resources that are misaligned with the realities and needs of caregivers.* At least **80%** of employees with caregiving responsibilities say the care they provide is long-term, yet HR professionals are less than half as likely to say their organization is effective in addressing the long-term, enduring care needs of caregivers **(35%)** compared to the short-term, episodic care needs **(76%)**.

3. *Despite their critical role, most organizations do not equip their people managers with the necessary resources to support employees with caregiving responsibilities.* Only **36%** of organizations provide people managers with resources on how to manage employees with caregiving responsibilities. However, organizations that provide resources to their people managers are significantly more likely to rate their people managers as effective at supporting caregivers **(83%)** compared to organizations that do not **(65%)**. This impacts organizational outcomes: Organizations with people managers who are effective at supporting caregivers are significantly more likely to rate their retention of individual contributors and managers as good or very good **(74%** versus **44%)**.

4. *Low employee utilization of caregiving-related benefits stems from both a lack of awareness and unsupportive workplace cultures.* Nearly half of HR professionals **(49%)** cite lack of employee awareness as a key factor in low benefit utilization rates, while **51%** of workers with caregiving responsibilities say they are not fully familiar with the caregiving benefits their organization offers. Yet only **24%** of organizations take active steps, such as hosting webinars or informational sessions, to educate employees about available resources. Workplace culture further complicates the issue — **35%** of working caregivers feel some discomfort when seeking caregiver resources. Additionally, many caregivers perceive significant risks when using these benefits, including jeopardizing their chances at a promotion **(46%)**, creating extra burdens for their team **(43%)**, and being trusted with fewer responsibilities **(42%)**.

INTRODUCTION

Caregiving responsibilities are increasingly defining the lives of many employees in today's workforce. According to the most recent data available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' American Time Use Survey, 30.6% of the employed population ages 18 and older provided care to a household and/or non-household member on an average day in 2023.[1] For working caregivers, they must balance their professional obligations with caregiving for aging parents, children, and/or other family members.

Driven by demographic shifts, longer life expectancies, and evolving family dynamics, this dual responsibility is not a temporary phenomenon, but a persistent and growing challenge that organizations are not fully prepared for. For example, a SHRM survey of workers with caregiving responsibilities[2] found that at least **80%** of caregivers anticipate the primary care they provide to be long-term, yet only **35%** of HR professionals say their organization is effective at addressing the long-term needs of employees with caregiving responsibilities. Furthermore, **1 in 3** HR professionals (**33%**) are unfamiliar with the caregiving needs of their organization's workforce.

In the past year, due to insufficient support with their caregiving responsibilities, **28%** of working caregivers have had to reduce the number of hours they worked, **21%** have had to reduce their workload, and **14%** have changed jobs for more flexibility.[3] The strain of caregiving affects not only employees' well-being and productivity but also raises pressing questions for employers about how to effectively support their workforce. Given the importance of this topic, SHRM gathered data from 1,470 HR professionals, 3,042 working caregivers, 1,249 unemployed caregivers, and 1,543 workers without caregiving responsibilities and used it for the following objectives:

1 Understand the different approaches organizations take to address the caregiving needs of their workforce.

2 Assess how different approaches to supporting working caregivers are linked to organizational outcomes.

3 Examine the impact that being a working caregiver has on organizational and personal outcomes.

Addressing this topic requires a concerted effort to foster awareness, implement supportive policies, and create an environment where both organizations and employees can thrive amid these challenges. The research underscores that organizations that address these challenges through the implementation of proactive caregiving approaches, effective people managers, and relevant caregiving benefits are better positioned to withstand talent shortages and challenges, as they have better recruitment, retention, and engagement among their employees.

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[1]SHRM calculation based on American Time Use Survey (ATUS) microdata downloaded from IPUMS ATUS, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.
[2]In this research, a primary caregiver was defined as an individual who assists another person in their daily functioning needs on a regular basis. This caregiving is on a personal level and is unpaid, rather than in a professional capacity. Categories of caregivers are elder, adult, and child caregivers. Categories were not mutually exclusive.
[3]*Care and Careers: Navigating Caregiving and Work Responsibilities,* SHRM, 2025.

CAREGIVING APPROACHES LINKED TO ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Organizations play a pivotal role in supporting employees with caregiving responsibilities, and adopting effective approaches is essential for fostering both employee well-being and organizational success. By understanding the unique challenges caregivers face, implementing proactive strategies, and equipping managers with the right resources, organizations can create a more supportive environment. Tailored policies and regular evaluation further ensure that caregiving support aligns with employees' needs, driving better engagement and performance across the board.

UNDERSTANDING THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES THAT EMPLOYEES WITH CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES FACE

Categories of Caregivers

Child Caregiver:
A primary caregiver to one or more individuals ages 0-17, including but not limited to biological, step, or foster children; legal wards; nieces/nephews; siblings under the age of 18; or children for whom one stands in loco parentis for.

Adult Caregiver:
A primary caregiver to one or more individuals ages 18-64 with a disability or health impediment, including but not limited to a spouse, sibling, cousin, or adult child.
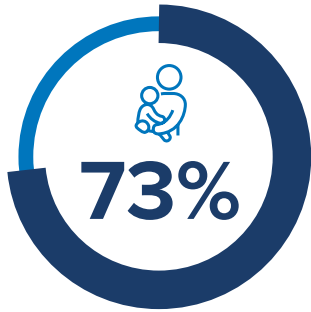
Elder Caregiver:
A primary caregiver to one or more individuals ages 65 and older, including but not limited to parents, in-laws, grandparents, or aunts/uncles.

To effectively balance business demands with caregiving needs, organizations must first grasp the unique challenges faced by working caregivers. This understanding is particularly crucial for those managing adult or elder care responsibilities — a growing yet often overlooked area. Unfortunately, many employers struggle to comprehend the complexities of these roles, hindering their ability to implement meaningful support strategies. For example, **73%** of organizations report understanding the unique challenges that employees with child caregiving responsibilities have. In contrast, only **50%** and **49%** of organizations, respectively, report understanding the unique challenges employees with adult and elder caregiving responsibilities face.
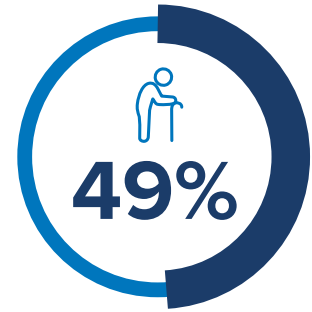
Organizations are more likely to understand the unique challenges faced by employees with child care responsibilities compared to adult care and elder care responsibilities.

73%

of organizations understand the challenges **child caregivers** face.

50%
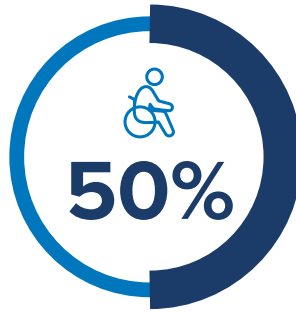
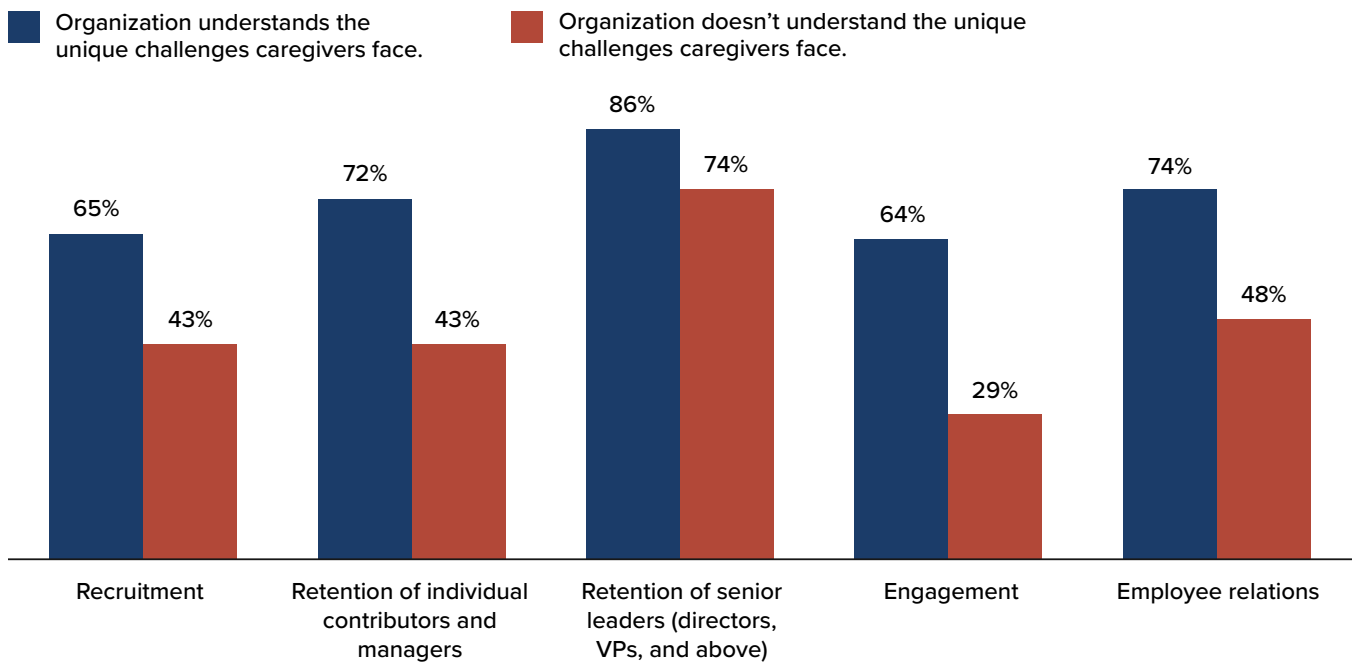of organizations understand the challenges **adult caregivers** face.

49%

of organizations understand the challenges **elder caregivers** face.

Organizations that understand the unique challenges working caregivers face[4] are significantly more likely to rate their organizational performance across key business indicators as good or very good compared to organizations that do not understand these challenges.

Organizations That Understand the Unique Challenges Working Caregivers Face Are Significantly More Likely to Rate Their Organizational Performance as Good or Very Good

Percentage of HR professionals who rate their organization's performance on the following indicators as either good or very good:

- ■ Organization understands the unique challenges caregivers face.
- ■ Organization doesn't understand the unique challenges caregivers face.

	Recruitment	Retention of individual contributors and managers	Retention of senior leaders (directors, VPs, and above)	Engagement	Employee relations
Understands	65%	72%	86%	64%	74%
Doesn't understand	43%	43%	74%	29%	48%

[4]Calculated as HR professionals who agreed with at least one of the following statements: "My organization understands the unique challenges of employees with child care responsibilities," "My organization understands the unique challenges of employees with adult care responsibilities," and/or "My organization understands the unique challenges of employees with elder care responsibilities."

MEETING THE MOMENT

Addressing the Growing Demands of Elder Care: The gap in employers' understanding of the unique challenges faced by employees with elder care responsibilities is an area that organizations should not overlook if they want to support their workforce effectively. Only **41%** of HR professionals feel prepared to help employees with elder care responsibilities, compared to **56%** of HR professionals who feel prepared to help employees with child care responsibilities. In the next five years, nearly **1 in 5 working caregivers (18%)** expect to take on new or additional elder caregiving responsibilities. Among employees without current caregiving responsibilities, elder caregiving is the most anticipated responsibility, with **13%** expecting to take it on in the next five years (compared to **5%** anticipating taking on caregiving for a child and **3%** for an adult).[5] This should come as no surprise: According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2023 National Population Projections, just over 1 in 5 Americans will be age 65 or older in 2030. Organizations that do not understand the unique challenges of elder caregivers are almost twice as likely to struggle to support these caregivers (**69%** versus **36%**). According to current working elder caregivers, the most common types of support they would like to see from their employers when it comes to providing elder care are help navigating benefits related to elder caregiving **(71%)**, managing stress and mental health **(68%)**, and financial planning for caregiving **(66%)**.

Employee Preferences for Elder Care Assistance from Employers

| Help navigating elder care benefits **(71%)** | Managing stress and mental health **(68%)** | Financial planning for caregiving **(66%)** |

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[5] *Care and Careers: Navigating Caregiving and Work Responsibilities,* SHRM, 2025.

TAKING A PROACTIVE, RATHER THAN REACTIVE, APPROACH

When it comes to addressing the needs of employees with caregiving responsibilities, HR professionals are more likely to describe their organization's approaches as reactive than proactive. This is particularly the case when addressing the needs of employees with adult or elder caregiving responsibilities.
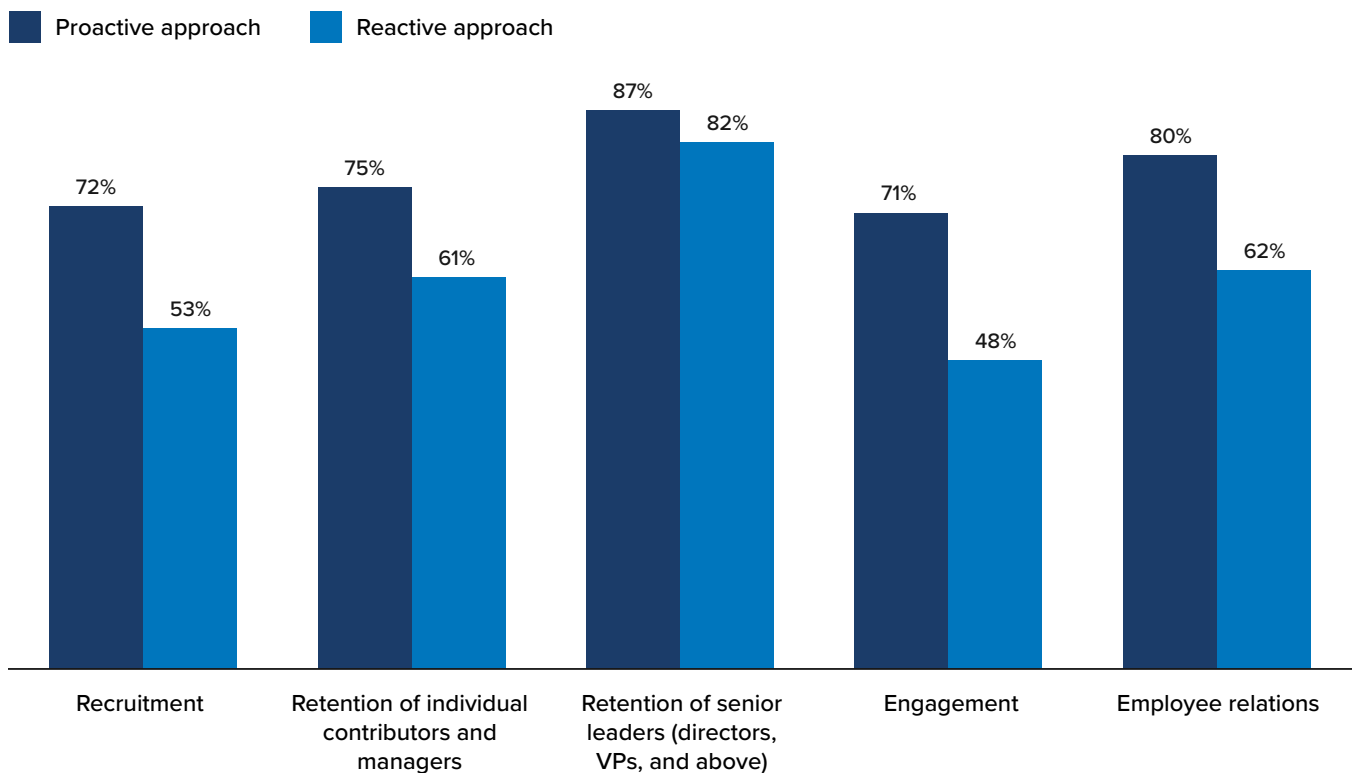
> » **68%** of HR professionals would describe their organization's approach to addressing the needs of employees with <u>child care</u> responsibilities as **reactive** rather than **proactive**.

> » **88%** of HR professionals would describe their organization's approach to addressing the needs of employees with <u>adult care</u> responsibilities as **reactive** rather than **proactive**.

> » **88%** of HR professionals would describe their organization's approach to addressing the needs of employees with <u>elder care</u> responsibilities as **reactive** rather than **proactive**.

However, organizations that embrace a proactive approach[6] tend to report significantly better performance across key business indicators than reactive ones. Looking toward the future, this proactive strategy becomes even more crucial. In the next five years, **21%** of working caregivers expect to assume new or additional primary caregiving responsibilities for a child, **14%** for an adult, and **18%** for an elder.[7]

Organizations Taking a Proactive Approach to Caregiving Are Significantly More Likely to Rate Their Organizational Performance as Good or Very Good

Percentage of HR professionals who rate their organization's performance on the following indicators as either good or very good:

■ Proactive approach   ■ Reactive approach

Indicator	Proactive approach	Reactive approach
Recruitment	72%	53%
Retention of individual contributors and managers	75%	61%
Retention of senior leaders (directors, VPs, and above)	87%	82%
Engagement	71%	48%
Employee relations	80%	62%

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[6]Calculated as HR professionals who said their organization takes a proactive approach with at least one of three types of caregiving (i.e., child, adult, and elder).
[7]*Care and Careers: Navigating Caregiving and Work Responsibilities,* SHRM, 2025.

PROACTIVELY EVALUATING AND MODIFYING POLICIES

**Evaluation of policies that impact caregivers:**
To ensure organizational policies that impact employees with caregiving responsibilities remain effective and relevant, regular evaluation is essential. Yet only **1 in 4 (26%)** organizations routinely review their policies that impact caregivers, with **65%** of these reviews occurring only once a year. Alarmingly, **nearly half (49%)** of organizations only evaluate such policies on an as-needed basis — reacting to issues as they arise — while **15%** never conduct evaluations at all, exemplifying the reactive approach most organizations take to supporting caregivers.

Failure to routinely assess these policies can lead to missed opportunities in addressing caregiver needs, hindering both employee and organizational performance. For example, organizations that routinely evaluate their caregiving policies are significantly more likely to rate their organization's employee engagement as good or very good compared to organizations that evaluate policies as needed or never evaluate their policies.
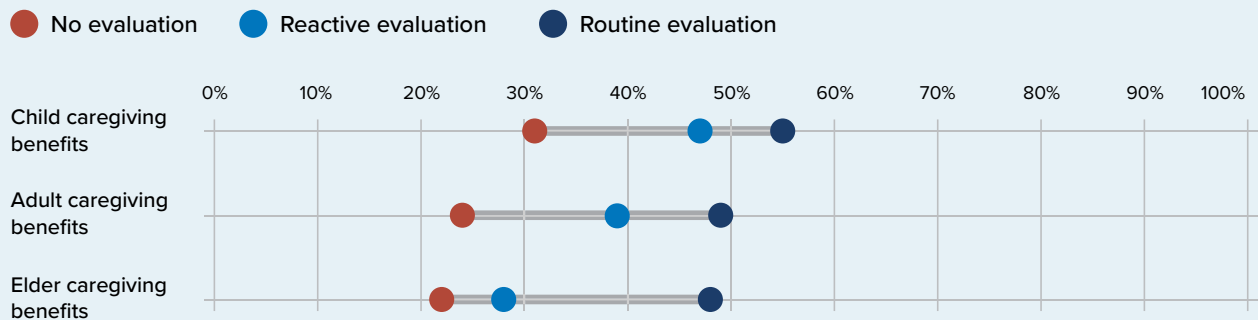
Organizations That Routinely Evaluate Their Caregiving Policies Are More Likely to Report Good or Very Good Employee Engagement

■ Employee engagement rated as very poor or poor

■ Employee engagement rated as fair

■ Employee engagement rated as good or very good
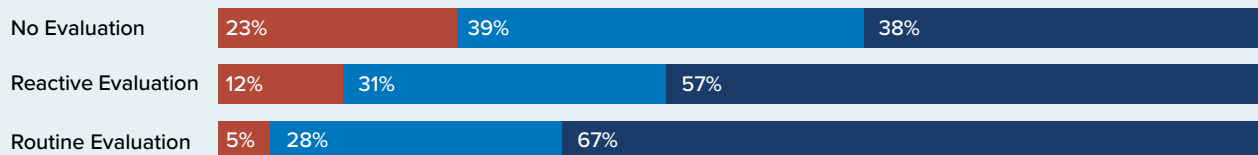
No Evaluation	23%	39%	38%
Reactive Evaluation	12%	31%	57%
Routine Evaluation	5%	28%	67%

Organizations That Routinely Evaluate Their Caregiving Policies Are More Likely to Report That Employees Are Satisfied with Their Caregiving Benefits than Organizations That Evaluate Less Frequently
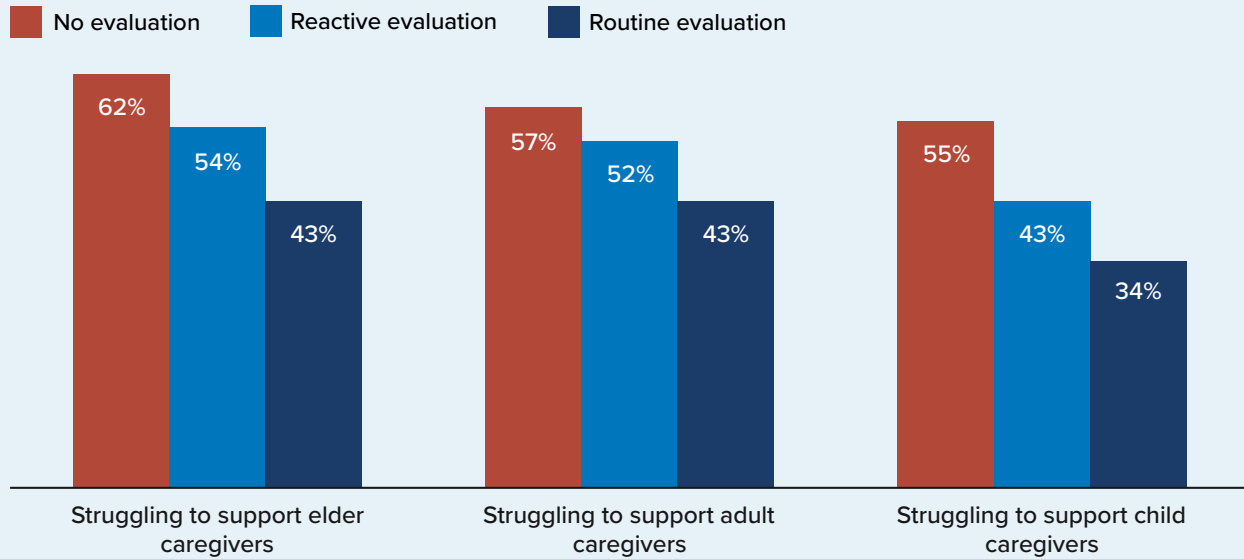
Percentage of employers, by policy evaluation strategy, who agree or strongly agree that employees at their organizations are satisfied with their benefit offerings in the following areas:

● No evaluation   ● Reactive evaluation   ● Routine evaluation

Regular Evaluation of Caregiving-Related Policies Enables Organizations to Better Support Caregivers

Organizations that do not evaluate their caregiving-related policies are significantly more likely to struggle to support caregivers of all types compared to organizations that evaluate their policies on a reactive or regular basis.

■ No evaluation   ■ Reactive evaluation   ■ Routine evaluation

	Struggling to support elder caregivers	Struggling to support adult caregivers	Struggling to support child caregivers
No evaluation	62%	57%	55%
Reactive evaluation	54%	52%	43%
Routine evaluation	43%	43%	34%

**Modification of policies that impact caregivers:**
Without routine evaluation, organizations lack the crucial insights needed to make informed decisions and update policies to align with their workforce's evolving circumstances. ***Despite the significant societal and workplace shifts over the past five years, 59% of organizations have not modified any of their existing policies to better accommodate diverse caregiving needs***, and an additional **13%** are unsure whether changes have been made.
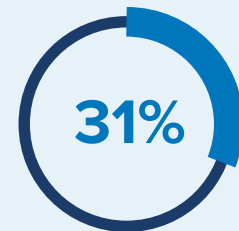
Among the organizations that have adapted their policies,
the three most common modifications are:
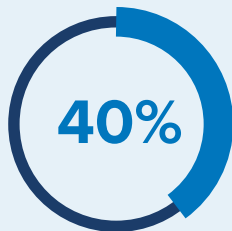
40%
Extending the duration of parental leave beyond what is legally required.
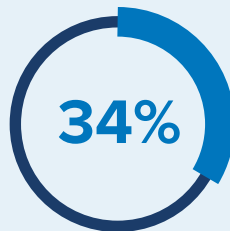
34%
Expanding the qualifying relationships that make an employee eligible for caregiving accommodations and benefits.

31%
Extending the duration of unpaid leave available.

Organizations that have modified their policies in the last five years to make them more inclusive of different types of caregivers, compared to organizations that have not made any modifications, are significantly more likely to report better employee engagement (**63%** versus **52%**), recruitment performance (**65%** versus **57%**), and employee relations (**75%** versus **66%**).

EFFECTIVE AND SUPPORTIVE PEOPLE MANAGERS

People managers play a critical role in supporting employees with caregiving responsibilities, but not all organizations are equipping their people managers with the necessary resources to do so.

» **Twenty-nine percent** of HR professionals say their organization's people managers are ineffective in managing and supporting employees with caregiving responsibilities.

» However, only **36%** of organizations provide their people managers with resources on how to manage employees with caregiving responsibilities (**10%** are unsure about the resources available to managers).

Equipping managers with the tools to navigate these challenges is crucial. Organizations that invest in providing resources to help managers support employees with caregiving responsibilities see significant benefits. For instance, **83%** of organizations that offer such resources report their managers as effective in supporting working caregivers, compared to only **65%** of organizations that do not provide resources or are unsure. These findings underscore the value of preparing managers to navigate these complexities successfully.

People Managers Are More Effective at Managing Working Caregivers When Provided with Resources on How to Support Them

Organizations that **provide resources** to people managers:

83%

"People managers at my organization are effective at managing and supporting working caregivers."

Organizations that **do not provide resources** to people managers:
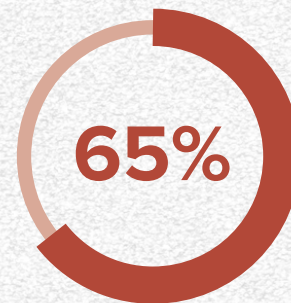
65%

"People managers at my organization are effective at managing and supporting working caregivers."
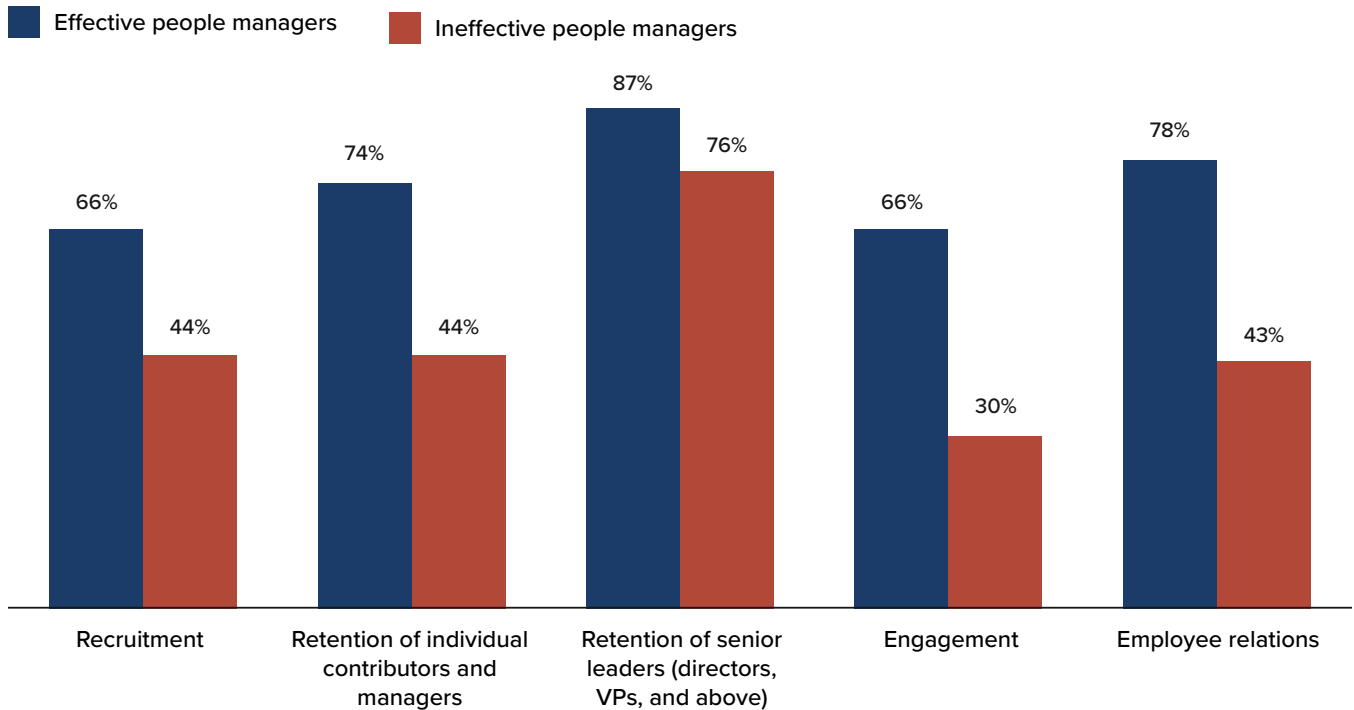
The value of an effective people manager can be felt at the organizational level. Organizations with people managers who are effective at managing and supporting employees with caregiving responsibilities are significantly more likely to rate their performance across key business indicators as good or very good compared to organizations with people managers who are ineffective.

Organizations with People Managers Who Are Effective in Managing and Supporting Working Caregivers Are Significantly More Likely to Rate Their Organizational Performances as Good or Very Good

Percentage of HR professionals who rate their organization's performance on the following indicators as either good or very good:

- Effective people managers
- Ineffective people managers

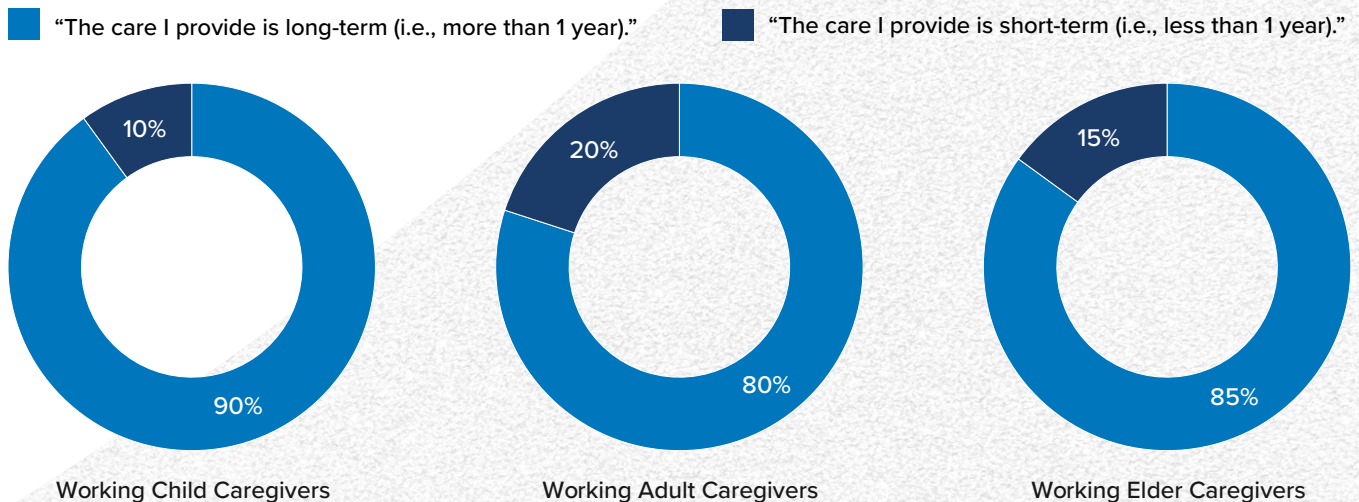| Indicator	Effective people managers	Ineffective people managers
Recruitment	66%	44%
Retention of individual contributors and managers	74%	44%
Retention of senior leaders (directors, VPs, and above)	87%	76%
Engagement	66%	30%
Employee relations	78%	43%

ALIGNING SUPPORT WITH THE NEEDS AND REALITIES OF CAREGIVERS

Supporting working caregivers requires deliberate alignment between organizational support and the actual needs of these employees. While addressing caregiver challenges as they arise is a step forward, ensuring that caregiving support truly reflects and responds to employees' realities is essential for long-term success. Instead, organizations may find the supports they offer to be misaligned with the supports working caregivers need:

» HR professionals are more than **twice as likely** to say their organization is effective at addressing the short-term, episodic care needs of employees with caregiving responsibilities **(76%)** compared to addressing their long-term, enduring care needs **(35%)**.

» However, a majority of working caregivers anticipate providing long-term care (i.e., more than a year) for children **(90%)**, adults **(80%)**, and elders **(85%)**.[8]

Most Working Caregivers Anticipate the Care They Provide to Be Long-Term ...

█ "The care I provide is long-term (i.e., more than 1 year)."   █ "The care I provide is short-term (i.e., less than 1 year)."

10% 90%
Working Child Caregivers

20% 80%
Working Adult Caregivers

15% 85%
Working Elder Caregivers

... Yet Only 1 In 3 Organizations Say They Are Effective at Addressing These Long-Term Needs.

█ My organization is effective at addressing caregivers' long-term needs.

█ My organization is ineffective at addressing caregivers' long-term needs.

35%

65%

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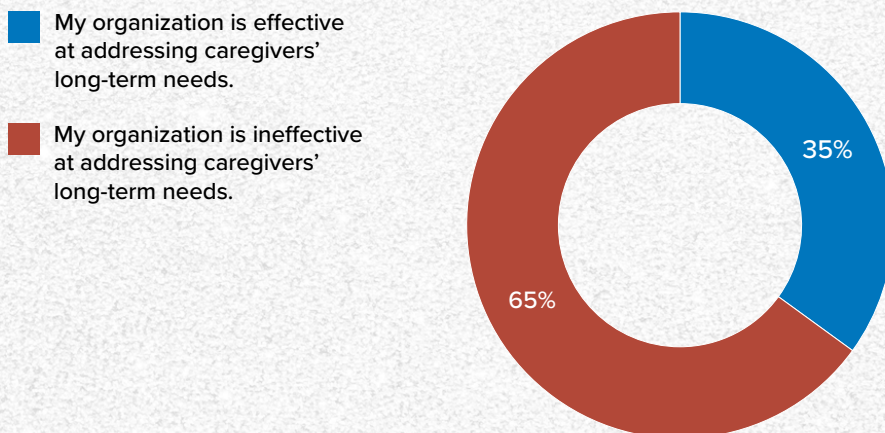
[8]*Care and Careers: Navigating Caregiving and Work Responsibilities,* SHRM, 2025.

This disconnect highlights a critical gap between the support organizations are providing and what working caregivers genuinely need. One way organizations can bridge this gap is by designing benefits that are intentionally aligned with the long-term realities and diverse challenges faced by caregivers. For example, in our sample of unemployed caregivers, those who left their jobs due to their caregiving responsibilities said the accommodation and benefits that would have made them consider staying at their job were flexible work arrangements, such as remote or hybrid work **(48%)**, and paid leave to care for immediate family members, such as their spouse, parents, or siblings **(30%)**.
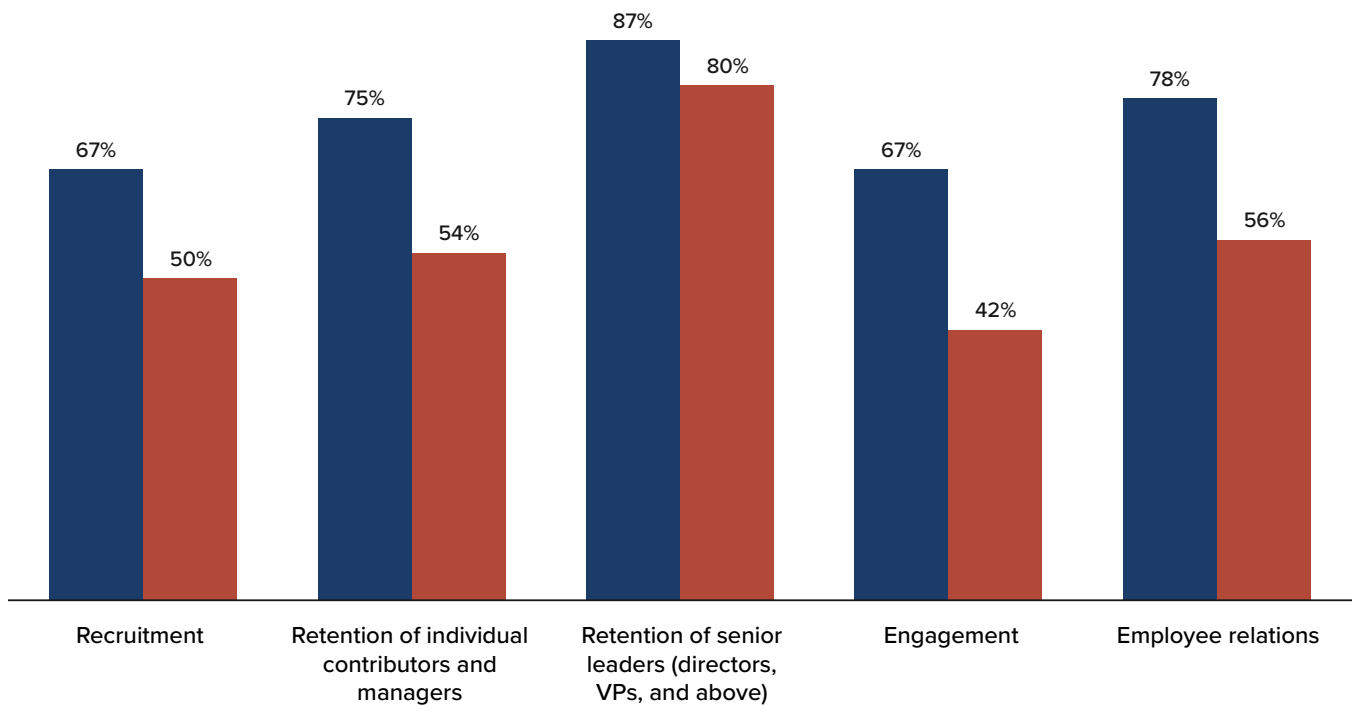
Organizations that offer caregiving benefits that satisfy working caregivers[9] are significantly more likely to rate their performance across all indicators as good or very good, compared to organizations that offer caregiving benefits that working caregivers are not satisfied with.

Organizations Offering Caregivers Benefits That Employees Are Satisfied with Are Significantly More Likely To Rate Their Organizational Performance as Good or Very Good

Percentage of HR professionals who rate their organization's performance on the following indicators as either good or very good:

- ■ Employees are satisfied with the caregiving benefits offered.
- ■ Employees are not satisfied with the caregiving benefits offered.

	Recruitment	Retention of individual contributors and managers	Retention of senior leaders (directors, VPs, and above)	Engagement	Employee relations
Satisfied	67%	75%	87%	67%	78%
Not satisfied	50%	54%	80%	42%	56%

[9]Calculated as HR professionals who agreed with at least one of following statements: "Employees are satisfied with the child caregiving benefits my organization offers," "Employees are satisfied with the adult caregiving benefits my organization offers," and "Employees are satisfied with the elder caregiving benefits my organization offers."

While aligning organizational support with the needs of working caregivers is critical, many organizations encounter significant obstacles in achieving this balance, resulting in a misalignment between the support offered and the actual needs of caregivers. To better understand this disconnect, it's important to explore how organizations decide what benefits and policies to offer and the common hurdles they face when striving to meet the diverse and complex needs of working caregivers through those benefits and policies.

When determining which benefits and policies to adopt, the top three factors influencing decision-making, according to HR professionals, are the cost of the benefit **(78%)**, input from senior leadership **(50%)**, and employee feedback **(37%)**. However, only **18%** of organizations rank utilization data among their top three decision-making factors.

Top 3 Factors That Drive Caregiving Benefits and Policy Adoption

The cost of the benefit **(78%)**	Input from senior leadership **(50%)**	Employee feedback **(37%)**

Given the critical link between employee satisfaction with caregiving benefits and improved organizational outcomes, organizations may want to consider how employee feedback and utilization data could play a more central role. By leveraging employee data, organizations can make more informed decisions that align benefits with the realities of caregiving employees, fostering both employee well-being and long-term organizational success.

Leveraging employee feedback may also help mitigate some of the challenges organizations face when it comes to trying to meet the needs of working caregivers, such as maintaining fairness among employees **(54%)** and a lack of awareness around the needs of caregiving workers **(38%)**.

» Among working caregivers, **36%** feel the flexibility given to caregivers is unfair to their non-caregiving colleagues, while **34%** of non-caregivers believe their personal life is not taken as seriously as it is for their co-workers with caregiving responsibilities.

By incorporating diverse employee perspectives and usage patterns into their decision-making process, organizations can better balance caregiver support with broader equity considerations. Additionally, this approach can help identify gaps in existing benefits, enabling organizations to prioritize initiatives that have the greatest impact on employee well-being and retention.

The 5 Most Common Challenges That Organizations Face When Trying to Meet the Needs of Working Caregivers

Maintaining fairness among employees with and without caregiving responsibilities **(54%)**

The cost of providing caregiving-specific benefits **(53%)**

Staffing shortages making it difficult to provide adequate coverage for caregivers **(53%)**

Lack of awareness around the needs of workers with caregiving responsibilities **(38%)**

Lack of leadership support or buy-in for the policies **(34%)**

CAREGIVING BENEFITS

GAPS AND ALIGNMENTS BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND CAREGIVERS

Using data from the SHRM 2024 Employee Benefits Survey,[10] we highlight the most common family care, flexibility, and leave benefits that organizations provide to their employees as they relate to caregiving. We also presented a similar list of benefits to working caregivers and asked them to identify the top three benefits in each of these categories that would be (or currently are) the most helpful to them as a working caregiver.

FAMILY CARE BENEFITS

TOP 3 MOST COMMON FAMILY CARE BENEFITS (HR PROFESSIONALS)
1. Onsite lactation/mother's room **(73%)**   2. Dependent care flexible spending account (FSA) **(58%)**   3. Bring child to work in an emergency **(33%)**

MOST HELPFUL FAMILY CARE BENEFITS (WORKING CAREGIVERS)		
CHILD CAREGIVERS	**ADULT CAREGIVERS**	**ELDER CAREGIVERS**
Bring child to work in emergency **(35%)**	Subsidy for adult dependent care **(33%)**	Access to elder care services and information **(42%)**
Dependent care FSA **(32%)**	Dependent care FSA **(32%)**	Elder care referral service **(31%)**
Subsidized child care center or program **(23%)**	Access to elder care services and information **(23%)**	Dependent care FSA **(25%)**

Most organizations currently provide family care benefits that are heavily geared toward child caregivers, as evidenced by two of the three most frequently offered benefits: an onsite lactation/mother's room **(73%)** and the option to bring a child to work in an emergency **(33%)**. However, working caregivers across all caregiving types consistently highlight dependent care FSAs as one of the most helpful benefits available. Additionally, elder caregivers value access to elder care services and referral resources, which remain underutilized yet impactful options.

This data illustrates a misalignment between the benefits organizations commonly offer and those caregivers find most helpful, particularly for adult and elder caregiving needs. To bridge this gap, organizations should prioritize offering universal caregiving support that benefits a broader range of employees. Low-cost, high-impact options such as dependent care FSAs and access to elder care services and information represent accessible first steps. These adjustments would ensure a more inclusive approach to caregiving support while managing financial constraints effectively.

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[10]For a comprehensive overview of what caregiving benefits organizations are offering that is representative of organizations throughout the U.S., see the SHRM 2024 Employee Benefits Survey.

FLEXIBLE WORK BENEFITS

TOP 3 MOST COMMON FLEXIBLE WORK BENEFITS (HR PROFESSIONALS)
1. Hybrid work opportunities for most employees **(63%)** 2. Flextime during core business hours **(53%)** 3. Break arrangements **(41%)**

MOST HELPFUL FLEXIBLE WORK BENEFITS (WORKING CAREGIVERS)		
CHILD CAREGIVERS	**ADULT CAREGIVERS**	**ELDER CAREGIVERS**
Flextime during core business hours **(43%)**	Flextime during core business hours **(40%)**	Flextime during core business hours **(44%)**
Remote work opportunities **(37%)**[11]	4-day workweek of 32 hours or less **(35%)**	4-day workweek of 32 hours or less **(38%)**
4-day workweek of 32 hours or less **(36%)**	Remote work opportunities **(33%)**	Remote work opportunities **(35%)**
Hybrid work opportunities for most employees **(31%)**	Hybrid work opportunities for most employees **(28%)**	Hybrid work opportunities for most employees **(30%)**

The data for flexible work benefits highlights that the preferences for flexible arrangements are consistent regardless of caregiving type, making these benefits a versatile and inclusive option for organizations. By exploring and adopting the flexible work policy options that are appropriate and reasonable for each organization's unique needs, organizations can simultaneously support a wide variety of employee needs, improving work/life integration for caregivers and the workforce at large. Such actions also strengthen engagement and productivity without requiring highly specialized or costly interventions.

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[11]"Remote work opportunities" was not included in the survey of benefits that HR professionals were asked if their organization offered.

FAMILY CARE LEAVE AND LEAVE FOR NEW PARENTS

TOP 3 MOST COMMON LEAVE BENEFITS (HR PROFESSIONALS)
1. Unpaid leave to care for immediate family as defined by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) **(84%)**[12] 2. Paid parental leave **(40%)** 3. Paid maternity leave **(39%)**

MOST HELPFUL LEAVE BENEFITS (WORKING CAREGIVERS)		
CHILD CAREGIVERS	**ADULT CAREGIVERS**	**ELDER CAREGIVERS**
Paid family leave **(40%)**	Paid leave to care for immediate family **(38%)**	Paid leave to care for immediate family **(41%)**
Paid leave to care for immediate family **(38%)**	Paid family leave **(37%)**	Paid family leave **(38%)**
Unpaid leave to care for immediate family as defined by federal FMLA **(24%)**	Unpaid leave to care for immediate family as defined by federal FMLA **(28%)**	Unpaid leave to care for immediate family as defined by federal FMLA **(26%)**

The primary way organizations address caregiver leave needs is through unpaid leave under the baseline federal FMLA requirements, which are an entitlement under law. When paid leave is offered, it is predominantly geared toward child caregivers, with parental and maternity leave being the second and third most common leave benefits provided. However, the needs of working caregivers often extend beyond specific caregiving roles, such as parenting. Caregivers across all three types consistently identify leave for family members as the most helpful, with paid leave being the top preference, followed by unpaid leave. This highlights the broad value of paid-leave policies that consider diverse caregiving scenarios, not just those tied to child care.

While not every organization may be in a position to offer paid leave beyond what the law requires, exploring ways to expand leave options within their means can help address the varied challenges faced by their workforce. Additionally, 13 states and Washington, D.C., currently offer their own paid family and medical leave programs, which can serve as a valuable resource for both employers and employees. By leveraging these programs and tailoring leave policies to their capabilities, organizations can create a more inclusive and supportive environment, enhancing employee well-being and satisfaction.

KEY TAKEAWAY:
The perception that caregiving accommodations are overly complicated or tailored exclusively to a small group does not have to be the case. Many of the benefits caregivers rely on — such as dependent care flexible spending accounts, flextime, and paid family leave — are straightforward and align with the broader needs of most employees. By focusing on universal policies that provide flexibility and leeway, organizations can address the specific needs of caregivers without creating separate or complex benefit structures. This holistic approach ensures that the overall workforce benefits while caregivers gain the support they need to thrive, both professionally and personally. When organizations meet the larger workforce's needs, they also create a work environment that naturally supports caregivers.

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[12]This item refers to the baseline compliance with FMLA (unpaid, eligible employee working for an eligible employer) and is not technically a benefit but an entitlement under the law.

CAREGIVER EXPERIENCE WITH BENEFITS

Almost as important as offering caregiving benefits is ensuring that employees are utilizing those benefits. Among organizations that offer flexible work benefits and leave benefits, roughly **2 in 5** report high utilization of these benefits (**42%** and **40%**, respectively). Comparatively, only **8%** of organizations that offer family care benefits say these benefits have high utilization rates.

A significant factor contributing to the low utilization of family care benefits is a lack of awareness. Nearly half of HR professionals **(49%)** point to employees being unaware of these benefits as a contributing factor to low utilization, while other barriers include irrelevance of the benefit **(27%)** and cost concerns **(25%)**. Similarly, working caregivers who have attempted to use their organization's caregiving benefits cite challenges such as cost concerns **(32%)**, limited knowledge of available benefits **(28%)**, and lack of understanding of how the benefits work **(24%)**.

Most Common Barriers Caregivers Face When Trying to Utilize Caregiving Benefits

Cost concerns **(32%)**	Limited knowledge of available benefits **(28%)**	Lack of understanding of how the benefits work **(24%)**

These findings reveal a persistent theme: a lack of understanding regarding the availability and usage of family care benefits. Despite this, only **24%** of organizations provide webinars or informational sessions to educate employees about the resources available to them. Considering the substantial investments organizations make in employee benefits, a foundational step would be to ensure employees are fully informed about the existing offerings. Establishing this baseline could maximize the impact of current programs before allocating additional resources toward new initiatives.

The gap between availability of benefits and utilization stems from not only a lack of awareness but also discomfort in accessing these resources.

» Half of working caregivers **(51%)** are either not at all familiar **(23%)** or only somewhat familiar **(28%)** with the caregiving benefits their organization provides.

» More than **1 in 3** working caregivers **(35%)** feel uncomfortable **(13%)** or somewhat uncomfortable **(22%)** seeking or using these resources.

One factor contributing to this hesitation is workplace culture. Many working caregivers perceive a professional risk associated with leveraging caregiving benefits such as flexible scheduling or leave. According to working caregivers, when someone utilizes benefits (i.e., taking leave, flexible scheduling) for caregiving responsibilities at their organization:

» They jeopardize their chances at a promotion **(46%)**.

» They burden everyone else on the team **(43%)**.

» They are trusted with fewer responsibilities **(42%)**.

» They risk their professional relationships **(41%)**.

» They risk their job **(38%)**.

These insights underline the responsibility of organizations to foster an environment where employees feel confident and supported in utilizing the benefits that organizations have invested in offering to them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION NO. 1
Adopt a Proactive Approach to Caregiving Policies

Regularly evaluating and modifying caregiving policies ensures they remain relevant and effective in addressing employees' evolving needs. Organizations that adopt proactive strategies report better employee engagement and organizational performance.

» Schedule routine evaluations of caregiving-related policies (e.g., semiannual or annual reviews).

» Collect feedback from employees, particularly caregivers, to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement.

» Leverage evaluation insights to implement timely updates, such as extending paid-leave durations or expanding eligibility for caregiving benefits.

» Assign a dedicated team to oversee caregiving policy performance and recommend adjustments.

SHRM How-To Guide: How to Develop and Administer Paid-Leave Programs
SHRM Template: Paid Family and Medical Leave Policy
SHRM Template: Unpaid Personal Leave of Absence Policy
All Things Work podcast: "Navigating Leave Policies: Understanding FMLA and ADA"
SHRM Toolkit: Managing Employee Surveys

RECOMMENDATION NO. 2
Align Benefits with Long-Term Caregiving Needs

Caregiving responsibilities are often long-term, but many organizations primarily address short-term needs. Aligning benefits with the realities of long-term care can better address the needs of current and future talent.

» Ensure that HR and leadership teams are trained on the specific challenges of long-term caregiving, particularly elder care.

» Conduct internal surveys to understand the caregiving challenges employees anticipate or currently face.

» Assess organization capacity to introduce or expand paid family leave programs to cover a broader range of caregiving scenarios.

SHRM Toolkit: Coordinating Leaves of Absence
SHRM Toolkit: Managing Flexible Work Arrangements
SHRM 2024 Employee Benefits Survey
SHRM Educational Program — Compensation and Benefits: Unlock the Power of Total Rewards
SHRM Total Rewards Specialty Credential

RECOMMENDATION NO. 3
Equip People Managers to Support Caregivers

People managers play a key role in supporting caregiving employees but often lack the necessary tools. Providing resources and training for managers can result in more effective support and improved organizational outcomes.

- » Offer training sessions for managers on caregiving challenges and strategies to balance caregiver support with team fairness.

- » Develop resource guides for managers, including case studies and FAQs on caregiving accommodations.

- » Establish a feedback loop where managers can share challenges and collaborate on solutions to better support working caregivers.

- » Pair managers with HR or support specialists to address complex situations sensitively and effectively.

SHRM Toolkit: Managing Family and Medical Leave (FMLA)
SHRM Toolkit: Developing Management
SHRM Toolkit: Managing Employee Attendance
SHRM People Manager Qualification (PMQ)

RECOMMENDATION NO. 4
Increase Awareness and Accessibility of Caregiving Benefits

A lack of awareness about available benefits can contribute to reduced usage rates. Clear communication and accessible information empower employees to take full advantage of caregiving resources.

- » Launch regular educational campaigns (e.g., webinars, emails, and lunch-and-learns) on the caregiving benefits available.

- » Create an easily accessible online portal or resource hub for caregiving benefits, FAQs, and key contacts.

- » Incorporate caregiving benefits into onboarding programs for new employees.

- » Actively highlight success stories of caregivers who have used benefits to reduce stigma and increase visibility.

SHRM Toolkit: Managing Organizational Communication

RECOMMENDATION NO. 5
Foster a Supportive and Inclusive Workplace Culture

Workplace discomfort and stigma discourage caregivers from using essential benefits. Building a culture of trust and inclusivity encourages employees to seek the support they need without fear of professional consequences.

» Publicly reinforce leadership's commitment to supporting caregivers through messaging and policy reinforcement.

» Regularly assess workplace culture through anonymous surveys, ensuring employees feel safe and supported.

» Implement anonymous reporting channels for employees to share concerns about biases or barriers related to caregiving.

SHRM Toolkit: Developing Employee Career Paths and Ladders
SHRM Toolkit: How to Build a Strong Organizational Culture

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal a clear opportunity for organizations to better support employees with caregiving responsibilities through strategic, inclusive, and proactive approaches. Proactive policy evaluations and modifications are key to staying ahead of employee needs, while aligning benefits with the realities of long-term caregiving, especially for elder care, ensures broader workforce support. At the same time, equipping people managers with resources and fostering a workplace culture of trust addresses critical gaps that hinder benefit utilization and employee well-being.

Organizations that prioritize these actions not only create a more supportive environment for caregivers but also reap tangible rewards, including improved recruitment, employee engagement, and retention. By addressing caregiving challenges head-on, businesses can position themselves as leaders in workforce inclusivity and resilience.

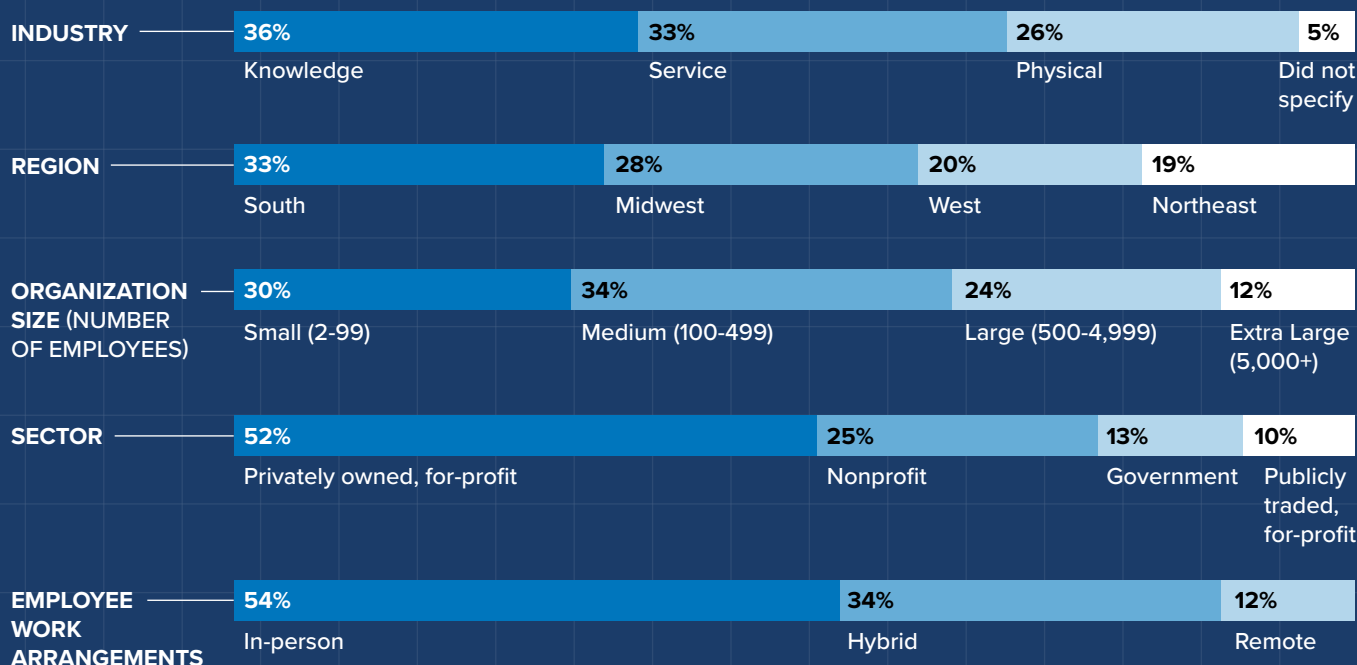Now is the time for organizations to act. By implementing these strategies, companies can build a culture where caregivers and non-caregivers alike feel valued, supported, and empowered to thrive both personally and professionally. Leadership commitment today will shape a workplace that is prepared for the caregiving challenges of tomorrow — strengthening organizations and the lives of their employees in meaningful and lasting ways.

SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS AND METHODOLOGY

HR PROFESSIONALS

The HR professionals survey was fielded electronically in September 2024 using SHRM's Voice of Work panel. A total of 1,470 HR professionals were surveyed and answered on behalf of their employers.

INDUSTRY			
36%	33%	26%	5%
Knowledge	Service	Physical	Did not specify

REGION			
33%	28%	20%	19%
South	Midwest	West	Northeast

ORGANIZATION SIZE (NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES)			
30%	34%	24%	12%
Small (2-99)	Medium (100-499)	Large (500-4,999)	Extra Large (5,000+)

SECTOR			
52%	25%	13%	10%
Privately owned, for-profit	Nonprofit	Government	Publicly traded, for-profit

EMPLOYEE WORK ARRANGEMENTS		
54%	34%	12%
In-person	Hybrid	Remote

WORKING CAREGIVERS, WORKING NON-CAREGIVERS, AND UNEMPLOYED CAREGIVERS

See _Care and Careers: Navigating Caregiving and Work Responsibilities_ for detailed sample information for the following three samples.

The **working caregivers** survey was fielded electronically from September to October 2024 to U.S. workers who provided primary care to children, adults, and/or elders in a personal capacity. A total of 3,042 working primary caregivers were surveyed using a third-party survey panel.

The **working non-caregivers** survey was fielded electronically in September 2024 to U.S. workers who did not provide primary care to children, adults, and/or elders in a personal capacity. A total of 1,543 working non-caregivers were surveyed using a third-party survey panel.

The **unemployed caregivers** survey was fielded electronically from September to October 2024 to primary caregivers to children, adults, and/or elders in a personal capacity who were not employed at the time of the survey. A total of 1,249 unemployed primary caregivers were surveyed using a third-party survey panel.

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