

## Health Promotion / Wellness / Psychosocial

### Carer Friendly Workplaces

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### What is meant by a carer or worker-carer?

Employees can be considered a carer if they provide unpaid care or assistance to a child, relative, close friend, or partner who needs help because of physical, mental, or cognitive conditions. This role is most often informal and unpaid, and done by carers who provide assistance to individuals living with a physical or mental disability, long-term health condition(s), or problems related to aging, while engaging in other paid employment. It may also apply in situations where an individual is recovering from illness or injury and requires temporary care.

Other terms used for this role is care givers, worker-carer, working-carer, caregiver-employee, carer-worker, or carer-employee. While the workplace can decide which situations will apply to their policy and program, carer is generally not a term that applies to usual childcare activities unless the child requires additional assistance..

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### Why should a workplace look at the role of a carer?

Lack of workplace support can result in the carer leaving the workforce, missing work days, taking early retirement, and experiencing reduced productivity. Other areas that may be affected include the worker's overall burdens, stresses, their mental and physical health, and work satisfaction.

## Does being a carer impact the workplace?

Yes, it may.

Consider a common scenario: an employee's parent is able to live alone but needs assistance with activities that involve driving – such as shopping, errands, and medical appointments. After working a full shift for their “paid” employer, many employees will take hours each day to provide even moderate levels of care. They may also need to take time away from their employment to attend medical appointments, creating concern about their work performance and job security. This extended workday does not only impact their work/life balance, but adds to fatigue, stress, anxiety, and may result in the individual being distracted and less able to perform their job safely.

Another common scenario may be a person with a disability requires assistance when moving from a sitting to standing position, when stepping into a bathtub, or to stand if they have fallen. The employee who is the carer may help lift or hold the care recipient. Little formal training may be available about proper lifting techniques. The potential for harm to the carer is strains, sprains, or back injury. The impact on the workplace may be lost time, reduced hours, or use of benefits.

Working carers may also be concerned about exposures at the workplace, such as a virus, and the impact that passing the illness to the person they are caring for may have.

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## What can a workplace do to support carers?

Providing a safe, healthy, and carer-friendly workplace has benefits for all. Employers are encouraged to emphasize the importance of balance between work and home, and to promote a carer-friendly workplace culture. You may wish to incorporate the program into an existing occupational health and safety management system (OHSMS) framework. For example, the Canadian Standards Association's (CSA) Standard B701-17 *Carer- Inclusive and Accommodating Organizations*. B701-17 incorporates a “Plan-Do-Check-Act” cycle – the same model used in CSA Z45001:19 – *Occupational health and safety management systems – Requirements with guidance for use*. The purpose of an occupational health and safety management system is to manage hazards and risks, provide a mechanism to prevent injuries and illness, and use methods to systematically monitor and evaluate the program.

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## What steps should be taken when implementing a carer policy and program in the workplace?

When developing a policy and program to cover supports to worker-carers, be sure to:

- Assign an individual who has authority to manage the implementation of the policy and program.

- Define who a carer is, and include examples of care giving activities that would be included or covered.
- Review all existing policies to ensure they are 'carer friendly' – for example, does your policy on stress management recognise the complex linkages between work related and home related stress? What types of leaves are currently granted and under what circumstances?
- Explore what legal and other requirements (e.g., human rights, family/emergency leaves or benefits) are available and applicable. If and where possible, the organization may wish to top up these programs with financial resources, by bridging gaps in coverage, or extending the leave time available. These leaves may include:
  - Personal emergency leave
  - Family responsibility leave
  - Compassionate care benefits
  - Family medical leave
  - Bereavement leave
  - Parental leave, if applicable
- Plan for unexpected leaves of absence, periods of high or low demand for caring, or time to coordinate medical services in addition to on-going arrangements.
- Determine what existing supports are available, both internally or externally, such as employee assistance programs (EAPs), benefit programs, and specific human resources policies and programs. Supports may also be available through items in a collective agreement with the union, if present.
- Assess these existing programs and look for gaps that may exist in coverage or assistance.
- Engage with all workers and other stakeholders. Discuss needs and options with those providing care to others. Ask carers what will help them to successfully combine work and caring. They will know what supports will benefit them best.
- Identify barriers to accessing or using supports, such as
  - Lack of training
  - No access to resources
  - Limited knowledge of the issue
- Protect the individual's privacy and confidentiality. Establish procedures about when to disclose information, and what can or should be shared.
- Be inclusive. Do not assume that one gender may play a smaller or larger role in care giving activities.

- Develop a program that includes a number of approaches and options, where possible.
- Consider if carers can be included in other workplace training activities, such as [mental health](#) initiatives, [fatigue management](#), or [safe lifting techniques](#) when working with patients.
- Communicate the program and resources to workers through training, email, and/or posters.
- Educate managers and supervisors on carer awareness, available policies and programs, and information available for caregivers.
- Provide coaching to supervisors, managers and workers on how to have a [difficult discussion](#)
- Implement the programs and activities as identified and planned.
- Educate all employees to increase their awareness and understanding of the role of a carer-employee and the supports available as a way to encourage a carer-friendly environment

Monitor and assess programs and activities with regard to any opportunities, challenges, and benefits as noted by the carer-employee, their manager or supervisor, and co-employees. Review and report the results. Take actions to continually improve the program performance to achieve the intended outcomes.

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## What are examples of approaches that can be taken to support carers?

A comprehensive program will incorporate as many options as possible. Examples include:

- Flexible and customizable work arrangements, such as [telecommuting/working from home](#), flexible start and finish times, reduced hours, the ability to bank or make up hours, location of work activities, etc.
- Job sharing
- Leave or other benefits for caregiving responsibilities for emergency, short, or long term situations
- Gradual return to work policies
- Financial assistance and relief
- A list of services available to workers (internal and external), including physical or mental health support
- Educate all employees to increase their awareness and understanding of the role of a carer-employee and the supports available

- Opportunities for co-workers, supervisors, and carer-employees to communicate and network
- Allowing carers to access a phone or their mobile phone at all times in case of emergencies, to connect with their care recipient, or to connect with health professionals
- Support for all workers, and inform them of what the impact will be to their daily tasks, and how they can support others

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