

## CPH News and Views

*A semi-monthly column on emerging topics related to healthy workplaces*

### **Issue #67: Supporting Working Caregivers During COVID: Trends and Strategies**

***Contributed by Jennifer Sabatini Fraone, Director of Corporate Partnerships at the Boston College Center for Work & Family***

COVID-19 has presented a dramatic challenge for working parents and caregivers. [Women's careers](#), family stability, the economic recovery, and our efforts to make organizations more equitable and inclusive are all at risk. It is essential for organizations to take action, starting with listening to employees and what their needs are - through surveys, focus groups, 1:1 interview, meetings with ERGs. A holistic effort is required (consistent with Total Worker Health), as no two situations are alike. What's important is to have options people can choose from to help make their own unique situation better.

The Boston College Center for Work & Family [collected and summarized information from our corporate partners](#) on the efforts employers have made to support caregivers in their organizations. We have compiled a menu of options that touch on six areas: *Flexibility, Well-being and Mental Health, Care Support, Financial Support, Leadership and Culture and Community Support.*

Of note, many organizations had some of these supports in place before the pandemic started. Their crisis response has been to supplement those services and re-package and re-communicate them.

**Flexibility:** Many organizations have different options in place for shifting hours and schedules; this is a great time to re-communicate those options and encourage managers to approve requests. Some of our member companies offer extended paid family leave that is fully or partially paid...others are allowing employees to donate any excess PTO into a pool for employees who are struggling and may need more time off. Small tweaks have been helpful as well: "No Meeting Fridays" or making it standard practice to schedule meetings for 45 or 50 minutes, not an hour. Communication is key here - checking in with employees and asking about their flexibility needs.

**Well-Being and Mental Health:** Mental health was a growing concern before the pandemic and now it has become critical for organizations to address. Whether it is promoting the use of existing EAP and counseling services (which are often underutilized) or offering workshops on mindfulness or self-care, organizations are ramping up these types of supports.

**Care Support:** Companies are increasing the availability of childcare support. Some of the trends that we are seeing from our partners are increased access to back-up care, a broadening of provider networks, discounts for tutoring, babysitting co-ops or even stepping in to help parents find learning pods.

**Financial Support:** We have seen some of our members offer subsidies to pay for childcare to all employees across the board, others may base this on income and provide more help to those who need it most.

**Leadership and Culture:** Leadership has a big role to play in establishing a caring culture and acknowledging the challenging times for caregivers right now. They can do this by sharing their own stories, in a blog or at a Town Hall meeting. They can also help by being transparent about when and how the company will begin the transition back to the office and encouraging managers to be flexible in how they implement this process. Underpinning all of this is the organizational culture - and trying to foster an environment where employees feel like they can be vulnerable and share their challenges, and that they will be listened to and respected.

**Community Support:** The need for community right now cannot be overstated. A platform where caregivers can find validation for what they are going through, bounce ideas off of one another, learn more about the supports that the company is offering can really help. Connections can be facilitated through ERGs/affinity groups, lunch and learns, or community boards where parents can share ideas. This can be one of the lowest cost, highest impact approaches to helping parents get through the coming months.

As you consider these employee supports now and as we transition out of the pandemic, we encourage you to take the lessons learned to envision a more inclusive, engaging, and supportive workplace in the future. Applying a Total Worker Health approach to employee wellbeing recognizes that we bring our best selves to work when we have the resources and support to care for our families.

## Resources

BCCWF [COVID-19 Resources and Updates](#)

BCCWF [Benchmarking Summary: COVID-19 Supports for Working Parents](#)

BCCWF [Research Summary: COVID-19 Impact on Women in the Workplace](#)

**Jennifer Sabatini Fraone is the Director of Corporate Partnerships at the Boston College Center for Work & Family**

*CPH-NEW is a Center for Excellence to Promote a Healthier Workforce of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. CPH-News & Views is a semi-monthly column written by Center researchers on emerging topics related to healthy workplaces. These comments reflect thoughts of the individual researchers and do not represent conclusive research summaries, nor do they necessarily reflect a consensus among all Center personnel.*

*We welcome your responses and discussion. Please send all questions and comments to [CPHNEW@uml.edu](mailto:CPHNEW@uml.edu).*