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Caregiving as Workforce Infrastructure: The Non-Negotiable Investment Hiding in Plain Sight

BY JESSICA SWENSON | JULY 16, 2026

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Caregiving isn't just a family issue. It affects employees' physical and mental health, financial well-being, and workplace performance. As family needs become more complex, employee expectations evolve, and costs continue to rise, the entire caregiving ecosystem is under increasing strain. How can employers strengthen their caregiving benefits and better support the employees who rely on them?

This question was asked and answered by Jess Brown, VP of marketing for [Cariloop](#), during a thought leadership spotlight at [From Day One's June virtual conference](#) on benefits and total rewards.

As a long-term caregiving industry advocate and a working parent, Brown has a comprehensive view of the issue. She believes caregiving should be a part of a company's infrastructure strategy rather than a niche benefit. "It's important to recognize that as employee expectations continue to rise and benefit budgets continue to shrink, employers are being asked to do something really difficult. You need to provide meaningful support without simply adding another expensive point solution to the ecosystem," she said.

Family-based caregivers spend an average of 27 hours each week fulfilling care responsibilities for their loved ones, says Brown, on top of coordination, research, transportation, medication management, and any full or part-time paid work. In-home non-medical senior care can be upwards of \$100,000 per year, she says. Childcare is considered affordable by the Department of Health and Human Services only if it doesn't exceed [7% of household income](#).

These time, health, and financial pressures can cause a ripple effect that not only impacts employees, but also businesses. Citing a 2025 [AARP study](#), Brown shared that 56% of employees reported going to work late, leaving early, or taking unplanned time off, and roughly 20% shifted from full-time to part-time status. "When it comes to choosing to care for the ones you love and showing up for work, people are always going to choose their family," she said.

She encourages employers to foster a culture of care by being open and vulnerable about their caregiving journeys. This can help employees feel safer and be willing to do the same. Brown also urges employers to prioritize multi-generational caregiving in addition to parenting and childcare. In her view, this type of care is a long-term priority that will persist for generations.



Jess Brown is the VP of marketing at Cariloop
(company photo)

She offers three key suggestions as companies head into their annual benefits planning season. First, review any backup care program you may have in place. Traditional models built upon prepaid, exclusive-provider networks may have you prepay for a bank of days, charge a premium cost for additional days during the contract period, and limit choices for employees seeking care for their families. She no longer sees this model as viable due to changing preferences and a shrinking supply of professional caregivers.

Second, acknowledge that caregiving is more than just backup care to offset a disruption. With the largest generation in the workforce, millennials, now shouldering care for both their children and parents, it is increasingly important to help them plan ahead.

"When you're investing in caregiving benefits, it's important to think about how you're avoiding disruptions in the workplace, but it's also important to recognize that there will always be disruptions because of caregiving, so you can invest in programs that support employees when those disruptions arrive," Brown said. "But really the foundation of those programs should be the fact that you want to help employees build a safety net, plan ahead, and have a plan B ready to go if and when those disruptions come knocking on their front door."

And third, she suggests asking targeted questions to understand your workforce's actual caregiving needs. This helps you better prepare for disruptions and reduce surprises when caregiving absences must occur.

Once caregiving benefits are evaluated and implemented, Brown says that companies can use a few different approaches to measure their ROI: business performance, clinical outcomes, and dollar-for-dollar savings. She recommends that employers identify their top priorities before they define how they'll measure success, and cautions that ROI measurement is typically a collaborative process.

It can be difficult to attribute business outcomes to one specific program, so she recommends using a cohort analysis that compares utilization data between employees who have and have not used caregiving benefits. This helps build a directional story. Measuring clinical ROI helps connect "caregiving support to measurable health, well-being, or clinical outcomes," said Brown, such as earlier engagement with benefits, fewer instances of burnout, increased use of preventive care, and the reduction of physical or mental health issues caused by stress.

A simpler option is to directly compare dollar-to-dollar costs to determine any savings within a specific time frame or between vendors. She encourages leaders to get into the weeds with benefits providers to understand their support and enable a more thorough comparison.

Brown reiterated that employees can be directly affected by a lack of caregiving support, which makes this type of care a strategic lever for employers. "Caregiving is not a niche issue," she said. "It's a strategic workforce force issue that really does impact the entire infrastructure of your employee experience. Every employer has employees who care for other people, and when those employees lack support, it has a direct impact on how they show up for work."

Editor's note: From Day One thanks our partner, [Cariloop](#), for sponsoring this thought leadership spotlight.

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