


2020

# WORK + LIFE

**Now More Than Ever: Why Care  
Benefits Are a Must-Have**

A photograph of a man with a beard, wearing a green long-sleeved shirt, sitting and holding two young children. In the foreground, a baby with light hair, wearing a pink and white striped onesie, is looking to the left. Behind the baby, a toddler with light hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, is looking down. The man's arms are visible, supporting the children. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

**CARE  
BENEFITS  
ARE NO  
LONGER  
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THEY’RE A  
MUST-HAVE**

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## Executive Summary

As the Covid-19 pandemic has so brutally illustrated, finding a sustainable work-life balance—a daunting task for the vast majority of workers who are caring for children and aging relatives under the best of circumstances—is essential to personal and economic well-being. The lack of a robust caregiving infrastructure has taken an enormous toll in this crisis, revealing both vulnerabilities and opportunities.

To delve into caregiving challenges, Care.com conducted a survey of 1,254 full-time American workers in mid-February 2020, just weeks before the full impact of the Covid-19 pandemic became apparent in the United States.

We found that the way companies treat their employees is no longer purely an internal matter. Today, as both consumers and employees, people evaluate and affiliate with a business based on its commitment to its workforce. Treating employees well has become a marker of how socially responsible that organization is. And social responsibility is taking on growing importance when people determine whom to buy from and work for. 83% of respondents in this study define a socially responsible company as one that offers family-friendly benefits such as back-up child and elder care and paid leave to care for family members.

That's one of the reasons why family-friendly benefits aren't merely "nice-to-have"—not for employees and not for employers. The pandemic has revealed just how vulnerable the economy and the humans that fuel it are to any sort of disruption in caregiving systems. In the last decade, the cost to U.S. businesses of lost productivity due to informal caregiving for children<sup>1</sup> and the elderly<sup>2</sup> was \$82.2 billion annually, reflecting absenteeism, shifts from full-time to part-time work, replacing employees, and workday adjustments.

That trend is evident in this study, which found that even before Covid-19, 86% of respondents had stayed home from work at least a few times a year to care for a child or elderly loved one. And though the personal, psychological, and emotional costs are harder to quantify in dollars, it's well-established that they are pervasive and deep. 73% of our respondents felt that they'd let down someone who needed their care.

While employers have undoubtedly made progress, employees still see their companies falling short—helping parents care for newborns, but then seemingly forgetting that childhood continues beyond the first year, failing to recognize and respond to the demands faced by employees who care for their aging loved ones, and still not quite recognizing that caregiving responsibilities are also shouldered by men, not just women.

Employers, in turn, may feel overwhelmed by a flood of new benefits being offered to employees. But there's good news for HR departments facing constraints on how much they can spend. In many cases, employees value family-friendly benefits over other, more costly perks such as tuition assistance or even some health and wellness offerings.



# FAMILY-FRIENDLY BENEFITS AREN'T JUST A “NICE-TO-HAVE”

*“[T]he public expectations of your company have never been greater. Society is demanding that companies, both public and private, serve a social purpose. To prosper over time, every company must not only deliver financial performance, but also show how it makes a positive contribution to society. Companies must benefit all of their stakeholders, including shareholders, employees, customers, and the communities in which they operate.”*

—Larry Fink (CEO, Blackrock) 2018 Letter to Investors

As we write this, organizations and individuals across the country are scrambling to cope with the upheavals caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. With children unexpectedly home from closed schools and child care centers, and facilities struggling to meet the needs of the vulnerable elderly, working families and their employers are more reliant on caregivers than ever.

Though temporary, crises of this magnitude reveal the underlying precariousness of our systems for meeting the requirements of both work and family life.

The pandemic will pass, but other demographic and attitudinal patterns will continue to create new demands.

- People are having children later in life, and as a result of that trend—combined with the general graying of the population—an increasing number of employees of all ages find themselves in the “Sandwich Generation,” caring for the needs of both their children and their elderly relatives.
- Baby Boomers are turning 65 at a rate of 10,000 per day, but not all of them are retiring, creating workforces that are more multi-generational than ever.
- Thanks to changing values and gender roles, men are now taking on greater caregiving responsibilities, particularly for elderly loved ones.
- Meanwhile, the cultural values of Gen Z and Millennial workers are creating new expectations of their employers.

Our research found that for the multi-generational workforce of today and tomorrow, family-friendly benefits are not simply a “nice-to-have.” They are a prime marker of a socially responsible employer, and essential to employee productivity, retention, and engagement.

The profound personal and financial hardships imposed by the pandemic—and the stopgap measures governments and companies are taking to address them—confirm these findings. If there is good news to be found, it is that what employees want and what employers need to create stable, engaged workforces are converging.

**Family-friendly benefits are a prime marker of a socially responsible employer, and essential to employee productivity, retention, and engagement.**



# Research Objectives & Methodology

In mid-February 2020, we conducted an online survey of 1,254 U.S. residents, roughly representative of the general working population, all of whom work enough hours to be eligible for employer benefits. Our goals were to learn:

- How family-friendly benefits influence employee recruitment, retention, and productivity;
- How family-friendly benefits affect peoples' perceptions of a company as "socially responsible" and influence their behavior as both potential employees and consumers;
- Which specific subgroups, needs, and life-stages people perceive as being adequately vs under-served in companies' current benefit packages.

## THE 1,254 RESPONDENTS WERE

59%

WOMEN

41%

MEN

9%

GEN Z

53%

MILLENNIALS

25%

GEN X

15%

BOOMERS

62%

Caring for an elderly person

62%

Respondents with at least one child at home young enough to need a babysitter

75%

With a pet requiring daily care

45%

Salaried employees

54%

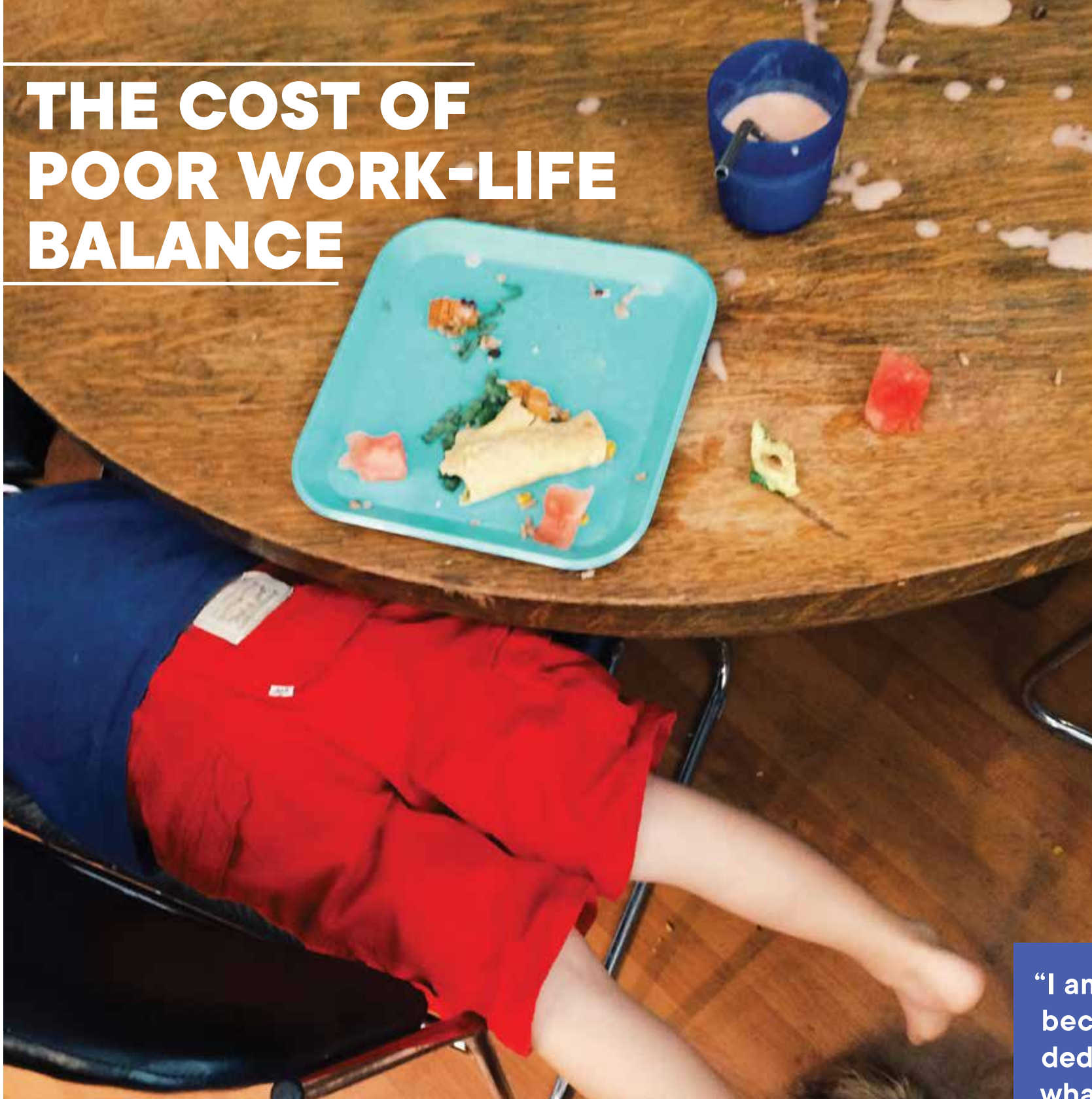
Hourly employees

1%

"Other"

Nationally representative in terms of region and race/ethnicity

# THE COST OF POOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE



## Employers feel the pain in absenteeism, productivity, and employee retention

For more and more American workers with responsibilities for children and aging loved ones, caregiving is essentially a second job—albeit one that’s unpaid. Their unaddressed caregiving needs have a large and material impact on absenteeism, productivity, and employee retention.

Almost 70% of mothers are in the labor force, and about 42% of mothers are the sole or primary breadwinners in their homes<sup>3</sup>. In 2018, the labor force participation rate for all women with children under age 18 was 71.5% (for men, it was 93.3%<sup>4</sup>). That’s to say nothing of the 17.7 million individuals in the United States who are caregivers for an older adult with a health or functional limitation.

### Employers indirectly pay huge costs for their employees’ second caregiving jobs. Here are just a few data points:

- Nationally, the cost of lost earnings, productivity, and revenue due to inadequate childcare resources (just for parents of children under the age of three) totals an estimated \$57 billion each year (\$37 billion in lost earnings for parents, \$13 billion in lost productivity for employers, and \$7 billion in lost tax revenue).<sup>5</sup>
- Absenteeism alone among caregivers to the elderly costs employers an estimated \$25.2 billion in lost productivity (based on the average number of workdays missed per working caregiver, assuming \$200 in lost productivity per day).<sup>6</sup>
- Even when they are at work, caregiving has been shown to reduce employees’ work productivity by 18.5%. <sup>7</sup>

Those aren’t the only impacts. Add in workers who shift from full-time to part-time work (\$4.8 billion), the cost of replacing employees (\$6.6 billion)<sup>8</sup>, and workday adjustments (\$6.3 billion), and what emerges is a portrait of businesses and organizations struggling with the costs of inadequate caregiving resources for their employees.

We saw these patterns reflected in our recent research.

**“I am actively looking for a new job because my boss questions my dedication when she has no concept of what it takes to juggle work and family.”**

This and all unattributed quotes are from survey respondents.

**70%**  
of our survey  
respondents who  
care for an elderly  
person have cut back  
on regular work hours  
at least once during  
the past year due to  
family responsibilities.

We were particularly struck by the higher figures in our data among those caring for the elderly—a pattern we see echoed in other studies.

The National Academy of Sciences, for instance, found that just among employees caring for the elderly, 61% have had to request workplace accommodations such as coming in late to work, leaving early, reducing work hours or taking time off.

**And this trend will only be amplified in the coming decades.**

The number of Americans ages 65 and older is projected to nearly double from 52 million in 2018 to 95 million by 2060, and the 65-and-older age group's share of the total population will rise from 16 percent to 23 percent<sup>9</sup>.

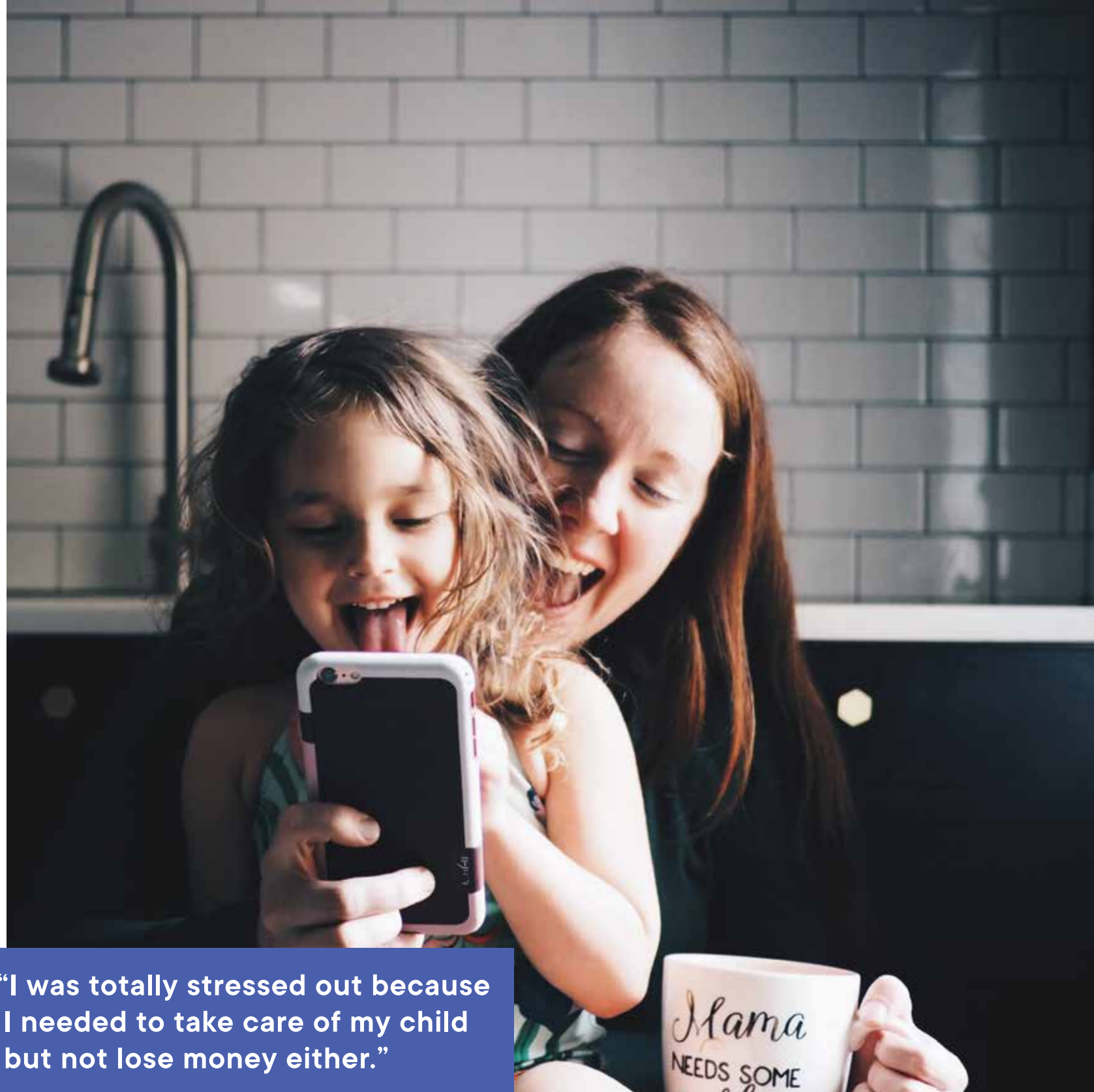


“It felt good to take care of her at first, but when I realized it would set a precedent for taking care of her multiple times which could cost me valuable time in the workplace, I got scared.”

| HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU FELT OR DONE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING?                                       | AT LEAST ONCE EVERY COUPLE OF MONTHS, AND UP TO ONCE PER WEEK | 1-2 TIMES PER YEAR | TOTAL |
|---|---|--------------------|-------|
| ABSENTEEISM   |   |                    |       |
| Stayed home from work to care for a family member or pet                                    | 53%   | 33%                | 86%   |
| Arrived late or left work early to care for a family member or pet                          | 53%   | 30%                | 83%   |
| Have cut back on regular hours at work due to family responsibilities                       | 37%   | 26%                | 63%   |
| PRODUCTIVITY  |   |                    |       |
| Felt distracted at work because they were concerned about caring for a family member or pet | 56%   | 24%                | 80%   |
| Feel that their job performance suffered due to family responsibilities                     | 40%   | 26%                | 66%   |
| Missed a meeting or deadline due to family responsibilities                                 | 32%   | 30%                | 62%   |

This is 70% among those caring for an elderly person

This is 71% among those caring for an elderly person



**“I was totally stressed out because I needed to take care of my child but not lose money either.”**

American workers of all ages, both salaried and hourly, male and female, are making decisions on whether to stay in their current job or seek a new one based on the availability of family-friendly benefits.

### **Employees feel the pain in terms of stress, financial hardship, and stalled career advancement**

An estimated 2 million parents make career sacrifices due to child care challenges<sup>10</sup>. American families lose out on an estimated \$37 billion in lost wages each year due to lack of child care.<sup>11</sup>

According to research consolidated by the Center for American Progress, “Caregiving obligations that interfere with parents’ ability to work can drive families with young children toward financial hardship; in fact, this is a contributing reason that half of young children in the United States live in low-income families.”<sup>12</sup>

And though the personal, psychological, and emotional costs are harder to quantify in dollars, our research corroborates the fact that they are pervasive.

Large majorities of employed caregivers feel that they are letting down those who rely on them, with 20% of women in our study saying they feel this way at least once a month, vs. 14% of men. And for those who feel this way at least a couple of times per year, those figures balloon to 83% of women and 80% of men.

A full 77% of those caring for the elderly—a cohort with a growing percentage of men—feel this way (versus 63% of those who don’t have eldercare responsibilities).

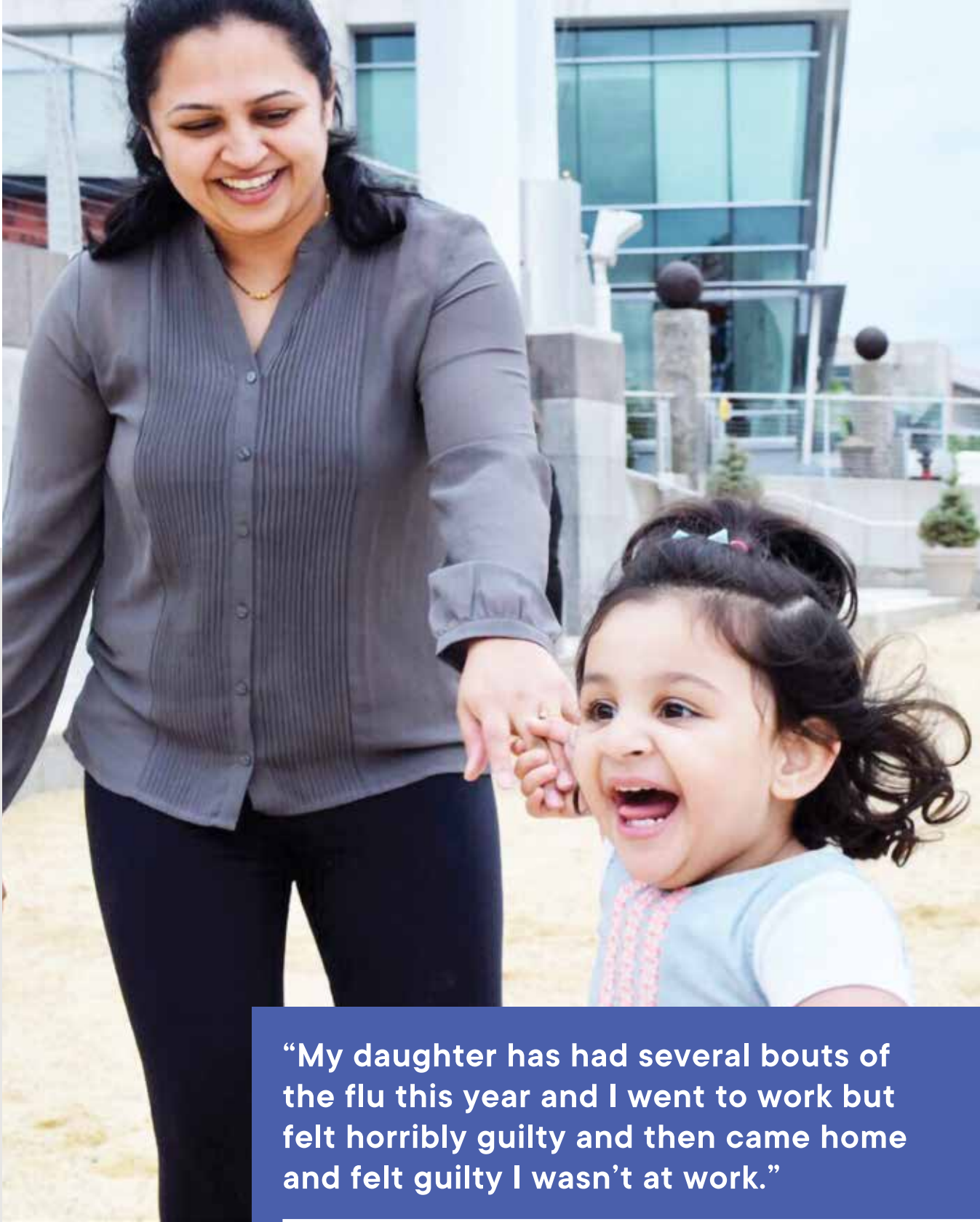
While telecommuting has produced some productivity gains<sup>13</sup>, it’s done little to ease the pain of conflicting priorities. The data were roughly the same whether or not employees were able to do their jobs outside the workplace, suggesting that under normal circumstances, working from home provides no meaningful solution

to these challenges. And while the social distancing requirements imposed by Covid-19 have expanded employers' and employees' notions of what types of job can be done remotely, they've also highlighted what supports need to be in place to make working from home a viable long-term option.

Financial hardship, emotional conflict, and career stagnation are all potential outcomes of an inadequate caregiving support system. And whether they've experienced these stressors firsthand or merely observed them in others, American workers of all ages, both salaried and hourly, male and female, are making decisions on whether to stay in their current job or seek a new one based on the availability of family-friendly benefits.


**77%**  
of those caring for the elderly—a cohort with a growing percentage of men—feel this way (verses 63% of those who don't have eldercare responsibilities).

| HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU FELT OR DONE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING?                                     | AT LEAST ONCE EVERY COUPLE OF MONTHS, AND UP TO ONCE PER WEEK | 1-2 TIMES PER YEAR | TOTAL |
|---|---|--------------------|-------|
| Missed a family event due to work   | 47%   | 30%                | 77%   |
| Feel that you are letting down the people who need your care                              | 52%   | 21%                | 73%   |
| Have scrambled to find someone else to care for a family member or pet at the last minute | 41%   | 31%                | 72%   |



“My daughter has had several bouts of the flu this year and I went to work but felt horribly guilty and then came home and felt guilty I wasn’t at work.”

# THE KEY TO ATTRACTING AND RETAINING EMPLOYEES



## Caregiving benefits motivate employees to stay at their current job

Over the past several years, as companies dealt with tightening job markets and record-low unemployment, attracting and retaining high-performing employees was crucial. And though we cannot yet predict how vigorous or prolonged the economic recovery will be once the Covid-19 pandemic ends, it's safe to assume that the priority employees placed on family-friendly benefits in our study is unlikely to change and even more likely to increase.

In our survey, we presented respondents with a series of benefits and asked them to select one or more statements that corresponded to how they felt about each.

Across all respondents, **caregiving-related benefits scored highly as a reason to stay at their current job.**

Not surprisingly, the perceived value of some benefits corresponds to the situation and needs of each individual respondent when it came to **retention**. For instance:

- The availability of subsidized back-up childcare. 28% of people with kids at home (and 32% of single parents) cited this as a reason to stay at their current job, vs. only 12% of respondents who don't have children at home.
- Eldercare-related benefits. 26% of people who have eldercare responsibilities cited the availability of back-up eldercare as a reason to stay at their current job (vs. 15% of those who don't), and 22% of eldercare-givers selected personalized guidance from a senior care advisor as a reason to stay (vs. 12% of non-eldercare-givers).

Benefits in general played a smaller role when it came to job-seeking motivators. **But caregiving-related options performed among the highest in terms of benefits that would motivate someone to take a new job.**

**"I feel I let my team down and was really disappointed, even though I always said family first and stand by that, I wish I could have done it all."**

\* Family-friendly benefits

| ↓   | THIS BENEFIT WOULD MAKE ME MORE LIKELY TO STAY AT MY CURRENT JOB  | IF THE PAY WAS COMPARABLE, I WOULD LEAVE MY CURRENT JOB FOR ONE THAT OFFERED THIS BENEFIT | ↓   |
|-----|---|---|-----|
| 35% | Flexible work schedule  |   | 15% |
| 31% | *Paid leave to care for a family member   |   | 13% |
| 28% | Wellness benefits (such as paid gym membership)   |   | 11% |
| 26% | *Subsidized back-up child care (when your regular child care isn't available and you have to work) <sup>1</sup> |   | 13% |
| 24% | Commuter benefits   |   | 12% |
| 23% | Student loan assistance   |   | 11% |
| 23% | Tuition reimbursement   |   | 12% |
| 22% | *Paid parental leave for a newborn or newly adopted child   |   | 10% |
| 21% | *Subsidized back-up elder care (when your regular elder care isn't available and you have to work) <sup>2</sup> |   | 11% |
| 18% | *Personalized guidance from a Senior Care Advisor   |   | 10% |
| 18% | Pet health insurance  |   | 9%  |
| 16% | *Back-up pet care (when your regular pet care isn't available and you have to work)                             |   | 8%  |
| 13% | *Adoption assistance  |   | 7%  |
| 13% | *Coverage for fertility treatments  |   | 7%  |

<sup>1</sup>The frequency of those selecting this as a reason to stay at their current job is 28% among those with children living at home  
<sup>2</sup>The frequency of those selecting this as a reason to stay at their current job is rises to 26% among respondents currently caring for an elderly person





## Men are increasingly in need of elder care-related benefits

While the rank ordering of benefits was the same across gender, proportionately more women than men selected *all* benefits except “Coverage for fertility treatments” and “Adoption Assistance” as reasons to stay at their current job.

However, we saw two notable exceptions to that pattern, both pertaining to elder care. Nearly as many men as women indicated that “Subsidized back-up elder care” was a benefit that would make them stay at their current job, and slightly more men than women selected “Personalized guidance from a Senior Care Advisor.” This shouldn’t be surprising, given that 67% of men in our sample say they provided care to an elderly person in their lives on a regular basis, versus only 58% of women.

Those ratios and these specific findings are consistent with national trends. According to the AARP’s Public Policy Institute<sup>14</sup>, “Although the ‘typical’ family caregiver is a 49-year old woman ... 40% of family caregivers of adults are men.” And of that group of men, 63% report that they are the primary caregiver. These data are based on a 2015 study<sup>15</sup>, but given that the aging population is swelling and living longer, we can expect these percentages to climb as the supply of unpaid caregivers dwindles relative to the demand.

Because caregiving has not historically been a male role, men seem to struggle even more than women with the professional implications of this challenge. This same study found that “more than one-third (37%) of male family caregivers did not inform their employers about their caregiving responsibilities. The percentage of male family caregivers who did not inform their supervisors was even higher for millennials (45%).”

Those findings were echoed in our own data as well. Among male respondents, 59% indicated that at least a couple of times per year they felt that their career advancement had suffered as a consequence of their caregiving responsibilities, versus 54% percent of our female respondents.

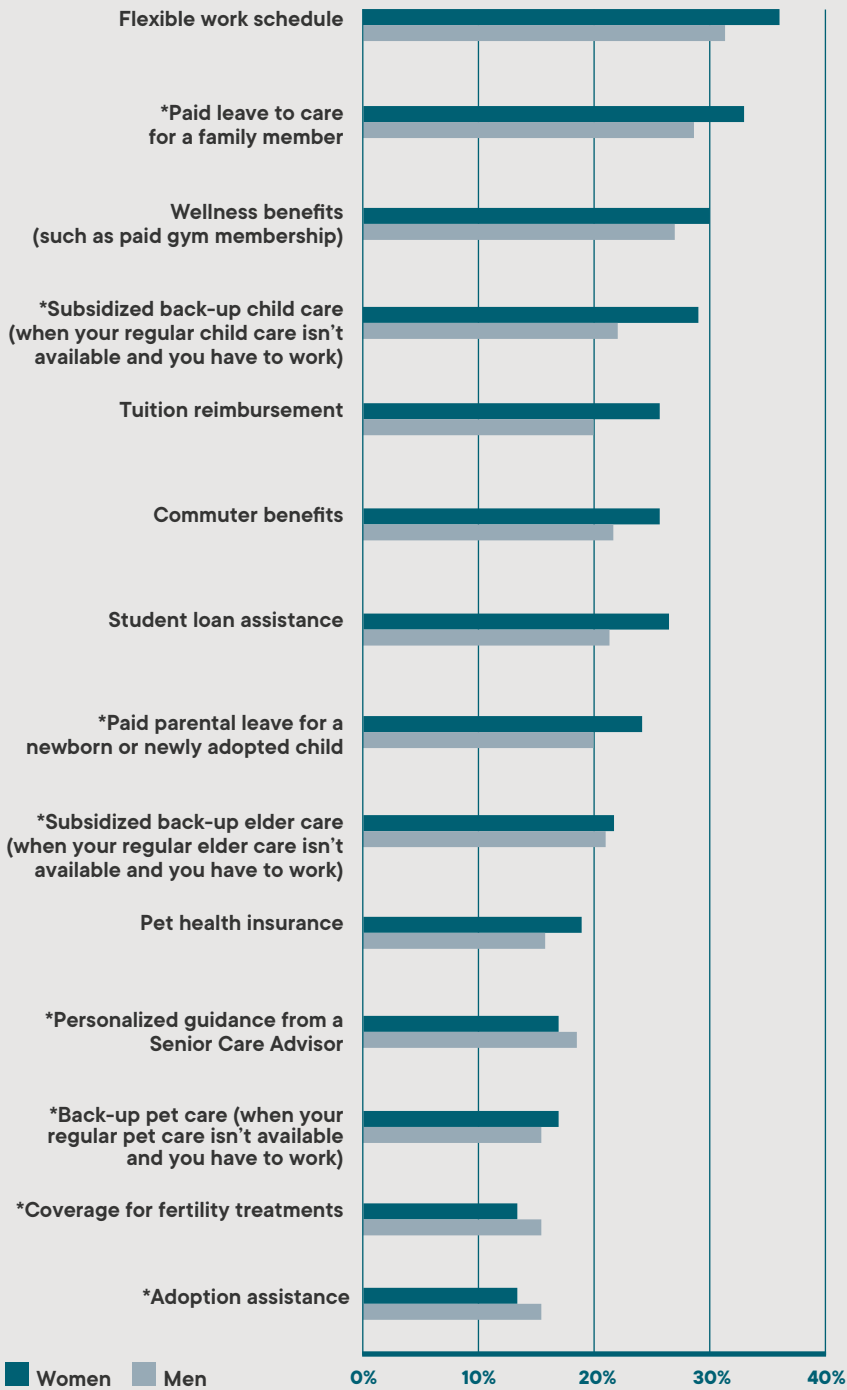
**The implication is glaring: catering to the needs of caregivers is no longer an imperative just for employers with predominantly female workforces.**

# 67%

of men in our sample say they provided care to an elderly person in their lives on a regular basis, versus only 58% of women.

THIS BENEFIT WOULD MAKE ME MORE LIKELY TO STAY AT MY CURRENT JOB

\* Family-friendly benefits



# BENEFITS ARE NO LONGER A PURELY “INTERNAL” MATTER



## Companies are judged by how they treat their workers

*“...21st century leaders also are less focused on physical and financial capital, and more focused on human capital. They are in a competition for the best employees, and the best employees want to work for companies doing good in the world. Increasingly, consumers and investors are demanding the same.”*

Alan Murray, President and CEO, Fortune

## What do employees look for in an employer?

Given the low unemployment rate and demand for skilled labor over the past several years, workers generally recognized that it was a seller's market and were discerning in who they wanted to work for. And while the attributes of the labor market will undoubtedly be transformed by Covid-19, **the work-life imbalance that the pandemic revealed is likely to reinforce the high priority employees place on family-friendly benefits.**

When we asked respondents to rank the attributes most important to them in an employer, “Pays well” most frequently and predictably received a Top 3 ranking. But more interesting was the second tier of tightly clustered attributes (Health and wellness benefits, financial stability, and family-friendly benefits), which outperformed both diversity and inclusion efforts and personal time off.

Strikingly, the appeal of family-friendly benefits isn't limited to those who have an immediate need for them. When we asked employees which benefits they might not personally need but respect their employer for providing, we again found that across generations, respondents most frequently selected family-friendly benefits:

- **55% of Gen X respondents** (who are most likely to be caring for both children and elderly relatives)
- **52% of Millennials** (the cohort employers are most often trying to recruit)
- **44% of Baby Boomers** (who, except for a growing cohort caring for grandchildren, have their childcare needs largely behind them but may still be caring for aging relatives)
- **39% of Gen Z respondents** (who see what lies ahead for them)

Indeed, offerings like adoption assistance, fertility treatments, and elder care were more frequently selected than wellness benefits or flexible work hours.

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU IN AN EMPLOYER?  
PLEASE RANK THESE ATTRIBUTES IN THEIR ORDER  
OF IMPORTANCE TO YOU.

Percentage of respondents ranking each benefit  
as one of their top three most important

72%

PAYS WELL

51%

IS FINANCIALLY STABLE

51%

OFFERS GREAT  
HEALTH AND WELLNESS  
BENEFITS

50%

OFFERS GREAT  
FAMILY-FRIENDLY  
BENEFITS

37%

VALUES  
DIVERSITY  
AND INCLUSION

27%

IS A FAMOUS OR  
WELL-REGARDED  
COMPANY

14%

OFFERS LOTS OF  
PERSONAL TIME OFF

I DON'T NEED THIS BENEFIT, BUT WOULD  
RESPECT MY EMPLOYER FOR PROVIDING IT

\* Family-friendly benefits

\*Adoption assistance

47%

\*Coverage for fertility treatments

45%

\*Subsidized back-up elder care (when your regular elder care isn't available and you have to work)

39%

\*Personalized guidance from a Senior Care Advisor

36%

Student loan assistance

35%

\*Subsidized back-up child care (when your regular child care isn't available and you have to work)

34%

Tuition reimbursement

32%

\*Paid parental leave for a newborn or newly adopted child

32%

Commuter benefits

31%

\*Back-up pet care (when your regular pet care isn't available and you have to work)

31%

Pet health insurance

30%

Wellness benefits (such as paid gym membership)

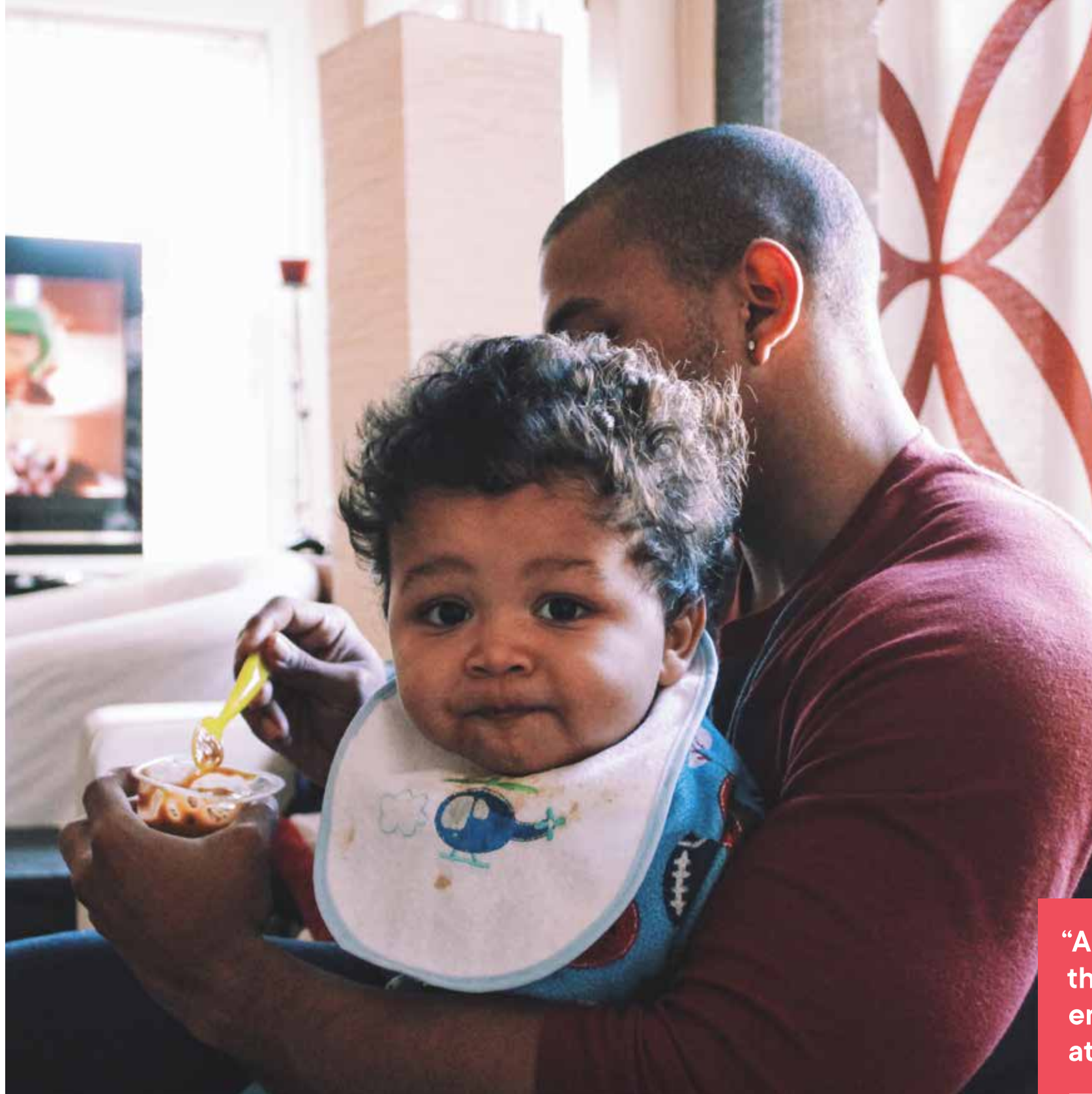
25%

\*Paid leave to care for a family member

23%

Flexible work schedule

17%



“Conscious consumerism” is on the rise, making it even more crucial for companies to be perceived as socially responsible.

Of course, *all* of the attributes and benefits we listed are worthy and happily, companies need not trade off commuter benefits, for example, with family-friendly benefits. But these data do suggest that companies seeking to boost their esteem in the eyes of current or potential employees might consider reallocating the dollars they’re spending on wellness benefits for other, more explicitly family-friendly ones.

Employers need not choose between catering to the needs of the Gen Z or Millennial employee or those of Gen X or Boomers. Our data demonstrates that family-friendly benefits have significant cross-generational appeal.

“A socially responsible company is one that considers the real world needs of its employees and customers with as much attention as it considers its bottom line.”

All but Baby Boomers most frequently classified care-related benefits among the top five under the heading “I don’t need this benefit, but would respect my employer for providing it.”

This may be an artifact of how the question was phrased. For example, unless it’s for their grandchildren, Baby Boomers probably “don’t need” student loan assistance. By the same token, unless it’s for their grandparents, Gen Z respondents probably “don’t need” back-up elder care.

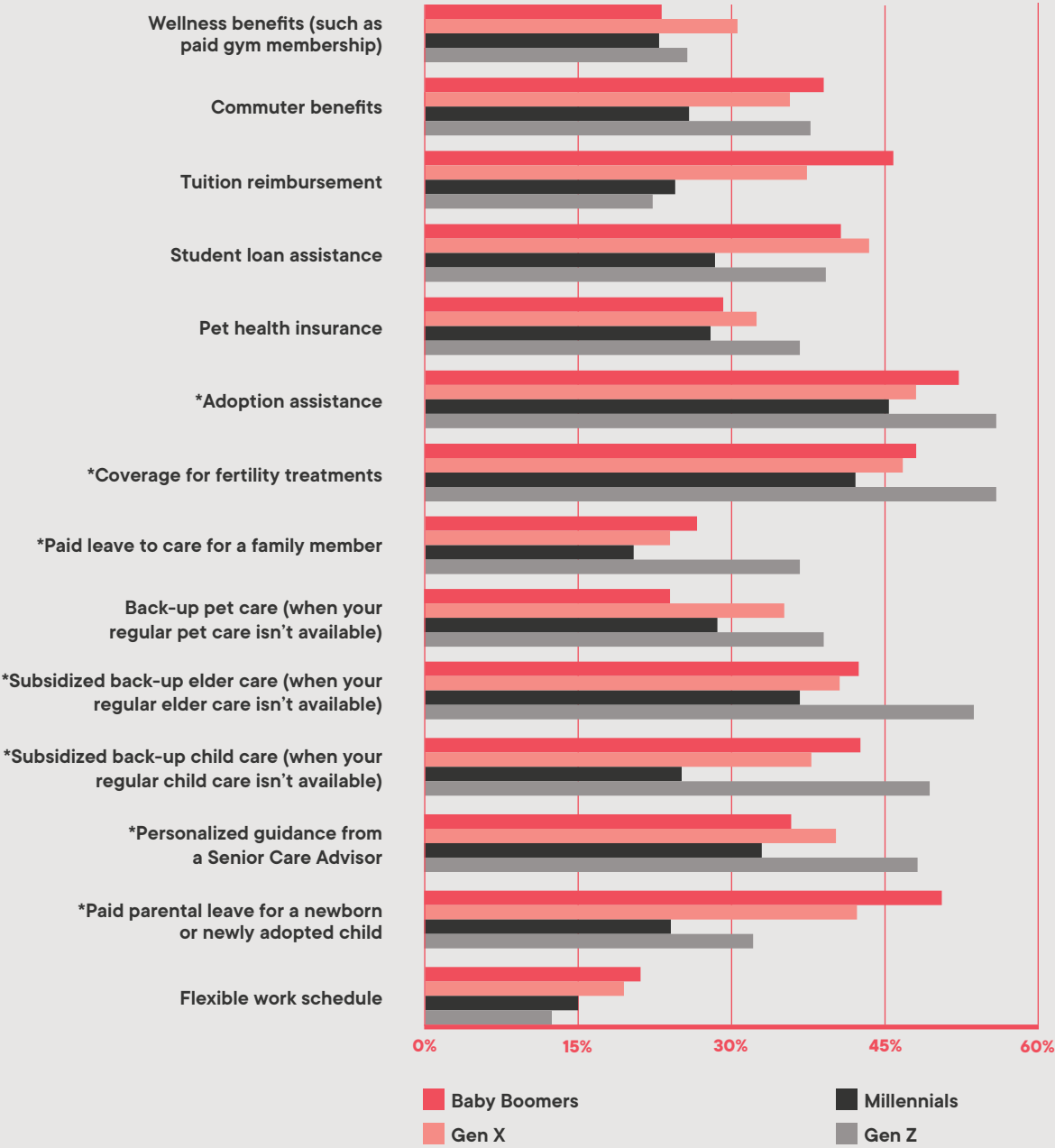
However, among Millennial and Gen X respondents – the two cohorts most likely to need both family-friendly benefits and other forms of monetary benefits such as “Commuter benefits,” family-friendly benefits still rank in the top five.

Our data demonstrates that family-friendly benefits have significant cross-generational appeal.



I DON’T NEED THIS BENEFIT, BUT WOULD RESPECT MY EMPLOYER FOR PROVIDING IT

\* Family-friendly benefits



What accounts for the fact that even younger workers are so supportive of benefits that may not immediately pertain to them? Our data suggests that it may be indicative of the value they place on corporate social responsibility.

How employees and consumers define a socially responsible company

Over the past few years, perceptions of what companies are ethically and socially responsible have played a larger and larger role in guiding purchase decisions. Indeed, a recent Cone Communications study found that 87% of Americans will purchase a product because a company advocated for an issue they cared about.<sup>16</sup>

Before showing respondents any lists of benefits, we asked them to use their own words to define a “socially responsible” company. The two characteristics that most often emerged were being responsible and compassionate employers, and being good stewards of the environment.

And when we then showed them a list of attributes and quantified how they defined “corporate social responsibility,” respondents heavily favored those that spoke to how companies treat their workers.

The two characteristics that our survey respondents most often cited were being responsible and compassionate employers, and being good stewards of the environment.

HERE ARE SOME OF THE WAYS PEOPLE DEFINE A “SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE” COMPANY. HOW STRONGLY DO OR DON’T YOU AGREE WITH EACH DEFINITION?

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Pays its employees a living wage  | 85% |
| Offers “family-friendly” benefits (such as paid parental leave, back-up child and elder care, etc.) | 83% |
| Offers health and wellness incentives for exercising, losing weight, etc.                           | 79% |
| Actively recruits a diverse, inclusive workforce  | 78% |
| Gives money to schools or charities   | 77% |
| Invests in sustainability and reduces its carbon footprint  | 76% |

| AS A SHOPPER/CONSUMER, HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE FOLLOWING IN HELPING YOU TO DECIDE WHICH BRAND OR STORE TO BUY FROM? | PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS CHOOSING “SOMEWHAT OR VERY IMPORTANT” |
|---|--|
| Product quality   | 93%  |
| Convenience   | 88%  |
| Treats its workers well (e.g. Pays well, offers family-friendly benefits)   | 84%  |
| Gives to charity or is socially responsible in other ways   | 71%  |
| Is committed to sustainability and clean energy   | 68%  |
| Values diversity and inclusion  | 67%  |

When we broke out these results by age group and by gender, the overall ratings were unchanged. Living wages and family-friendly benefits were most often somewhat or strongly agreed with across all generations (with higher frequencies among Millennials and Boomers). 84% of men and women alike gave “Family-friendly benefits” a top-two box rating.

The average ratings (on a 5-point scale) tell a similar story. Living wages and family-friendly benefits were most often given the highest average rating across all generations.

Social responsibility is increasingly valued when workers choose prospective employers, but we also found their perceptions of a company as being socially responsible is influencing their choices as shoppers. Even more specifically, employees told us that how companies treat their workers is one of the leading criteria they use as consumers in deciding what and who to buy from.

And it isn’t just a consideration for young people: These ratings don’t vary dramatically by generation. Only a slightly higher proportion of Gen Z respondents (86%) gave “Treats its workers well” a top-two box rating than other generational cohorts (84% of Millennials, 83% each of Gen X and Baby Boomers).

This echoes what consumer research is increasingly finding: “Conscious consumerism” is on the rise, making it even more crucial for companies to be perceived as socially responsible.

Social responsibility is increasingly valued when workers choose prospective employers, but we also found their perceptions of a company as being socially responsible is influencing their choices as shoppers.

# EMPLOYEES FEEL BENEFIT INEQUITIES



**While progress has occurred, employees see disparities in who their benefits best serve.**

While the primary objective of this study was to assess employees' struggles, needs, and aspirations, we did solicit their feedback on their current benefit packages as well. And across gender and generations, respondents see disparities in what benefits are offered, feeling that some subgroups and needs are disproportionately served than others. For example, *across generational cohorts*, a majority feel that:

- Parents of newborns are disproportionately better served than parents of older kids.
- Caregivers to children receive disproportionately more support than do caregivers to the elderly.
- Male caregivers are less supported than female caregivers.

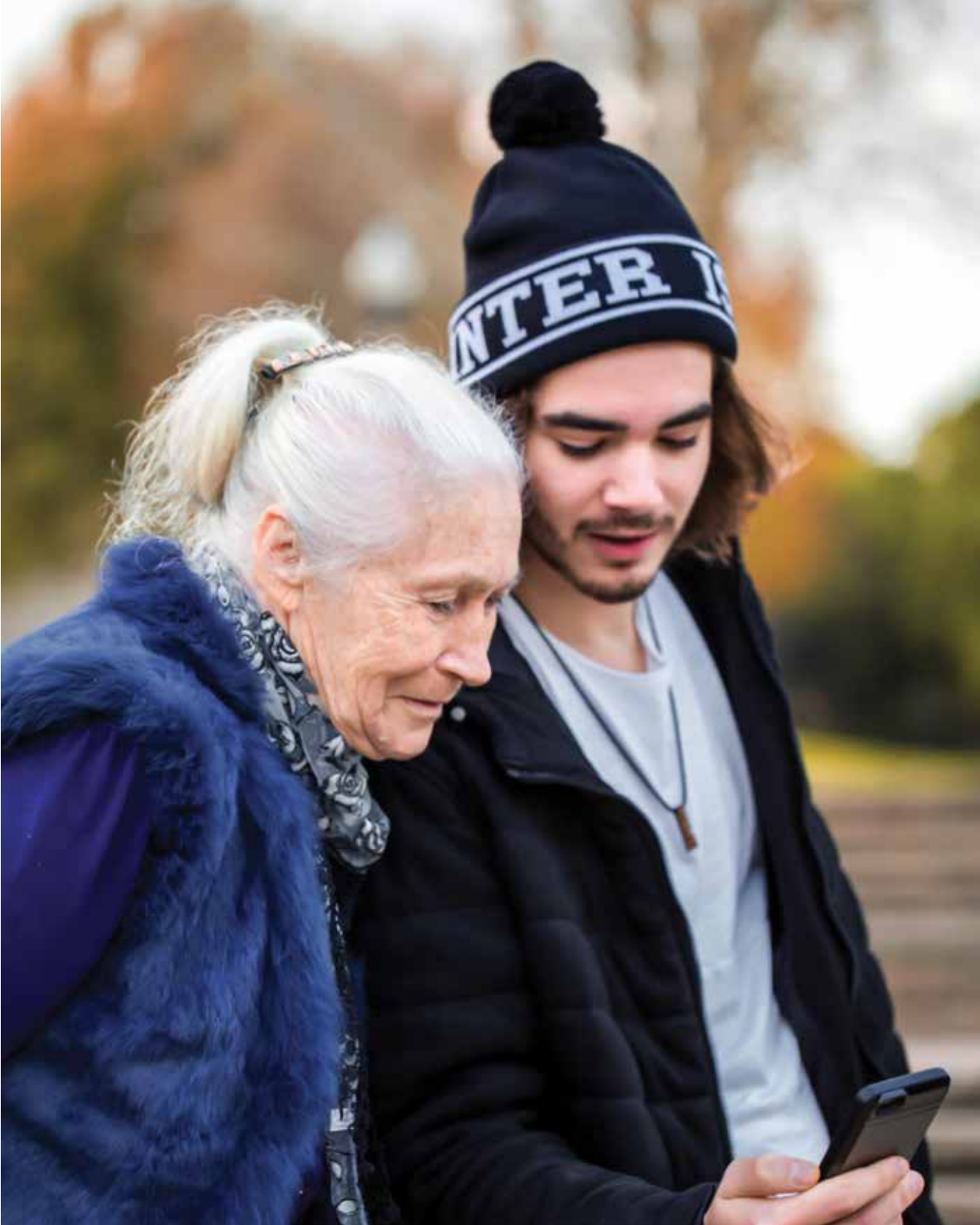
## **Eldercare responsibilities are fueling a growing awareness and empathy among men**

We see some notable differences in the perceptions of women and men. While a plurality of all respondents agree that male caregivers are less supported than female caregivers, 9% more men than women gave that statement a top-two box rating.

**“I needed to get to work but the person who takes care of my mother that day couldn’t, so I stayed home, lost money and didn’t meet a deadline.”**

| HOW STRONGLY DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?  | PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS CHOOSING "SOMEWHAT OR STRONGLY AGREE" |
|---|--|
| In general, benefits for parents are disproportionately focused on parents of newborns, and not enough on parents of older children | 62%  |
| In general, male caregivers are less supported by employers than female care givers   | 57%  |
| In general, employers don't do enough for parents of newborns   | 53%  |
| In general, women of child-bearing age are less likely to advance in their careers  | 51%  |
| It's risky for your career to tell an employer about your childcare responsibilities  | 50%  |
| It's risky for your career to tell an employer about your elder care responsibilities   | 45%  |
| In general, employers offer more useful benefits to younger workers than to older workers   | 42%  |
| In general, employers do a good job of helping employees care for the elderly*  | 35%  |
| In general, employers offer more useful benefits to older workers than to younger ones  | 34%  |

\*46% of employees who could telecommute gave this a top-two box rating, nearly twice as many as those who could not work from home.





### But more than any other subgroup, male eldercare-givers think that:

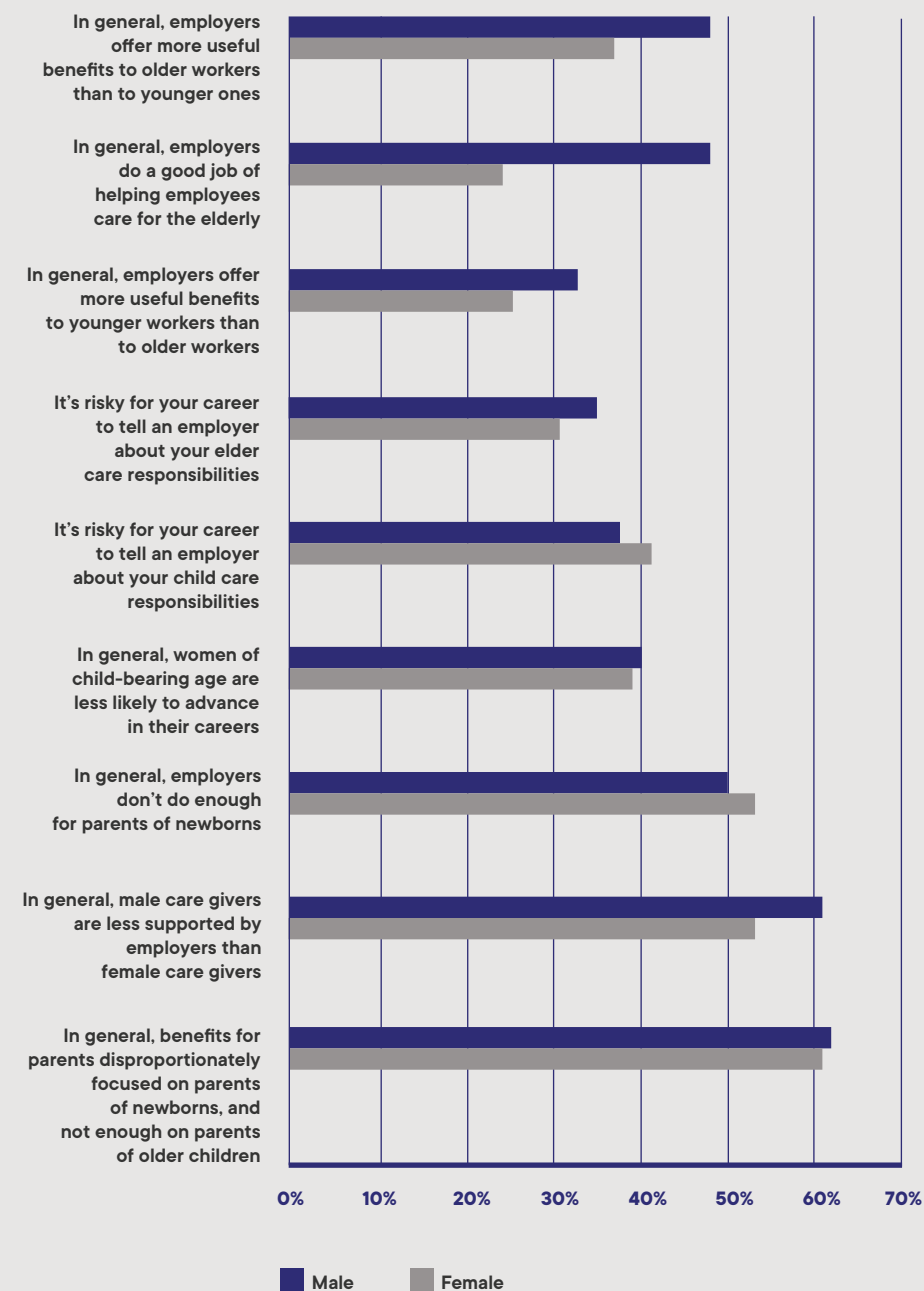
- Male caregivers are less supported by employers than female caregivers (67%).
- It's risky to tell an employer about one's eldercare responsibilities (52%).
- It's risky to tell an employer about one's childcare responsibilities (51%).
- Employers offer more useful benefits to younger workers than to older workers (54%).
- Employers offer more useful benefits to older workers than to younger workers (48%).

While those last two bullet points may seem contradictory, they may also suggest that caregiving has a sort of halo effect. Perhaps for men, who may be newer to caregiving in general and disproportionately tasked with caring for the elderly, these responsibilities generate a broader empathy with and advocacy for caregivers in general. If so, that suggests that employers may need to revisit their assumptions about what their male workers want and need.

**54%**  
of male eldercare-givers feel that employers do a good job of helping employees care for their elderly loved ones, versus only **30%** of female eldercare givers.

## HOW STRONGLY DO YOU AGREE WITH EACH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?

Percent of respondents who "Somewhat or Strongly Agree"



Some perceptions vary based on life stage:

To some extent, respondents’ perceptions reflected the needs specific to their life stages. A higher proportion of Gen Z and Millennial respondents—the cohorts most likely to be having babies in the near future or already have young children living at home—feel that:

- Women of child-bearing age are less likely to advance in their careers.
- It’s risky to tell employers about one’s childcare responsibilities.

And in larger numbers, Gen Z and Millennial respondents think that employers:

- Don’t do enough for parents of newborns
- Do a good job of helping employees care for the elderly
- Offer more useful benefits to older workers than to younger ones
- Are less supportive of male caregivers than of female caregivers

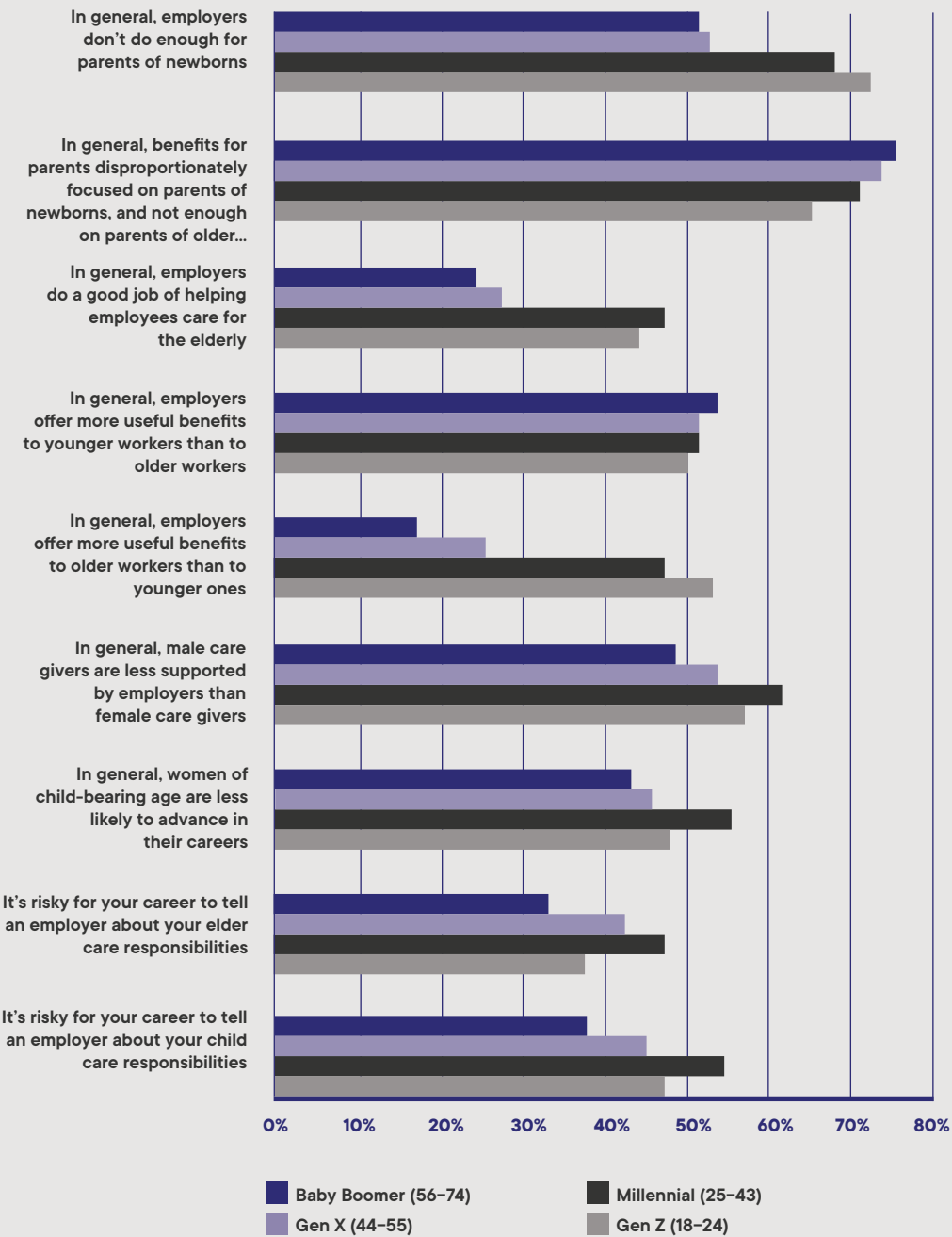
However, a majority of respondents across all generational cohorts agree that in general:

- Benefits for parents are disproportionately focused on newborns, and not enough on parents of older children.
- Male caregivers are less supported by their employers than are female caregivers.

That cross-generational consensus may reflect the fact that older adults not only need care themselves, but often also provide care to younger family members. Approximately 1 million grandparents age 60 and over were responsible for the basic needs of one or more grandchildren under age 18 living with them in 2016.<sup>17</sup> And by the same token, the caregiving responsibilities of younger adults aren’t limited to children. At least one in four caregivers to the elderly is a Millennial.<sup>18</sup>

The old demographic assumptions about who needs what are blurring. This means that whether a workforce is multigenerational or predominantly Millennial, employers need to expand and diversify their family-friendly benefits.

HOW STRONGLY DO YOU AGREE WITH EACH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?





# SMALL TRADE-OFFS AND BIG GAINS

## We need to recognize our interdependence

Our data suggest that employers may have some latitude to reallocate some of their existing spending on “perk benefits” to more family-friendly benefits and satisfy more employees in the process.

What’s clear is that employers cannot afford to do nothing. As of a few years ago, only 53% of employers offered flexible work hours/paid sick days, 32% offered paid family leave, 23% offered employee assistance programs, and 22% allowed telecommuting regardless of employees’ caregiving burdens.<sup>19</sup>

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a huge wake-up call. Already better positioned to address the crisis thanks to established employee benefits programs including backup child and eldercare, some companies have expanded these programs to ensure that their employees can continue to work when so many others, including their competitors, cannot.

We and others have documented the consequences of inadequate family-friendly benefits in terms of productivity, absenteeism, retention, and employee stress. But let’s add one more to that list: Candor. Only 56% of caregivers report that their work supervisor is aware of their caregiving responsibilities—76% for those providing daily care, and 49% for those providing weekly care.<sup>20</sup>

One of the positive lessons to emerge from the trauma of the coronavirus pandemic is that trust, transparency, and a long-term view are prerequisites to problem solving. Employees need to feel safe in surfacing their work-life challenges, and able to choose a job based on its long-term viability from them as caregivers as well as workers.

“Last year, our nanny was sick and I couldn’t get a last minute replacement. I worked from home that day and we brought the nanny soup and medicine. I did not worry how my employer would react ... I think it’s important for children to see adults fulfilling their responsibilities even when it is inconvenient or difficult.”

## Implications for Employers

- Expand your caregiving-related benefits; they are key both to acquiring and especially to retaining employees of all generations.
- Companies may need to make trade-offs to do so, but a large body of research (including ours) suggests that family-friendly offerings are more valued than some as if not more costly “perk” benefits.
- As gender roles and values change, men are increasingly taking primary responsibility for eldercare, and their benefit packages need to support them in this worthy work.
- While progress has occurred, employees see disparities in who their benefits best serve, with a distinct bias towards parents of newborns. While new parent benefits are critical, the need for childcare extends well beyond infancy, and your benefits package must respond to those ongoing needs.
- Not only will family-friendly benefits help companies with employee acquisition, retention, and productivity, but it will affect revenues. Americans are increasingly eager to work for and buy from socially responsible companies, and defining social responsibility primarily in how companies treat their workers. This creates an opportunity for Human Resource professionals to directly impact their companies’ top line.

**Employees need to feel safe in surfacing their work-life challenges, and able to choose a job based on its long-term viability from them as caregivers as well as workers. Employers need to be transparent in acknowledging their constraints, open to making changes, and enlightened enough to invest in the long-term wellbeing of all their stakeholders.**



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