

# The Sandwich Generation in the American Workforce

*By Abba Belgrave, Sales Support Manager*

Defined by the dual caregiving burdens of their aging parents and their own children, the sandwich generation is only growing. More than half of Americans in their 40s are caught between these competing responsibilities. HR leaders should plan for the escalating needs of this population.

The harsh truth is that the situation may not get better. One out of every five people will be over age 65 in the next six years. At the same time, six out of ten parents say they have provided financial help to their adult children in the past year. [Caregiver employees](#) stuck between these two predicaments are, predictably, overwhelmed. The balancing act between work and family obligations becomes complex. Increased emotional distress is common when the demands of a parent and a child are in direct conflict. And while the stressors are myriad ranging from the physical to psychological, it is the financial implications that employers should assess and make a plan for.

A special edition of New York Life Wealth Watch Survey stated that nearly half of employees in the sandwich generation report they were unable to meet essential expenses due to the costs of caregiving in the past 12 months. It is no surprise then that 90% of sandwich generation adults have made financial decisions to their detriment as a result. Credit card debt and depleted or nonexistent emergency savings, this increased financial precarity has downstream effects on how they utilize their employee benefits. One example is delaying their own medical care in favor of their aging relative or child's needs. This can lead to higher costs on employer plans when employee health issues become emergent. However more than this, one third of Americans who are now in their 40s and 50s, have less than \$10,000 in retirement savings. If employees of the sandwich generation are already feeling the financial pinch of managing their parents and children then the future looks worse when they are in need of care and support themselves.

It can be difficult to know where to start but the only wrong thing to do is nothing. Most employees will not inform their employer of their struggles for fear of career repercussions. Survey your population to ascertain the likely need. A multi-pronged approach could include any or all of the following:

1. **Re-assess your [financial wellness](#) benefits.** 29% of the sandwich generation is very stressed about financially supporting both their kids and their parents. Some of them are still paying off student loan debt. Offering a mix of financial wellness benefits can give these employees the tools to support their short and long term goals while they support their families.
2. **Consider updating your leave policies.** Full-time caregiving is forcing some employees out of the workplace. FMLA and PTO may not be enough for the long term implications of caregiving these employees face. Only 13 states have paid family and medical leave programs. If offering flexible work hours is not feasible for your organization, consider how a specific policy for caregiving might provide relief to affected staff and limit attrition.

3. **Provide avenues for support.** This can take a variety of formats. Keeping an updated list of caregiving resources available in the community. Starting an employee resource group so that workers can share their experiences and feel less isolated. Re-educating employees on the value of benefits they already have access to such as an EAP or long term care policies.

Hard though it is to imagine, at some point, nearly every working person will need to take time away from their job to care for a family member. The statistics bear this out. Employers who can cultivate a benefits strategy that acknowledges the reality faced by employees of the sandwich generation will be better prepared for the needs of their workforce.

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