



# SUPPORTING MILITARY AND VETERAN CAREGIVERS IN THE WORKPLACE

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A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS



**Elizabeth Dole Foundation**  
CARING FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

**AARP**  
Family Caregiving™

**HIRING OUR  
HEROES**  
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
FOUNDATION

# FOREWORD

In June 2019, a group of more than 20 executives from private- and public-sector organizations, in collaboration with AARP, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s Hiring Our Heroes Program, gathered for the inaugural Military and Veteran Caregiver Employment Taskforce meeting. Throughout multiple sessions and subsequent conversations, Taskforce members identified key challenges working family caregivers of military service members face when trying to balance their care responsibilities with full- or part-time employment or when entering or re-entering the workforce.

Similarly, Taskforce members identified challenges employers face when accommodating employees who are family caregivers of military service members, including concerns of job readiness for those re-entering the workforce and productivity issues for existing employees. From there, they outlined key strategies for employers to implement, such as increasing the number of positions with flexible schedules and remote opportunities, expanding leave policies, creating customized benefits, enhancing employee assistance programs (EAPs), and leveraging employee resource groups (ERGs) to ensure employees receive adequate care, peer and leadership support and consideration. Each idea that met with approval was identified as a significant step for employers to take in order to embrace and support working family military caregivers.

## MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY AND VETERAN CAREGIVER EMPLOYMENT TASKFORCE

- AARP
- Amazon
- Bank of America
- Best Buy Co. Inc.
- Booz Allen Hamilton
- Comcast NBCUniversal
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- U.S. Department of Defense
- U.S. Department of Labor
- Elizabeth Dole Foundation
- Hilton
- Hiring Our Heroes
- Home Instead Senior Care
- Humana Military
- KPMG U.S. (facilitator)
- McDonald’s USA
- Philips
- Prudential Financial Inc.
- U.S. Small Business Administration
- Sodexo USA
- Uber Technologies Inc.
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- The White House



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## WORKING CAREGIVERS OF MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS AND VETERANS

Amid the longest period of conflict in our nation's history, military service members are coming home in greater numbers than ever before as survivors of catastrophic battlefield injuries, thanks to significant advances in wartime medicine and emergency practices. At the same time, veterans from previous wars and conflicts are experiencing the effects of aging, compounded by health issues related to their service. Whether they served in World War II, Iraq or any point in between, many veterans are in need of long-term care and continued support. These responsibilities increasingly fall on the shoulders of family members and friends, who often prioritize the needs of their loved ones over their own.<sup>1</sup> This kind of devoted care can help to ensure faster recovery times and save the nation millions of dollars in health care costs. Yet, little is known about military caregivers and the challenges they face when they take on the responsibility of caring for their loved one.

Approximately 5.5 million people provide unpaid care for active-duty military service members and veterans. Of those 5.5 million caregivers, most are family members. As one of the fastest-growing segments of the caregiver demographic, military caregiver roles are growing in number and responsibility at a rapid rate.

<sup>1</sup> Terri Tanielian, Rajeev Ramchand, Michael P. Fisher, Carra S. Sims, Racine S. Harris and Margaret C. Harrell, "Military Caregivers: Cornerstones of Support for Our Nation's Wounded, Ill, and Injured Veterans," *Rand Health Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 1, March 2013, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4945228/>.

A military caregiver is defined as someone who cares for a wounded, ill or injured service member or veteran. That person could be a spouse or partner caring for an active-duty service member, a son or daughter caring for a parent who is a veteran, a brother or sister caring for a sibling who suffers from emotional issues following service, a parent caring for a wounded child or even a grandchild caring for a grandparent. These caregivers provide a broad range of care and assistance for their loved ones, many of whom suffer from disabling physical or mental injuries, as well as conditions such as traumatic brain injury (TBI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), paralysis and spinal cord injury, and service-connected illnesses like amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), multiple sclerosis and certain types of cancer.

Family military caregivers play vital roles in facilitating the recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration into society of wounded, ill and injured service members by providing day-to-day assistance with fundamental activities such as bathing, dressing and eating. In addition, they help their loved ones relearn necessary skills, arrange medical appointments, manage finances and provide supportive environments, all while continuing to care for themselves and other family members and remain—if possible—employed. This can impose substantial physical, emotional and financial tolls, impairing caregivers' capacity for work and productivity beyond their caregiving responsibilities.





## COMMON CAREGIVING SERVICES

Two critical issues facing military caregivers are access to the support and services they need to effectively care for their loved one, and the prevention of problems like compassion fatigue (a form of burnout), financial stress and other issues related to their caregiving responsibilities. In recent years, government agencies, community organizations and nonprofits have stepped up to attend to these services, but military caregivers still often struggle to find assistance that supports their unique needs. On the next page, we list some of the most common needs facing military caregivers today. Caregivers can find programs to support these needs at [hiddenheroes.org/resources](http://hiddenheroes.org/resources).



## **RESPITE CARE**

Care provided to a service member or veteran by someone in order to give the caregiver a short-term, temporary break.

## **PATIENT ADVOCATE OR CASE MANAGER**

An individual who acts as a liaison between the service member or veteran and his or her care providers, or who coordinates care for the service member or veteran.

## **A HELPING HAND**

Direct support, such as loans, donations, legal guidance, housing support or transportation assistance.

## **FINANCIAL STIPEND**

Compensation for a caregiver's time devoted to caregiving activities and/or for loss of wages because of a caregiving commitment.

## **STRUCTURED SOCIAL SUPPORT**

In-person or online support groups for caregivers and/or military family members that can assist with caregiving-specific stresses or challenges.

## **RELIGIOUS SUPPORT**

Religious- or spiritual-based guidance or counseling.

## **STRUCTURED WELLNESS ACTIVITIES**

Organized activities, such as fitness classes or stress-relief lessons, that focus on improving mental or physical well-being.

## **STRUCTURED EDUCATION OR TRAINING**

In-person or online classes, modules, webinars, manuals or workbooks that involve a formalized curriculum (rather than ad hoc information) related to caregiving activities.

## **NONSTANDARD CLINICAL CARE**

### **HEALTH CARE**

Health care that is (1) offered outside of routine or traditional channels such as common government or private-sector payment and delivery systems, or (2) offered specially to caregivers.

### **MENTAL HEALTH CARE**

Mental health care that is (1) offered outside of routine or traditional channels such as common government or private-sector payment and delivery systems, or (2) offered specially to caregivers.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Rajeev Ramchand, Terri Tanielian, Michael P. Fisher, Christine Anne Vaughan, Thomas E. Trail, Caroline Batka, Phoenix Voorhies, Michael Robbins, Eric Robinson and Bonnie Ghosh-Dastidar, *Hidden Heroes: America's Military Caregivers*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR499.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR499.html).



## BALANCING WORK AND CAREGIVING

Nearly 60 percent of all family caregivers work full or part time while balancing the needs of their relatives and other loved ones.<sup>3</sup> Not only do caregiving responsibilities often require individuals to cut back on hours or take time off/leaves of absence, their productivity and focus can be impacted by the stress and worry they feel for their loved ones. On average, employed caregivers work 34.7 hours a week.

- 56 percent of employed caregivers work full time.
- 16 percent of employed caregivers work 30–39 hours a week.
- 25 percent of employed caregivers work fewer than 30 to 39 hours a week.<sup>4</sup>

Factoring in a potential loss of wages, health insurance and other employment benefits, the cost of caregiving can be significant. Often, military caregivers are sole income earners, forcing them to balance their caregiving obligations and employment

According to a 2014 RAND study published in conjunction with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, some 60 percent of military caregivers are female and 40 percent are male. Only a third are spouses. Nearly half of the post-9/11 caregiving population is between the ages of 31 to 55; 43 percent are pre-9/11 military and veteran caregivers.<sup>5</sup> It's important to note that many of these individuals did not choose caregiving as a vocation.

<sup>3</sup>AARP and National Alliance of Caregivers, Caregiving in the U.S. (Washington, DC: AARP and National Alliance of Caregivers, 2015), <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2015/caregiving-in-the-united-states-2015-report-revised.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup>Ramchand et al., *Hidden Heroes*, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR499.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR499.html).

<sup>5</sup>Ramchand et al., *Hidden Heroes*, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR499.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR499.html).

On top of the stress imposed on them, many military caregivers struggle to self-identify as caregivers. They think of their work as simply helping out. The longer they feel unrecognized by society, the greater their potential vulnerability to feelings of isolation and even mental health issues like depression and anxiety.

Further exacerbating self-doubt, caregivers frequently experience feelings of guilt and remorse when leaving their loved ones to go to work, tend to their families or fulfill other day-to-day obligations. Caregivers of individuals with behavioral health issues routinely show elevated risks for depression. In these situations, caregivers often benefit by leaving the home to focus on something other than caregiving duties, but they still need support from supervisors and colleagues. Deciding whether to remain in the workforce is often a critical part of the caregiver journey. With support and understanding from their workplace, they may be able to succeed at both their jobs and their caregiving duties.

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"If you think about the workplace, no one truly understands the sacrifices our service members make. They look at it through a different lens. While it's the service members who give their life to service, it's the spouse, too. They both are serving our country. We owe a debt of gratitude to the military caregiver. They didn't plan for this. So, how do we prepare them to go back into the workforce? First, acknowledge the work that they do. Understand the sacrifices they make on behalf of their loved ones and then make it possible for them to do both."

Mary Alexander, Vice President, Strategic Partnerships and Healthcare Integration, Home Instead Senior Care; Member, Military and Veteran Caregiver Employment Taskforce

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## CASE STUDY

### EMERY POPOLOSKI

Dole Caregiver Fellow 2014 | Massachusetts

#### Recommendations for caregivers

- Take advantage of résumé reviews and career coaching from organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes Program and the Wounded Warrior Project. Develop language to cover résumé gaps. Emery: "Rather than saying, 'I was out of work for three years due to caregiving,' put the words into business terms."
- Build a business case for yourself on the job. For instance, tell your employer you can work a certain number of hours and may need some flexibility, but you will get the job done. Show the worth of working to accommodate a caregiver employee.

#### Recommendations for employers

- "Legacy agreements" in HR policies that protect military caregivers' jobs and accommodations in the event of management changes.
- Workplace mentorships and networking lunches for military caregivers.
- Partnerships with nonprofit organizations to develop models for helping military caregivers get back into the workforce.

Emery Popoloski was 25 when her husband, Charlie, then 27, was diagnosed with invisible wounds, post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury and seizures following his deployments to Iraq. Theirs was a different journey that began in 2012, after Charlie's initial diagnosis and the couple's decision to leave the military and move to the Boston area to be closer to medical support and family.

As a member of the millennial generation, Emery was internet-savvy, learning quickly where and how to search for support online—tools she shared with others. This peer support ultimately put her in touch with a 2012 Dole Caregiver Fellow who encouraged her to apply for a fellowship.

And that, Emery says, "started my journey." She was named the 2014 Dole Caregiver Fellow representing Massachusetts. She also became a Foundation employee, working part time overseeing the Hidden Heroes Caregiving Community on Facebook and later taking on a full-time role coordinating the Fellows program.

"The Fellowship enabled me to do advocacy work, connect, network and meet other Fellows and people in my shoes," she says. She was able to discuss caregiving with local, state and national leaders. "Most importantly," she adds, "they listened."

Emery admits she was lucky, crediting "an underground network" that helped her, as well as nearby family, whose support helped her go back to school for a master's degree. Today, Emery still volunteers as a Dole Fellow Alumna while working full time, supported by her employer's generous benefits program, which includes flexible working hours.

"Part of losing one's identity is losing your career goals," she says. "My passion is caregiver employment. You don't have to leave work altogether as a military caregiver, just adjust to what you're doing. Be honest about what you can or cannot do at a particular time. Sometimes just getting out of the house and back to work makes all of the difference."

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Each year, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation selects 50 military caregivers from across the country to represent the foundation as Dole Caregiver Fellows. During their two-year terms, Fellows bring vital attention to the challenges caregivers face through efforts such as advocating for increased support on Capitol Hill, advising the foundation on programs and initiatives, and providing inspiration and support through the online Hidden Heroes Caregiver Community.

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Learn more at [elizabethdolefoundation.org/dole-caregiver-fellows](http://elizabethdolefoundation.org/dole-caregiver-fellows).

## PRE- AND POST-911 CAREGIVERS

- Of the 5.5 million military/veteran caregivers in the United States, 1.1 million care for veterans of conflicts after 9/11. These caregivers not only tend to be younger than most caregivers; they also care for younger veterans who may be more likely to suffer from mental health issues or substance abuse in addition to service-related conditions.<sup>6</sup>
- Like many military and veteran caregivers, the majority of post-9/11 caregivers aren't connected to a support network. They face tremendous pressures as they try to navigate complex health care systems, uncover benefit allowances, find medical and behavioral support services, and stay on top of changing policies and legislation affecting veterans.



## CREATING A CAREGIVING-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE

Only 56 percent of caregivers report that their work supervisor is aware of their caregiving responsibilities.<sup>7</sup> Often, caregivers who choose not to disclose their situations to employers fear they may appear as a burden or be overlooked for future advancement. Caregivers without workplace support often experience greater attendance issues and have higher turnover than those whose employers are aware of and accommodate their situations.

Employers must dispel incorrect assumptions and stereotypes about caregiving employees, including the notion that taking advantage of flexible work arrangements means they're less committed to their jobs, or the belief that employees' caregiving responsibilities will interfere with their ability to get their work done.<sup>8</sup>

The good news is that a number of forward-thinking employers are recognizing the growing family caregiver population and taking significant steps both to ease the burden for valuable employees and prevent discrimination against them. By simply acknowledging caregivers' challenging situations, employers are more apt to understand and support their employees' dual roles.

<sup>7</sup> "Military and Veteran Caregiver Experience Map," Elizabeth Dole Foundation, <https://caregiverjourney.elizabethdole-foundation.org/wp-content/themes/caregiver-child/images/Caregiver-Journey-Map.pdf>. Information from Ramchand et al., *Hidden Heroes*, and Tanielian et al., "Military Caregivers."

<sup>8</sup> Ramchand et al., *Hidden Heroes*, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR499.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR499.html).

Among other policies, many progressive employers offer paid leave or related programs that can help employee caregivers:

- 53 percent of employers offer flexible work hours.
- 52 percent offer paid sick days.
- 32 percent offer paid family leave.
- 23 percent offer employee assistance programs.
- 22 percent offer telecommuting opportunities.<sup>9</sup>

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"Employers may not think about or be aware of military caregiver resources when seeking to recruit caregivers. We need to talk to caregivers and have them provide their feedback on what they feel is needed in the workforce. For example, what is necessary when someone becomes a caregiver overnight.

"We need to work together to create resources, such as help with résumé building, career coaching and other job-readiness skills. At DoD, one of the programs we offer focuses on helping military spouses with résumé writing, specifically how to translate their skills. If you volunteer, you're still building your résumé with project management and other skills. There are different ways to convey those skills without saying you were out of work."

**Mininia Hawkins, Military Community Support Programs,  
Department of Defense, Military Community & Family Policy; Member,  
Military and Veteran Caregiver Employment Taskforce**

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## REALIZING A RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Supporting caregivers yields tangible benefits for employers. Research found that companies that offer flextime and telecommuting programs saw a return on investment of between \$1.70 and \$4.45 for every dollar invested.<sup>10</sup> Implementing HR policies, support programs and customized benefits for employee caregivers can help ensure employee/job satisfaction, reduce distraction, and strengthen employee loyalty and performance overall.

Communicating these benefits and positive outcomes to corporate leaders can go a long way in promoting a caregiving-friendly workplace culture. Suggestions for starting efforts in-house include:

- Ensure caregiver employees understand relevant benefits programs.
- Leverage helpful employer technologies such as online HR information, caregiver portals or employee caregiver chat functions.
- Establish or enhance employee resource groups (ERGs) and affinity groups to connect military caregivers to other like-minded organizations.
- Provide ongoing education to familiarize management and staff with the needs and challenges of working caregivers.
- Establish wellness programs, counseling and guidance resources within the organization for caregivers to access when needed.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Walsh, Renee Albert and Mark Victor Hansen, *Taking Care of Caregivers: Why Corporate America Should Support Employees Who Give Their Hearts and Souls to Those in Need*. (Dallas, TX: Cariloop, Facebook and Chicken Soup for the Soul, 2018), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dJovq5iQfc-p0fwlunowuyqoA6z-BVqu/view>.





## CREATING A CULTURE OF AWARENESS

There is no widely accepted business model for establishing a military caregiving-friendly workplace. Instead, employers must adapt workplace environments and implement policies and programs that best suit their workforce and mission. A smart first step for any employer is to demonstrate that it identifies with caregiver employees, their needs and their situations, and then to educate all staff to recognize and support these needs. This can also help employers set expectations for prospective hires ahead of employment. Such actions could be as simple as:

- Creating a resource guide to help recruiters understand caregiving needs. Include a list of affinity groups and networks specifically for military caregivers.
- Educating recruiters and hiring managers that caregiver résumés may be more likely to be nontraditional, to lack degrees or to show large gaps in employment.
- Educating recruiters and hiring managers on judgment bias when reviewing résumés or interviewing candidates who may appear to have a caregiving situation.

- Providing post-hire personalized onboarding. (For instance, ask caregivers to share as much as they are comfortable sharing. Identify other caregiver employees who might be comfortable mentoring new employees.)
- Ensuring direct managers are knowledgeable about caregiving employees' situations and communicate with these employees on a regular basis.
- Developing a military caregiver handbook that outlines programs and policies for employee caregivers. Distribute it to new employees during onboarding.
- Offering mentors or coaches who can connect with caregivers, answer their questions and guide them through the workplace. Train these mentors to recognize emotional distress.
- Encouraging leaders to share personal caregiving stories to help others feel more comfortable sharing.
- Adding military caregivers as a goal area for diversity recruitment/hiring.

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"Affinity groups or employee networks provide a great opportunity to leverage employees within the organization who have served or worked as military caregivers and can speak to this firsthand. He or she can help educate your organization on the unique experiences and needs one has when applying for a job and re-entering the workplace. Additionally, it's important to ensure that recruiters who haven't served or worked as military caregivers understand the unique scenarios."

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Rafael Ramirez, Vice President, Bank of America; Member, Military and Veteran Caregiver Employment Taskforce

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## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR CAREGIVERS AND EMPLOYERS**

Employees, employers and caregiving experts often find an imbalance in how caregiving is viewed in the workplace. Many employers are just beginning to see caregiving as a reality that should be supported and accommodated. Meanwhile, for many caregivers, entering or re-entering the workforce may be fraught with concern about returning to work and leaving their loved ones.

### **The caregiver may experience:**

- Feelings of self-doubt; lack of self-esteem.
- Feelings of stress or isolation.
- Desire to self-identify as a caregiver.
- Sense of needing a non-degree job.
- Concern about returning to work after a long gap in employment.
- Need for flexibility due to an unpredictable schedule.
- Intimidation at re-entering the workforce.
- Concern about being “job ready.”
- Lack of access to or knowledge of networks and connections.
- Lack of knowledge of VA programs and employment-readiness programs.
- Sense of being a “challenging hire.”
- Feelings of guilt for leaving a loved one.
- Financial pressures; cost of hiring help may outweigh compensation.

Employers, in turn, may perceive a caregiver applicant to be a “risky hire” or to require more empathy/understanding.



### **The employer may wish to consider:**

- Flexible work arrangements, including remote or part-time work.
- Implementing programs/protocols/training for caregiver employees:
  - Training to understand caregiver roles and accommodate caregiver needs.
  - Mentoring to onboard and work with caregivers.
  - Training to ensure managers understand caregiver needs.
  - Protocols to ensure continuity of caregiver policies in the event of manager turnover.
- Adjusting hiring approaches.
- Leveraging technology, recruitment messaging and culture to present a picture of a caregiver-friendly workplace.
- Ensuring recruiters know that recruiting caregivers is a company value.
- Set a goal of hiring caregivers and focus on meeting the goal.
- Adding military caregivers to diversity recruitment goals.
- Offering career fairs for caregivers.



## CASE STUDY

### SHARON GRASSI

Dole Caregiver Fellow 2018 | Arizona

#### Recommendations for caregivers

- Self-identify as a caregiver.
- Recognize that you can make a meaningful difference by advocating for military caregivers and sharing your stories with others.

#### Recommendations for employers

- Implement formal policies to protect hiring agreements and document accommodations made for military caregivers.
- Make a conscious effort to recognize the intricacies of caregiver situations.
- Offer flexible work schedules, telecommute options, and leave and emergency respite policies for military caregivers.

It took Sharon Grassi years to identify as a caregiver. Her son Derek, a U.S. Army veteran and former combat medic and infantryman, suffers from hearing and vision loss, vocal-cord paralysis, spine damage, chronic PTSD, and neurological conditions. She began advocating for Derek while he was still in the military and is committed to supporting him as a veteran caregiver for as long as she is able.

It wasn't until a friend told her about the Elizabeth Dole Foundation (EDF) that she found support and mentorship as a caregiver. Soon after, she applied to be a Dole Caregiver Fellow, recognizing the opportunity to share her story and advocate for others.

As the 2018 Dole Caregiver Fellow, Sharon shares her experiences and advocates for other caregivers. She is also a member of the Campaign for Inclusive Care, a VA/EDF initiative that works to incorporate caregivers into veterans' medical care teams. But her passion lies in improving active-duty medical- and mental-health diagnosis, treatment and transitional communication.

Sharon credits a network of medical professionals and veterans services—including the Traumatic Brain Injury unit at the Naval Medical Center San Diego, the National Intrepid Center of Excellence at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center, and the Federal Recovery Coordination Program—for their collective support. With their help, she says, Derek's medical and mental health diagnoses were well-defined prior to his discharge.

Soon after Derek came home in 2015, Sharon realized that he needed more support than expected. She quit full-time work for what she thought would be a few months, but a few months turned into a few years.

"I initially thought my life was too messy and that I couldn't consider taking on a full-time job, but there are supportive employers and flexible job opportunities out there—you just have to seek them out," she says. She currently works 10 to 40 hours a week as an on-call technical writer for a major aerospace firm. "It's not always easy juggling work, caregiving and advocacy, but for the most part, my employer has been extremely flexible."

Sharon says her work as a Dole Caregiver Fellow is worth the effort. "There are so many out there who need help and support. We all want a sense of normalcy and a level of integrity," she says. "There might not be a one-size-fits-all remedy, but restructuring the way employers think about military caregivers is a good start."



## BUILDING A BETTER WORKPLACE

The majority of ideas expressed among members of the Military and Veteran Caregiver Employer Taskforce focused on expanding leave policies, establishing respite care policies and investigating new options for job flexibility. Ideas also included developing apprenticeship programs, customizing existing roles, creating new positions and business units, offering job-share opportunities, and establishing ongoing education and training.

While many employees use some combination of sick time, vacation or family leave to care for a military or veteran family member, others use time through the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Providing employees with paid leave when caring for wounded, ill or injured family members may be the single most-important consideration an employer can make when thinking about expanding or implementing workplace support services that are friendly to military family caregivers.

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“It’s important that military caregivers are aware that we, as employers, actively want them to consider our virtual, flexible roles, whether through awareness campaigns or partners such as AARP, panels or, better yet, a coalition of companies. It might be even more impactful if it was made as part of a hiring pledge.

“Don’t treat military caregivers as any other applicants. Instill policies and practices to give them the very best opportunity to succeed. For instance, develop internship programs for those who are ready to re-enter the workforce but have large gaps in their professional résumés. Engage other employers to do the same. You’re committed to making a positive end result, a hire, even though it may end up being with your partner organization. The benefit is having a caregiver who now has a 12- or 16-week internship on his or her résumé and the experience to move forward.”

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Tim Bomke, Senior Manager, Amazon Military Affairs; Member, Military and Veteran Caregiver Employment Taskforce

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## FEDERAL AND STATE LEAVE POLICIES

### The Family and Medical Leave Act

The Family and Medical Leave Act, which allows workers to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave within a 12-month period, is available to individuals who work for companies with 50 or more employees, for public agencies, or for elementary and secondary schools. To be eligible for FMLA leave, an employee must have been employed at the organization for at least 12 months and worked at least 1,250 hours in the period prior to leave. Around 60 percent of U.S. employees meet FMLA criteria, but FMLA isn't an option for many eligible workers because they can't afford to take unpaid leave.



### State Family Leave Laws

Some states have enacted legislation to create state paid family leave insurance (FLI) programs, which provide cash benefits to eligible workers who engage in certain caregiving activities. Four states—California, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island—have active programs. Several other states and the District of Columbia have programs awaiting implementation.

State laws differ in terms of leave time allowed, eligibility requirements, extent of coverage and funding sources, among other distinctions. Employers that operate in multiple states with different paid family leave laws may face administrative burdens in managing varying eligibility and funding requirements. In addition, employers doing business in states that offer paid family leave vary in how much they supplement caregiving employees' lost income.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Jeremy Nobel, Jennifer Weiss, Candice Sherman, Courtney Wilson-Myers and Laurel Pickering, *Supporting Caregivers in the Workplace: A Practical Guide for Employers*. (New York, NY: Northeast Business Group on Health and AARP, 2017), [https://nebgh.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/NEBGH-Caregiving\\_Practical-Guide-FINAL.pdf](https://nebgh.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/NEBGH-Caregiving_Practical-Guide-FINAL.pdf).



### **Voluntary Leave Transfer Program**

The Voluntary Leave Transfer Program (VLTP), available to federal employees only, allows federal employees to donate annual leave directly to other federal employees who have a personal or family medical emergency and have exhausted their available paid leave. Each federal agency administers a voluntary leave-transfer program for its employees. There is no limit on the amount of donated annual leave an employee may receive from leave donors. However, any unused donated leave must be returned to leave donors when the medical emergency ends.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> "Pay & Leave," U.S. Office of Personnel Management, <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/leave-administration/#url=Fact-Sheets>.



## CUSTOMIZED PROGRAMS AND POLICIES

Beyond leave policies, employers can offer options specifically for military caregiver employees by leveraging existing resources and building on programs already in place. Such customized programs, policies, materials and resources can not only help guide employees but can instill self-confidence and a sense of belonging within the organization.

### Potential resources

- Military caregiver employee handbooks.
- Resource guides for military caregivers.
- Onboarding ambassadors.
- HR liaisons and caregiver mentors.
- Dedicated employee caregiver web pages with portal access to employee chat and Q&A functions.

### Benefits

- Virtual, remote or flexible scheduling opportunities, or even customized remote or flexible positions that can accommodate caregivers' schedules.
- Case managers to recommend legal, financial and health care resources.
- Partnerships with organizations that can help caregivers understand and navigate relevant benefits and policies, including the VA, AARP, Hiring Our Heroes, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Respite care for emergencies.
- Direct access to military services organizations and associations.
- Tuition assistance.

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"To care for those who have taken care of us is to serve our nation in its own right. Hilton supports every member of the military family and seeks to employ veterans, spouses, dependents and caregivers. Work-from-home opportunities provide flexibility and a career path for caregivers of our nation's veterans, and companies should strive to make positions remote, where possible. Caregivers' exceptional attributes are an advantage to any company."

Melissa Stirling, Senior Director, U.S. Military and Youth Programs, Hilton

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# Strategies and Tips for Employers of Military and Veteran Caregivers

## Practical Solutions for the Recruitment, Onboarding and Retention of Military Caregivers

The challenges and proposed solutions derived from the Military and Veteran Caregiver Employment Taskforce expanded beyond traditional workplace best practices and policies. Participants were asked to think outside the box in considering initiatives, activities and services employers might implement to recruit, hire and retain valued caregiver employees.

From creating custom benefit packages and social impact campaigns to establishing job readiness programs and support services, the ideas brought forth center on public awareness, employee assistance, company culture, education and support.

### Potential ideas for recruiting military and veteran caregivers

- \_\_\_\_ Identify as a military caregiver-friendly organization in job announcements and advertising/marketing materials.
- \_\_\_\_ Update recruitment and other HR materials to ensure caregiving-friendly language is in place.
- \_\_\_\_ Use inclusive promotional language: "This is a caregiver-friendly place to work," and "Caregivers, you are welcome here."
- \_\_\_\_ Develop a military caregiver culture, and promote it with workshops, guest speakers and meet-and-greet events.
- \_\_\_\_ Work toward creating a social impact campaign around caregiving. Advocate hiring caregivers to raise awareness of caregiver needs, accommodations and opportunities. Promote the campaign.
- \_\_\_\_ Create a resource guide to help recruiters understand caregiving needs. Include a list of networks and affinity groups for military caregivers.
- \_\_\_\_ Target caregiver recruitment as part of a broader employee referral program.
- \_\_\_\_ Provide training to identify with caregiver situations.
- \_\_\_\_ Establish an apprenticeship program for caregivers getting back into the workforce.
- \_\_\_\_ Offer job opportunities that can be performed remotely. Clarify this flexibility in job descriptions and requirements.
- \_\_\_\_ Allow flexible scheduling where caregiving employees can scale hours up or down as needed.
- \_\_\_\_ Educate recruiters and hiring managers on how caregiver résumés may be nontraditional, lack degrees or show large gaps in employment. Ensure these résumés will not be ruled out by "roboscreening."
- \_\_\_\_ Designate recruiters to focus on caregivers. Set recruitment goals for hiring managers. Ensure they understand the organization values this population and wants to build awareness about it.
- \_\_\_\_ Enlist marketing in ensuring that all recruitment materials identify the organization as military caregiver-friendly.
- \_\_\_\_ Clarify job expectations so candidates understand how the workplace environment will support them.
- \_\_\_\_ Hold career fairs, including "virtual" career fairs, that target caregivers and promote flexible work hours, part-time and remote work opportunities.
- \_\_\_\_ Create "job families"—similar to job-sharing programs but aimed at helping caregivers take time off while others fill in for them; ideal for remote positions and flexible schedules.
- \_\_\_\_ Add military caregivers to diversity recruitment/hiring goals.
- \_\_\_\_ Explore state and federal tax credit opportunities, including the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)—a federal tax credit for employers that hire individuals from targeted groups who face significant barriers to employment.
- \_\_\_\_ Establish a pledge program, such as with Hiring Our Heroes, to hire military caregivers.
- \_\_\_\_ Explore other programs that elevate and empower caregivers. These might include developing an in-house "TED Talk" about the benefits of being a caregiver-friendly employer, or supporting scheduling flexibility through part-time opportunities or entrepreneurship information via the Small Business Administration.
- \_\_\_\_ Explore how caregivers' day-to-day responsibilities navigating complex systems and researching resources might support organizational roles.

# **Strategies and Tips for Employers of Military and Veteran Caregivers**

## Practical Solutions for the Recruitment, Onboarding and Retention of Military Caregivers

### **Ideas for onboarding military and veteran caregivers**

- \_\_\_ Train caregivers to be ambassadors who represent the organization at recruiting events and help spread the word that the organization is caregiver-friendly.
- \_\_\_ Establish “onboarding ambassadors,” assigned mentors who help new caregiver hires transition to the organization and their roles.
- \_\_\_ Offer mentors or coaches who can provide caregivers with answers and guidance. Train them to understand caregiver experiences and recognize emotional distress.
- \_\_\_ Develop and distribute a caregiver handbook that outlines programs and policies for military caregivers.
- \_\_\_ Establish funds to support a job-readiness program.
- \_\_\_ Establish an experiential fellowship program offering military caregivers on-the-job training with no obligation to hire the employee.
- \_\_\_ Partner with organizations such as the VA, Elizabeth Dole Foundation, Hiring Our Heroes and HHS to provide free counseling, policy education and navigation assistance.

### **Strategies for retaining military and veteran caregivers**

- \_\_\_ Provide post-hire personalized onboarding. Ask caregivers to share as much as they are comfortable sharing. Get to know them to help ensure they thrive in the work environment.
- \_\_\_ Partner and develop fellowship opportunities with entities like the Elizabeth Dole Foundation and Hiring Our Heroes to provide employment opportunities and advocacy for military caregivers in the workplace.
- \_\_\_ Leverage employee resource groups (ERGs) to provide peer support.
- \_\_\_ Provide respite care to support emergency respite leave.
- \_\_\_ Ensure awareness of other outside resources, education and cloud-development training sources (such as PsychArmor, Salesforce and Vetforce).
- \_\_\_ Encourage caregiving employees to seek out resources; offer assistance in navigating complex websites and programs.
- \_\_\_ Implement an employee assistance program (EAP) to help military caregivers assess and understand benefits available to them, including guidance counseling, help with insurance and VA information, and legal resources.
- \_\_\_ Offer tuition assistance programs structured around employee timelines.
- \_\_\_ Establish legacy systems to continue caregiver policies in the event of manager turnover.
- \_\_\_ Establish transfer/leave policies for caregivers.
- \_\_\_ Establish a rotation program so employee caregivers can experience different roles and flexibility.
- \_\_\_ Develop a military caregiver subnavigation page on the company intranet with chat features, a caregiver portal and other specialized resources.
- \_\_\_ Conduct “stay” interviews versus “exit” interviews. Inquire why employees choose to stay with the organization.
- \_\_\_ Work with other employers to educate caregivers about financial and legal issues related to caregiving.





## CASE STUDY

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### JENNIFER MACKINDAY

Dole Caregiver Fellow 2014 | Indiana

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#### Recommendations for caregivers

- Know that you can make ends meet. It's not easy, but you can find a way to feed your family and cut costs.
- Understand that full-time caregiving can limit your ability to earn Social Security credit or save for retirement. That can be a big hit.
- If possible, take advantage of employee assistance programs (EAPs), which are often an underused organizational benefit.
- Caregiver burnout is common. Consider finding a support network for military caregivers.

#### Recommendations for employers

- Acknowledge the benefits of hiring caregivers who tend to be organized, efficient and used to tackling complex, long-term projects.
- Provide private spaces for caregivers to take phone calls without having to leave the office or interrupt teammates.
- Understand the EAP benefits that caregivers require, and market that availability. The time gained from lost productivity can far outweigh the cost of a strong EAP benefits program.

Having spent her career working in marketing and communications, Jennifer Mackinday became a full-time caregiver to her brother James after he was wounded during combat by an improvised explosive device in Mosul, Iraq. Since then, James, a U.S. Army veteran, has suffered from seizures, hearing and vision problems, post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, mobility impairment and spinal damage.

"I became a caregiver. I was no longer on a professional trajectory. My brother's schedule of appointments and care needs didn't allow me to work a traditional 9-to-5 job," she says.

After seven years of intensive caregiving, the long-term stress sent Jennifer into a downward spiral, mentally and physically. "It was then that I realized that my stress and sadness stemmed from not working, and unless I got help and support, I couldn't go back."

That realization led Jennifer to seek the help of veteran-oriented nonprofits, including the Wounded Warrior Project, which helped her develop her résumé and polish her interviewing and business skills. She then began volunteering for the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, becoming Indiana's 2014 Dole Caregiver Fellow as an advocate for military and veteran caregivers.

Now a Dole Fellow Alumna, Jennifer oversees the Hidden Heroes Caregiver Community, a private Facebook group for military and veteran caregivers. She also uses her marketing and communications background to educate the public about military caregivers.

She is also a spokesperson and motivational speaker with the Wounded Warrior Project's Warriors Speak program, sharing her caregiving story with others around the country. "Working is a form of respite for me and was the thing I missed the absolute most when I was caregiving full time," Jennifer says.

Her journey has been long, but she has learned a lot from her experience and is happy juggling many roles. "I see this often when caregivers are able to go back to work. They take on more than one job to make up for lost time. I'm focused on building for my future and helping others learn to do the same."

## LOOKING AHEAD

As technology advances and employers become more comfortable with flexible work environments, caregivers will find greater opportunities to participate in the workforce. For employers, investing in military caregiver employees can pay off with increased job satisfaction and loyalty—and greater retention and productivity. By identifying with military caregivers, supporting their need for flexibility, establishing caregiver-friendly HR programs and policies, and investing in caregiving initiatives and awareness, employers can move into the future supported by a more stable, productive and appreciative workforce.

Likewise, increasing lifespans ensure that caregiving will remain an issue for employers and employees. AARP's Supporting "Caregivers in the Workplace: A Practical Guide for Employers" survey, coauthored with the Northeast Business Group on Health, reported that 82 percent of employers agreed or strongly agreed that over the next five years, caregiving would become an increasingly important issue for their organization. Employers can support more positive outcomes for employee military caregivers by:<sup>13</sup>

- Making sure caregivers are supported with financial and legal guidance to ensure continuity of care for their loved ones.
- Creating formal partnerships across organizations to provide universal acceptance and public awareness of the need for employee military caregiver support.
- Investing in technology and research to better accommodate the needs of military caregivers in the future.
- Establishing legacy systems to ensure that caregiver agreements are upheld.
- Initiating pledge programs, such as Hiring Our Heroes, to promote the hiring of military caregivers.

<sup>13</sup> Nobel et al., *Supporting Caregivers in the Workplace*, [https://nebgh.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/NEBGH-Caregiving\\_Practical-Guide-FINAL.pdf](https://nebgh.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/NEBGH-Caregiving_Practical-Guide-FINAL.pdf).



# RESOURCES

The following pages identify key resources to help military caregivers, their loved ones and their families.

## AARP FAMILY CAREGIVING WEBSITE

[aarp.org/caregiving](http://aarp.org/caregiving) 877-333-5885

AARP's Family Caregiving website provides tips and tools to help caregivers care for loved ones. Includes valuable information about handling medical issues, health records and advance directives, home safety, financial and legal issues, caregiver life balance and much more. Caregivers can also connect with other caregivers at [aarp.org/caregivingcommunity](http://aarp.org/caregivingcommunity).

(For Spanish resources, go to [aarp.org/cuidar](http://aarp.org/cuidar) or call 888-971-2013.)

## ADMINISTRATION FOR COMMUNITY LIVING

[acl.gov](http://acl.gov)

Federal agency responsible for focusing attention and resources on the needs of older Americans and people with disabilities.

## AMERICAN LEGION

[legion.org](http://legion.org)

Supports service members and veterans with a variety of services.

## ARCH NATIONAL RESPITE NETWORK AND RESOURCE CENTER

[archrespite.org](http://archrespite.org)

Helps caregivers locate respite services near them.

## BLUE STAR FAMILIES

[bluestarfam.org/for-mil-families/wellness](http://bluestarfam.org/for-mil-families/wellness)

Works to strengthen military families by connecting them with neighbors and other caregivers and resources in their community.

## CAREGIVERS ON THE HOMEFRONT

[caregivers-homefront.org](http://caregivers-homefront.org)

Provides caregivers of veterans and first responders with education, support groups, advocacy and retreats.

# RESOURCES

## CAREGIVER SUPPORT

**caregiver.va.gov 855-260-3274**

Offers training, educational resources, support services and more to help military and veteran caregivers.

## CODE OF SUPPORT FOUNDATION

**codeofsupport.org 571-418-6339**

Provides one-on-one assistance to service members, veterans and their families with complex needs.

## DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS (DAV)

**dav.org**

Provides veterans, their families and caregivers with services including benefits assistance and claims help.

## ELDERCARE LOCATOR

**eldercare.acl.gov 800-677-1116**

A public service of the U.S. Administration on Aging that connects caregivers to local services and resources for older adults.

## ELIZABETH DOLE FOUNDATION

**elizabethdolefoundation.org**

Empowers, supports and honors the nation's 5.5 million military caregivers who care for wounded, ill and injured service members and veterans at home. The Foundation's Hidden Heroes campaign brings attention to the untold stories of military caregivers and provides a network to connect them with peers and access carefully vetted resources.

## FISHER HOUSE

**fisherhouse.org**

Builds comfort homes at military and VA medical centers around the world where military and veteran families can stay free of charge while loved ones are in the hospital.

# RESOURCES

## GIVE AN HOUR

[giveanhour.org](http://giveanhour.org)

A network of mental health professionals who offer free counseling to those in need.

## HEARTS OF VALOR

[heartsofvalor.org](http://heartsofvalor.org)

A network of people caring for wounded, ill or injured service members; maintained by Operation Homefront.

## HIDDEN HEROES

[hiddenheroes.org](http://hiddenheroes.org)

Includes personal stories from caregivers, a vetted directory of resources, a private Facebook community and calls to action for communities and individuals.

## HIRING OUR HEROES

[hiringourheroes.org](http://hiringourheroes.org)

A program of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation that helps transitioning service members, veterans, military spouses and caregivers find meaningful employment opportunities.

## HOME BASE

[homebase.org](http://homebase.org) 617-724-5202

Strives to heal “invisible wounds” — post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, depression — for veterans, service members and their families.

## HOPE FOR THE WARRIORS

[hopeforthewarriors.org](http://hopeforthewarriors.org)

Provides support services to military and veteran caregivers of post-9/11 service members or veterans who have been physically or psychologically wounded.

# RESOURCES

## THE INDEPENDENCE FUND

[independencefund.org](http://independencefund.org) 888-851-7996

Empowers severely wounded, injured or ill veterans to overcome physical, mental and emotional wounds incurred in the line of duty.

## MILITARY AND VETERAN CAREGIVER NETWORK

[milvetcaregivernetwork.org](http://milvetcaregivernetwork.org)

Offers peer support and services to connect military and veteran caregivers.

## MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

[moaa.org](http://moaa.org)

Offers personal and financial services exclusive to members.

## MY VA311

**844-MyVA311 (844-698-2311)**

Provides access to information about VA services such as disability, pension, health care eligibility, burial benefits and nearby VA facilities.

## NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR CAREGIVING

[caregiving.org](http://caregiving.org)

Focused on improving the quality of life for caregivers and those they care for through research, innovation and advocacy.

## NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR HOME CARE & HOSPICE

[nahc.org](http://nahc.org)

Consumer information on how to select a home care provider or hospice.

## NATIONAL HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE CARE ORGANIZATION

[nhpco.org](http://nhpco.org) 800-646-6460

Consumer information on hospice care and services.

## NATIONAL MILITARY FAMILY ASSOCIATION (NMFA)

[militaryfamily.org](http://militaryfamily.org)

Offers service members and military families support, programs and advocacy.

# RESOURCES

## PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

[pva.org](http://pva.org)

Offers expertise on the special needs of veterans who have experienced spinal cord injury or dysfunction.

## QUALITY OF LIFE FOUNDATION

[woundedveteranfamilycare.org](http://woundedveteranfamilycare.org) 855-765-7650

Through its Wounded Veteran Family Care Program, addresses the needs of families who provide daily substantial care for severely wounded, ill or injured veterans at home.

## SEMPER FI FUND

[semperfifund.org](http://semperfifund.org)

Provides financial assistance and lifetime support to post-9/11 combat-wounded, critically ill and catastrophically injured service members and their families.

## VETERANS CRISIS LINE

[veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat](http://veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat) 800-273-8255

Free, confidential support 24/7 for veterans in crisis.

## VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

[va.gov/vso](http://va.gov/vso)

A directory of organizations that help veterans and their family members obtain benefits and services they've earned through military service.

## WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT

[woundedwarriorproject.org](http://woundedwarriorproject.org) 888-997-2586

Offers a variety of programs, services and events for veterans wounded in military actions since 9/11.

## YELLOW RIBBON FUND

[yellowribbonfund.org](http://yellowribbonfund.org)

Practical support for wounded, ill and injured service members and their caregivers, including housing and transportation, to keep families together during the critical recuperation phase.





Visit the AARP Family Caregiving website for information, tools and resources for caring for a loved one at

**[www.aarp.org/caregiving](http://www.aarp.org/caregiving)**

or call **877-333-5885**

For Spanish resources visit

**[www.aarp.org/cuidar](http://www.aarp.org/cuidar)** or call **888-971-2013**

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Tell us what you think. [www.aarp.org/preparetocaresurvey](http://www.aarp.org/preparetocaresurvey)

# SUPPORTING MILITARY AND VETERAN CAREGIVERS IN THE WORKPLACE

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## A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS



**Elizabeth Dole Foundation**  
CARING FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

**AARP**  
Family Caregiving™

**HIRING OUR  
HEROES**  
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
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601 E Street NW | Washington, DC 20049 | AARP Caregiving Support 877-333-5885 | [www.aarp.org/caregiving](http://www.aarp.org/caregiving)