



香港城市精神健康聯盟

**City Mental Health
Alliance** HK

**A TOOLKIT TO
SUPPORT THE
MENTAL HEALTH
OF EMPLOYEE
CAREGIVERS**

CARING FOR CARERS

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About this toolkit

Informal caregivers, people who provide regular unpaid care to a relative, friend or other dependent, are taking on an increasing burden in Hong Kong.

These caregivers may have taken on primary responsibility to care for their dependent spouses, ageing parents, children, relatives or friends with disabilities or other advanced illnesses. Many shoulder these caregiving responsibilities alongside full time work, which can put a huge strain on their own mental and physical health.

Caregivers who are struggling to balance these responsibilities may decide to pass on career opportunities or may leave the workforce entirely, which can result in additional financial and emotional strain. For employers, this means higher staff attrition, potential lost productivity and increased absenteeism - bringing with it huge costs for businesses.

For these reasons we felt it was important to develop this toolkit, to raise awareness and understanding of this important topic, signpost to further information and trusted resources, and provide practical tips for those in caregiving roles or who may be working with colleagues with caring responsibilities.



In this toolkit, you will find:

- An overview of the situation for informal caregivers in Hong Kong
- Key challenges faced by caregivers and the potential impact on their mental health
- Practical tips for employers to better support employees with caregiving responsibilities
- Self-care tips for caregivers
- Links, resources and references for caregivers and employers (Hong Kong and international)



This is an interactive pdf.

Click on the links to go straight to further information from trusted online sources.

INTRODUCTION: CAREGIVING IN HONG KONG



Challenges of employee caregivers

A report released by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) in 2023 found that employees in caregiving roles are more likely to be impacted by reduced working hours and income.

The role of caregivers is varied and may include providing support or assistance with:

- medical appointments
- emotional support
- groceries and errands
- cooking and housework
- mobility
- financial support
- bathing and dressing
- continence care
- rehabilitation
- cognitive and nursing care

As women have traditionally been the primary caregivers, the report found that female employees are impacted to a greater extent than their male counterparts. Working caregivers are also more likely to sacrifice promotion prospects or career advancement opportunities in an attempt to maintain their work-life balance.

This poses a business risk as a growing number of working caregivers may result in increasing rates of absenteeism and presenteeism in the workplace, and may also lead to higher rates of staff attrition. The EOC found that more than 62% of survey participants were working over 40 hours a week on top of their caregiving responsibilities (with 16% working over 50 hours or above).

These statistics highlight the critical importance of looking after the mental health and wellbeing of caregivers in the Hong Kong workforce.

16% of surveyed participants were working over 50 hours a week on top of their caregiving responsibilities

Hong Kong has an ageing population and one of the highest life expectancies in the world: 86.8 years for females and 80.7 years for males. [The Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department](#) has predicted that life expectancy in Hong Kong will increase by 6.2 years for men and 5.8 years for women over the period 2019 to 2069.

The mental health impact on caregivers



Carers often put the needs of others first and neglect their personal needs. A 2022 survey by Carers UK found that 30% of carers reported poor mental health due to their caregiving roles.

Learn more about the [State of Caring Report](#) by Carers UK.

Participants in the EOC survey expressed concerns around caregiving - including lack of emotional support, sense of helplessness, extreme stress, loneliness and lack of personal time.

The EOC survey also identified a number of stress factors experienced by caregivers, including:

Concerns regarding the future care needs of spouse/relative

Feelings of being confined by responsibilities or demands

Lack of confidence in their caregiving ability

Conflicts with other daily commitments

Conflicts with family over care decisions

Feelings of being overwhelmed, overworked or overburdened

Change in relationship with spouse/relative

Financial difficulties associated with caregiving



EMPLOYERS: SUPPORTING CAREGIVING EMPLOYEES



Boosting employers' support for caregiving employees

While some workplaces have responded to the needs of caregiving employees by providing flexible work arrangements and extra paid leave, 79% of working caregivers surveyed by the EOC reported their work stress had increased as a result of their caregiving duties, and more than a third had experienced discrimination in the workplace

In their report, the EOC recommends that the Hong Kong Labour Department sets guidelines for employers to build a caregiver-friendly workplace. They also advise that this cultural change can be nurtured by educating managers about common challenges faced by caregivers, gathering experiences from colleagues who are or have been caregivers, develop a user-friendly guide to provide the necessary information and increase the provision of community resources.



Practical tips for employers

As an increasing proportion of the working population takes on caregiving responsibilities in Hong Kong, it is crucial to foster supportive and open workplace cultures that recognise and support the mental health needs of caregiving employees. Below are some practical ways in which workplaces and managers can provide better support:

- 1. Remote and flexible working policies** enable caregivers to balance caregiving duties from home. The needs of dependents can be unpredictable, and this increased flexibility allows carers to be more physically available for their dependents while juggling work and home responsibilities. It can also enable them to take care of urgent caring duties as and when required.
- 2. Family leave or unpaid leave** ensures employees know they can take the time they need to be away for a more significant period (e.g. to accompany their dependents to regular medical appointments or more intensive medical treatments or procedures).
- 3. Seek feedback from caregiving employees** on the company's existing carers' support services and resources. Openly listen to understand their individual needs and work together to develop or refine your company's support offering.
- 4. Create an Employee Resource Group** for caregivers so that they can access an additional informal platform to share, provide support and exchange tips and resources.
- 5. Collect data before designing policies and procedures** that impact on caregiving employees - what is the employee demographic, who are they caring for, what are their caregiving responsibilities and what do they need?
- 6. Apply caregiving policies consistently across the company** and ensure that policies are not considered optional by certain teams or line managers.
- 7. Encourage senior leaders to share their own caregiving experiences** and how they have juggled their care responsibilities with work or to voice their support for the role of caregivers through the policies provided. This can empower other team members to be more open about their struggles and foster a more inclusive and supportive workplace.
- 8. Have open conversations around the caregiving employee's career progression** and work with them to ensure that they have continual support to achieve their long-term career objectives and goals.
- 9. Consider providing in-house psychological support** to enable employees who may be struggling to find time to attend counselling outside of their working and caregiving hours to more easily access mental health support.

SELF-CARE FOR CAREGIVERS: PRACTICAL TIPS



Self-care tips for caregivers

Caregivers will often ignore their own physical and mental health needs to meet their overwhelming caregiving duties and work responsibilities. However, it is important to ensure that carers take the time they need to look after their mental and physical health so that their ability to care for others is sustainable. Below are some practical self-care tips for caregivers:

1. Create a flexible routine

Have an open conversation with your line manager to discuss your needs and create a work routine that enables you to remain flexible while balancing your work and home responsibilities.

2. Set boundaries

Be clear with your colleagues about your availability during the week and block out time in your calendar to dedicate to caring duties. Communicate with your colleagues the extent and nature of your caring responsibilities so that they can help to manage conflicting demands. Clear boundaries can also give you the space to recharge and find balance.

3. Delegate tasks

Lean on your personal support network and be comfortable with asking for help and delegating tasks where appropriate. Have open and honest conversations with your team members about your capacity and workload.

4. Carve-out self-care time as a priority

Block time out in your calendar regularly to do something just for yourself - whether it be for exercise, grooming appointments or even to just read a book with a cup of tea. Commit to setting aside this time for yourself with no distractions. This practice of “putting on your oxygen mask first before helping others” is essential to preventing caregiver burnout.

5. Access local resources and support groups

Learn more about the resources that are available in your community - including support groups, workshops or financial grants. Being a care provider doesn't mean that you must do all of it alone.

6. Make use of workplace benefits

Speak with your line manager and human resources team to find out what work benefits are available to support employees with carer responsibilities. Make the most of these benefits and be open to suggesting changes that would better suit your needs and potentially other carers in your workplace.

SUPPORT RESOURCES: HONG KONG AND GLOBAL



Hong Kong organisations and resources

The below organisations and platforms provide support to caregivers in Hong Kong, including counselling services, knowledge-sharing, courses and community networks.

[Baptist Oi Kwan Service](#) provides support services to caregivers including emotional counselling support, knowledge-sharing and community resources.

[Caritas Jockey Club Resource and Support Centre for Carers](#) offers support, resources and hotlines for carers.

[Hong Kong Carer Alliance for Dementia \(HKCAFD\)](#) holds educational talks, activities and home visits with local NGOs to support caregivers for individuals with dementia.

[Hong Kong Federation of Handicapped Youth: Carer Support Service](#) provides resources, activities and counselling services for carers of youth with disabilities.

[Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres](#) offers networking activities to help women expand their social and support network beyond the home and help relieve the pressure they face.

[Information Gateway for Carers](#) provides comprehensive and up-to-date information to carers of the elderly, people with disabilities and people in mental recovery on their self-service website.

[Jockey Club Centre for Positive Ageing](#) provides training and resources to educate and upskill caregivers looking after family members with dementia.

[Richmond Fellowship of Hong Kong: Family Caregivers Support Services](#) provides a supportive network to caregivers and family members of people in recovery.

[Smart Elders](#) is a carers' support programme that offers bereavement counselling services, courses and decompression tips.

[The Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation: Carers Support Services](#) runs the Smartcare Project which provides support for the carers of persons with chronic illnesses residing in the Hong Kong Eastern District.

[University of Hong Kong San Po Centre on Ageing](#) offers assessment tools for caregivers, research and resources.

[Variety \(Caregivers' Programme\)](#) supports caregivers of children battling illness, including knowledge-sharing from child psychiatrists, clinical and educational psychologists.

[Agewhale](#) provides personalised care planning and management services, as well as workshops, talks and resources about caregiving.

Global organisations and resources

While these organisations are based outside of Hong Kong, the below links to established international caregivers' networks are useful sources of reference as they provide comprehensive resources, toolkits and best practices to both caregivers and employers.

[**Caregivers Action Network**](#) is a non-profit organisation providing education, peer support, and resources to family caregivers.

[**Carers Australia**](#) offers a Carer Wellbeing Survey, resources, networking support, advocacy, engagement and research focused on achieving increased recognition and support for carers.

[**Carers Canada**](#) provides research and resources on carer-friendly workplaces and carer wellbeing.

[**Carers UK**](#) offers financial support, practical support (e.g. carer's assessment), helpline, wellbeing tips, career support and other useful tools.

[**Carers Worldwide**](#) develops and promotes cost effective, sustainable and easily replicable methods of providing support to carers in low and middle-income countries.

[**Eurocarers**](#) a European network bringing together carers' organisations and research institutes to ensure that care is valued and recognised as central to the sustainability of health and care systems.

[**Family Caregiver Alliance**](#) offers a free online dashboard with personalised information that matches caregiving needs.

[**National Alliance for Caregiving**](#) dedicated to improving the quality of life for friend and family caregivers.



For further reference

Hong Kong Research and Reports on Caregiving

- [Family Caregivers of Persons with Advanced Illnesses, Equal Opportunities Commission \(2023\)](#)
- [Eldercare Hong Kong: Projected Societal Cost of Eldercare – HSBC, The Women’s Foundation and The University of Hong Kong \(2019\)](#)
- [Consultancy Study on the Needs and Support Required of Carers of Elderly Persons and of Persons with Disabilities in Hong Kong - Main Report, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University Consulting Team \(2022\)](#)
- [Carers of Elderly Persons and Working Age Persons with Sickness, Injury and Disablement \(ISE02/2023\), Hong Kong Legislative Council \(2023\)](#)

For employers supporting caregiving employees

- [Supporting Caregivers in the Workplace – Aon](#)
- [Supporting Caregivers in the Workplace - Center for Workplace Mental Health](#)
- [How to Keep Employees Productive – Support Caregivers – Harvard Business School](#)
- [How employers can support caregivers coping with increased responsibilities – Guardian Life](#)
- [Employees need more support from their employers – Calm Business](#)
- [Caring for the Caregivers in the Workplace – Corporate Wellness Magazine](#)
- [This is what a caregiver-friendly workplace looks like – Hero Health](#)
- [Caregiving and Workplace Flexibility: Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion \(EARN\)](#)



The City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong (CMHA HK) is a not-for-profit membership organisation. We are an alliance of businesses, working together with mental health experts and partner organisations, to achieve our vision that every workplace will protect, support and create positive mental health for their people.

We provide training, events, resources, research and practical support for companies wishing to create mentally healthy workplaces.

This guide is not and should not be considered as clinical advice or support. Anyone who may have a need for such support should seek professional advice.

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