



## **Caring for Our Caregivers: How Philanthropy Can Help**

This Women's History Month, we highlight the challenges that caregivers face, the impact this role has on their mental health, and how philanthropy can help. The need associated with caregiving has received little attention in philanthropy, in spite of affecting so many people personally and impacting the outcomes funders care about. This includes care provided by formal or paid caregivers, as well as informal or family caregivers who support friends or family members in need.

### **Mental health burdens facing caregivers**

Even prior to the pandemic, both paid and informal caregivers were at elevated risk of developing physical and mental health disorders. Caregivers, who are often women, provide essential care to groups in need of physical and/or emotional support, such as children, people with disabilities or chronic conditions, and aging adults. Many caregivers find themselves ill-prepared for their role and its associated challenges,<sup>1</sup> resulting in stress, frustration, and burnout from the demands of their work.<sup>2</sup> Women caregivers also have higher rates of depression, anxiety, substance use to cope with their stress, and other mental health conditions compared to their non-caregiving counterparts.<sup>3</sup>

Low pay and high workplace demands are causing many paid caregivers to leave their jobs, an existing trend that has only been accelerated by the pandemic. For example, home health workers are in increasingly short supply, as workforce burnout, COVID-19 exposure, and recruitment to higher-paying positions in hospitals and other settings are depleting the home health workforce.<sup>4</sup> Female healthcare workers, teachers, immigrants and women of color have been most severely impacted by COVID-19 and caregiving responsibilities. For example, over 70% of the workers in America's hospitals and employees in K-12 schools are women, many of whom have additional caregiving responsibilities when they leave work.<sup>5</sup>

### **Considerations for funders**

The link between caregiving and mental health is particularly important for funders who want to make an impact in women's health. Caregiver mental health also affects the health and well-being

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<sup>1</sup> Family Caregiver Alliance. (n.d.). *Caregiver health*. <https://www.caregiver.org/resource/caregiver-health/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Graham, J. (2022, February 3). *Pandemic-fueled shortages of home health workers strand patients without necessary care*. Kaiser Health News. <https://khn.org/news/article/pandemic-fueled-home-health-care-shortages-strand-patients/>

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2021, April). *Women in the labor force: A databook*. BLS Reports. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/2020/home.htm>



of populations being cared for. As the need for caregivers increases, the importance of supporting this population will only grow, especially for an aging U.S. population.

Here are some considerations to help funders get started.

**Incorporate caregiving and caregiver mental health into your strategy for impact.** For example, The Center for High Impact Philanthropy's [XX Factor framework](#) helps funders create an impact in five key dimensions of women's lives that are critical to women flourishing: health, education, economic empowerment, personal safety, and legal rights. Caregiving and caregiver mental health touch upon several of these dimensions and key indicators in each, such as household wealth and female labor force participation. Funders should consider the intersection of caregiving, women's health and well-being, and their other priority investment areas. This includes considering the challenges that caregiving presents for certain populations or issues that the funder already serves (e.g. economic prosperity or workplace mental health), or broadening the focus of funding for adjacent groups. For example, early childhood funders may consider their focus beyond young children to also serve parents or childcare workers supporting those children.

**Look for special services that address the barriers to healthcare that women & caregivers face.**

In addition to supporting evidence-based models of care, look for programs that incorporate special services for women and caregivers. For example, mental health or addiction treatment that offers onsite childcare reduces one significant barrier to treatment that women often face. Recent data also indicates that flexible treatment options such as telehealth services can help increase patient retention. Another opportunity is to support **multi-generation approaches** that engage both mothers or other caregivers and their children. Interventions with integrated health and family services (e.g., prenatal care and education, parenting skills training, etc.), home visiting programs, family skills training interventions, and family treatment drug courts, can improve outcomes for both generations.<sup>6</sup> To reduce barriers that women face in receiving quality mental health and addiction treatment, funders can also help support policies and practices that avoid punitive approaches, especially in regards to addiction. This can include keeping families together and treating mental health and addiction through clinical means, rather than through criminal justice involvement.

**Advance policies that support caregivers and their overall well-being.** Caregiver mental health extends far beyond mental health services, including factors such as working conditions, equitable pay, and worker protections. For unpaid caregivers, advancing workplace policies around flexible work days, paid sick days, paid family leave, and employee assistance programs can alleviate the burden they face in balancing work and caregiving responsibilities.<sup>7</sup> It is also important to consider

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<sup>6</sup> Arnold Ventures. (n.d.). *Evidence based strategies for abatement of harms from the opioid epidemic.* <https://craftmediabucket.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/TheOpioidEbatement-v4.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Family Caregiver Alliance. (n.d.). *Caregiver statistics: Work and caregiving.* <https://www.caregiver.org/resource/caregiver-statistics-work-and-caregiving/>



that immigrants and women of color are disproportionately represented in the paid caregiving workforce. For example, Black and Brown women are particularly overrepresented in the home health care and child care sectors, and the average wage for this workforce is under \$14 an hour.<sup>8</sup> This population is more likely to experience systemic racism and discrimination, financial strain, and concerns over immigration status. Fostering resilience in partnership with advocacy organizations, programs, and support groups can help lessen mental health burdens.

Supporting the mental health of caregivers is an important yet under-recognized area. Funders can help shine a spotlight on this growing need and advance key initiatives to improve the overall mental health and well-being of women and the many other segments of society they support.

To explore working with Mindful Philanthropy on this topic, please contact us at [info@mindfulphilanthropy.org](mailto:info@mindfulphilanthropy.org).

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<sup>8</sup> Gould, E., Sawo, M., & Banerjee, A. (n.d.). Care workers are deeply undervalued and underpaid: Estimating fair and equitable wages in the care sectors. <https://www.epi.org/blog/care-workers-are-deeply-undervalued-and-underpaid-estimating-fair-and-equitable-wages-in-the-care-sectors/>