

Report of the COVID-19 Caregiver Task Force

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Introduction and summary of recommendations

The COVID-19 Caregiver Task Force was charged on July 30, 2020 with recommending enhancements the University of Washington can make immediately and through the 2020-21 academic year to better support employee and student caregivers. While our task was to address caregiving needs in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we found it impossible to address the current caregiving crisis in a meaningful way without acknowledging factors that created work-life challenges for caregivers prior to COVID-19, or considering the systemic inequities reflected in caregiver roles and access to child and adult care resources.¹

We urge the University to respond to the COVID-19 caregiving crisis in ways that build momentum for future improvements. We think UW has an opportunity to distinguish itself within higher education as a leader whose values for diversity, excellence and innovation are reflected in measurable, equitable workforce outcomes for caregivers such as retention, promotion, engagement and assessment of campus climate. Therefore, this report not only elaborates the following recommendations, it situates them in the context of the University's [vision and values](#), and surfaces systemic changes that can support caregivers' success - at work and at home - during COVID-19 and beyond. It concludes by suggesting how to sustain this task force's efforts toward this goal.

In response to our charge, the COVID-19 Caregiver Task Force submits the following recommendations:

1. We recommend that shortly after receiving this report, President Cauce issues a strong statement of support for caregivers that is framed by the University's values and provides guidance for the University community to put those values into practice.
2. Develop or promote programs and services that address themes in the specific, urgent needs that caregivers and managers included in their survey responses.
3. Increase training and resources for managers, including deans and other academic leaders, related to caregiving and work-life.
4. Direct and support leaders and managers to review and enhance policies and processes related to annual planning, performance evaluations, merit and promotion.
5. Strengthen pathways for students, staff, faculty and managers to identify and respond to situations when the University's commitment to supporting caregivers is challenged.
6. Establish an advisory committee to the President and Provost to elevate and address work-life issues of students, faculty and staff.
7. Review existing caregiving programs and identify strategies that mitigate barriers to their utilization and impact.

Task Force Approach

The task force convened on August 6 and met four times before September 10. Two working groups convened regularly to explore ideas and surface recommendations related to the four categories of recommendations solicited in the group's charge: programs and resources, policies and practices, education and outreach and caregiver engagement.

In recognition of the task force's timeline, and to help accelerate the group's work, UW Human Resources conducted two surveys to assess the needs of 1) caregivers and 2) managers who supervise employees with caregiving responsibilities. While [survey results](#) support the recommendations in this report, we are mindful that contract classified and classified non-union employees are underrepresented in our sample. As elaborated below, we urge senior leaders to ensure the experiences of these employees are solicited to complement the task force's recommendations and enact its commitment to equity and inclusivity.

The task force's work was strengthened because several members collaborated on projects, other task forces or ad hoc groups that were working concurrently to identify and address caregiving needs. Several group members also provided information about peer institutions' responses to the caregiving crisis for the task force's consideration. Task force members also served as a sounding board for programs that could be implemented before its recommendations were submitted (e.g. the Komae cooperative child care app, revitalizing the UW Child Care Connections program, developing tutoring resources).

Key Considerations

The survey results, conversations and research underscored the fact that COVID-19 exacerbated an already untenable caregiving situation for our region community that cannot easily be solved by the University or its families. It is a human crisis where an employee's need to care for their family is in direct conflict with the need to make a living and to achieve our highest potential as individuals and a University. Addressing this challenge requires concrete actions like those recommended in this report. It also requires that we rely upon UW's core values to guide us as we navigate this situation together. The task force asks that the following be considered when implementing our recommendations.

Equity: Caregiving issues were evident long before the pandemic and are now at a crisis point; access to caregiving supports has been inequitable, particularly in the Puget Sound area, and caregiving is too often an unpaid or underpaid responsibility disproportionately held by women and marginalized ethnic and racial groups. UW's commitment to fighting inequities within our institution and societally *requires that we ask ourselves who is served or may be harmed by remedies to the current situation, what inequitable structures can be changed through our response and how the University can elevate support for those with the greatest barriers to accessing care.*

Excellence: This pandemic has removed or stressed societal structures on which our families rely for stability and support and is harming UW's most valuable asset – its people. Caregivers cannot perform at their best if their family members are not safe and well cared for, and UW faces the risk of losing outstanding talent if caregivers leave UW or depart the workforce altogether. While the University cannot stand-in for schools, child care facilities or social services, *we must commit ourselves to supporting employees and students in addressing their families' needs first, which ultimately enables them to bring their best to their work and studies.*

Innovation & Discovery: UW is known for finding solutions to the world's most complex problems. It is self-evident that the pandemic has fundamentally changed work and learning for everyone, not only for

caregivers. Such systemic disruption is an invitation to ask what we want the University to look like after the pandemic. *We must commit ourselves to directing the changes COVID-19 has brought to serve our vision of an even more productive, positive and equitable work environment?*

Detailed Recommendations

1. **We recommend that shortly after receiving this report, President Cauce issues a strong statement of support for caregivers that is framed by the University's values and provides guidance for the University community to put those values into practice.** It is our hope that this communication reflects the key considerations from above and articulates shared expectations for students, staff and faculty; doing so can reduce anxiety among caregivers and managers alike.ⁱⁱ

Recognizing that implementing our recommendations will take varying amounts of time, **a values-based statement of support can also help address existing concerns by including concrete expectations for ways managers and leaders can immediately support employees and students**, such as:

Be flexible. Flexibility is key to retention and supports productivity and well-being. We need to give caregivers the maximum flexibility allowable, consistent with their position at the University. This includes supporting telework for any position whose duties can reasonably be performed remotely, allowing employees to modify their work schedules to the extent the job allows and helping employees understand and apply their time off and leave of absence options to best meet their families' needs.

Adjust expectations. We are in a global crisis that has changed work and learning for everyone, not only caregivers. As managers, we need to work with individuals and teams to revise performance goals, revisit them regularly, and be clear about how success will be evaluated in the coming year. As teams, we need to change standards for some routine work and get creative about when we meet and why, using options like asynchronous meetings and common blocks of meeting-free time to help balance flexibility, structure and teamwork. Everyone, including students, need to expect that children may show-up in an online meeting or class. Education is a public good, and their presence is a reminder that our entire society is being affected by the challenges of remote schooling, not only our caregivers.

Demonstrate understanding. Managers, supervisors and advisors need to be proactive and ask caregivers how they are doing and share relevant supports and wellness resources with them. Acknowledge that every family has its own unique challenges. Financial constraints, social supports or a lack thereof, family needs, work schedule, geographic location, technology access and more all fundamentally shape caregiving challenges during this unprecedented time.

2. **Develop or promote programs and services that address themes in the specific, urgent needs that caregivers and managers included in their survey responses.** For example, caregivers would like additional help accessing support for remote learning (e.g. such as finding tutors or part-time in-home caregivers, including UW students), curricular resources and/or information about quality online and in-person programs that provide supervised learning and instructional support. Caregivers also expressed the need for support and education to help them meet their responsibilities during the pandemic, such as peer support groups, parenting workshops and tips for remote learning. Both managers and caregivers asked for increased education about mental health resources and training that can help members of the UW community identify and respond to mental health concerns. The University is known for its strong community partnerships and we urge leaders to seek collaborations that can achieve these goals.

- 3. Increase training and resources for managers, including deans and other academic leaders, related to caregiving and work-life.** As suggested by survey results, there is an urgent need to provide managers with tools to support their employees during COVID-19. Managers specifically request help in operationalizing what it means to provide *maximum flexibility* for caregivers at this time. It should be a priority to create tools (e.g. trainings, webinars, tip sheets) that address what flexible work schedules can look like within the constraints of federal and contract overtime rules, ways that workplace expectations can be adjusted and options for temporarily changing job responsibilities consistent with organizational needs (e.g. job sharing, FTE reductions/increases).

Ongoing manager education is important and should focus on caregiving as a workforce and equity issue, awareness of UW caregiver experiences and needs, knowledge of UW resources and policies related to caregiving, and skills to engage in productive work-life conversations with individual employees and teams. We should incentivize managers to ensure that their employees are aware of work-life balance programs and to support employees who choose to take advantage of such opportunities.

- 4. Direct and support leaders and managers to review and enhance policies and procedures related to annual planning, performance evaluations, merit and promotion.** The COVID-19 caregiving crisis is concurrent with disruption to work and learning and we urge senior leaders to support managers in re-examining their team's priorities in light of these changes and in response to new resource constraints. Revisiting goals and priorities for all employees in the coming year is essential, and the need to help caregivers recalibrate is particularly urgent. We also urge continued conversations about whether merit reviews, tenure timelines, teaching evaluations and graduate student milestones may be adjusted to reflect pandemic circumstances.

In addition, we recommend that deans, department chairs and managers plan for contingencies that will likely arise during the pandemic. In their survey responses, caregivers expressed concern about how their work and families will be disrupted when they, their family member or a caregiver becomes ill. One suggestion is to create peer-support systems - for example, where professors have a planned backup ready to take their class if they are unable to teach. Such support systems could also assist in sharing best practices in working during the current challenges faced by the pandemic.

Another way to act on this recommendation is to provide a brief survey or online form for leaders and managers to indicate they have engaged their units and employees in these conversations and to identify how they have adapted their priorities, plans or practices in light of the crisis. In addition to providing accountability, the results may illustrate best practices and/or needs for additional training and support for managers.

We also recognize that caregiver responsibilities and subsequent negative consequence of the COVID-19 crisis will fall disproportionately on groups that UW already recognizes through its race and equity initiative. Consistent with UW's equity commitments, we strongly suggest organizational leaders identify ways to systematically assess, in a voluntary and confidential way, whether an employee had caregiving responsibilities during the pandemic and examine how salient outcomes (e.g. retention, performance evaluation, promotion) correlate with caregiver status, as well as disability, ethnicity, gender and race.

- 5. Strengthen pathways for students, staff, faculty and managers to identify and respond to situations when the University's commitment to supporting caregivers is challenged.** Much is at stake for the University in retaining caregivers who contribute to its excellence. For caregivers, what is at stake is both professional and

deeply personal, so it can be difficult to talk about work-life issues with their managers. We recommend developing education and outreach so caregivers know where they can turn, both inside and outside of their unit, for consultation about their work-life challenges and options (e.g. human resource consultants, UW Ombuds).

- 6. Establish an advisory committee to the President and Provost to elevate and address work-life issues of students, faculty and staff that enhances their ability to meet their responsibilities to the University and to their families.** The committee's charge should include advising senior leaders on strategies, practices and programs to support caregiver work-life and assessing the campus climate for caregivers through surveys, focus groups and at least annual convenings with representatives from University committees and offices that may consult with caregivers about their needs and experiences (e.g. the Office of the Ombud, UW Bias Incident Advisory Committee, UW Human Resources, etc.).

We recommend that this group be established during autumn 2020 and that its initial priorities include:

- Establishing a clear vision for work-life across the University of Washington's campuses that articulates why UW is invested in helping students, faculty and staff meet their responsibilities at work and at home, and how it will assess its success.
- Advancing the current task force's charge to identify ways to better support employees and students who care for older adults. Child care dominated the task force's conversation due to the approaching start of the K-12 school year and UW's autumn quarter and there remains a need to identify ways to better support employees and students who provide care for adults.
- Providing an update on the issues and recommendations in this report to senior leadership and the members of the current task force in winter quarter 2021.
- Reviewing and advising on the University's existing care giver programs as described in Recommendation 7.

- 7. Review existing caregiving programs and identify strategies that mitigate barriers to their utilization and impact.** Key factors shaping access to caregiving include affordability, availability and how well the care aligns with the priorities of our students, staff and faculty. When determining where to invest the financial resources available for caregiver supports, the task force recommends prioritizing affordability over the other dimensions of access. This stance acknowledges the strong correlations between economic inequality and race, ethnicity, gender and disability status. The task force offers the following questions and considerations as a starting point to guide this review:

Affordability: To what extent does the current array of UW caregiving resources serve employees across UW's salary ranges and to what extent do they serve our students? Potential levers for increased affordability include charging sliding scale fees based upon income; care vouchers or scholarships; discount partnerships and facilitating access to and utilization of public and private financial aid programs for caregivers, and of subsidized community care, youth and elder care programs.

Availability: To what extent do UW's current caregiving resources account for a diverse range of family compositions and logistical needs. We should consider, for example, who needs care (e.g. infant/toddler, early childhood, school aged, adult, special learning or physical needs), when care is needed (e.g. before and after school, full-day, evening and weekend; school breaks; emergencies) and availability in the communities where most UW caregivers live and work. To address availability the University should explore expanding partnerships with regional non-profits and school districts that facilitate care-finding. The task force also suggests assessing the feasibility of developing internal

programs that create opportunities for meaningful student learning and work while increasing options for UW caregivers.

Alignment with individual needs and values: What factors, beyond affordability and availability, shape caregivers' use of existing resources and may illustrate their unmet needs? Our programs cannot address the unique circumstances of every family in our community. However, understanding the importance of factors such as cultural responsiveness, educational and caregiving philosophy, desired level of parent/family engagement can help shape current and future partnerships, programs and resources.

In addition to assessing how well UW's programs ease access to care, we further recommend that the University evaluate annually whether the employees and students who utilize them are representative of the diversity of our community in terms of race/ethnicity and campus and, for employees, their position-type and base salary.

Financial Considerations

The taskforce recognizes the significant financial challenges faced by the University due to the COVID-19 pandemic and our recommendations were thoughtfully considered to be no or low-cost. However, survey responses from caregivers conveyed they are facing significant financial concerns as well. Many of the options available to help them balance their work and caregiving responsibilities, such as unpaid or partially paid leaves, reduced work hours and paying for full-day daycare for children who would have previously spent their days in public school, come with a financial cost for families, with a disproportionate impact on lower wage employees and students. Caregivers are also concerned about costs in the long run, as their career trajectory, promotion schedule, and income potential are disrupted by many of these solutions. Based upon early studies of caregiving and employment during the pandemic, these long-term consequences will disproportionately harm the careers and financial futures of the University's female-identified employees.

Any steps taken to mitigate the financial burden of COVID-19 on caregivers may also bring some near-term cost savings to the University by reducing absenteeism, employee turnover and instances when employees are physically present but not fully functioning (i.e. presenteeism). This can help the University maintain its own high standards of service to the community through excellence in its teaching, research, service, and health care missions.

We urge the University to consider ways to repurpose existing funding and seek new resources (e.g. grants and private funding) to preserve its investment in the excellence of its current workforce and address equity considerations. Based on the caregiver survey findings, information from other universities and feedback from other members of the University community, we offer the following suggested interventions that could alleviate the financial burdens faced by caregiving employees. We acknowledge these examples may not fully address the needs of the most financially challenged in our community and, as stated in previous recommendations, we strongly recommend additional outreach to these groups.

1. Offer need-based caregiving subsidies, vouchers or scholarships.
2. Increase paid (and unpaid) leave options, such as allowing staff and faculty to use unlimited amounts of sick time for caregiving and include teaching relief as a permissible use of sick leave for faculty.
3. Increase funding to hire temporary employees and/or to provide temporary pay increases for colleagues able to temporarily assume increased responsibility to support operational needs while caregivers may

be on leave or changing their work hours; this would include funding for additional teaching assistants. Increase opportunities for bridge funding for grant funded positions.

Next steps

The needs of UW's caregivers are urgent and work on these recommendations should begin as quickly as possible. We understand that our proposals are not one-size-fits-all and that action will occur through multiple administrative units and policy-making bodies. Several members of the task force self-identified as stewards to help drive the recommendations in the report while the University establishes the standing advisory group that we have proposed. For example:

- Faculty Senate representatives to the task force have already engaged senate leadership and can be called upon to help steward action on these recommendations as they relate to faculty.
- A child care working group comprised of representatives from UW Human Resources, UW Medicine, the School of Medicine and the Office for Youth Program Development and Support met regularly during the spring of 2020 to assess and implement caregiving programs and resources. Informed by this report, and expanded with voices from UW Bothell and UW Tacoma, this group can continue to work on programmatic solutions this fall.
- UW Human Resources used this task force as a sounding board related to staff policies affecting caregivers. We encourage UWHR to utilize similar groups of interested non-experts to obtain feedback about pending policy changes and how to communicate about them with employees and managers. We also encourage collaboration between UWHR and Academic Human Resources to support deans and chairs related to caregiving issues and to coordinate training for managers, as appropriate.
- The Graduate School is committed to continued leadership of efforts for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars, in collaboration with others listed here.

ⁱ See, for example:

Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Berkeley. (2018) [About the early childhood workforce.](#)

McKinsey & Company. (2020). [COVID-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effects.](#)

National Direct Care Workforce Resource Center. (2020). [It's time to care: A detailed profile of America's direct care workforce.](#)

Washington State Department of Commerce. (2019) [Child care collaborative task force.](#)

Zamarro, G. and Prados, M. (2020). [Gender differences in couples' division of childcare, work and mental health during COVID-19.](#)

ⁱⁱ Managers who responded to the task force's survey expressed a strong desire to support caregivers and emphasized the importance of a statement from senior leaders making it an institutional priority. Similarly, while caregivers who responded to the survey said they feel supported by their managers, they also stressed the importance of knowing that University leaders understand their situation and are committed to supporting them.