



## Why organizations must support the mental health of working parents.

The events of the past two years have been immensely challenging for parents. Balancing childcare, remote learning, and work, with COVID-19 restrictions in schools, the workplace, and the community gave rise to added complexity and stress for parents.

The Mental Health Index by TELUS Health (Formerly LifeWorks) found that, since April 2020, working parents have consistently lower mental health scores than non-parents, including lower scores in anxiety, depression, isolation, and financial risk. The impact of mental health on work productivity is also greater for parents compared to non-parents.

In Canada, parents with children 18 years of age and under make up for 30% of the workforce with 76.5% of mothers that are employed, reaching 91.8% for fathers. Accordingly, understanding the specific issues and needs of parents is necessary to adequately support this large subset of working Canadians.

## The mental health of parents is significantly strained.

Parents of adult children as well as those under 18 years of age are concerned about the mental, social, and financial wellbeing of their children. Coupled with work accountabilities and unyielding change, the result is distress, evident by the mental health scores of parents. According to a recent study by TELUS Health:

- Half of working parents believe the pandemic has impacted their ongoing mental health
- Parents are 25% more likely to report suffering from symptoms of burnout than non-parents
- Nearly half of parents end their workday feeling mentally and/or physically exhausted, two in four find it increasingly more difficult to be motivated at work, and one-third have difficulty concentrating on their work
- As perpetual exhaustion becomes routine, the toll on mental health is unceasing. Nearly two-thirds of parents go to work when unwell (physically or psychologically) at least one day per week
- Parents are also more than twice as likely as non-parents to believe they have an alcohol disorder

Parents, the largest group of working caregivers, is a group requiring decidedly special attention. The ability to sustain productivity under the weight of personal and work demands is a matter of concern for all employers.

## The workplace experience through the lens of parents.

Parents experience the workplace differently than other groups.

- Nearly half of parents with children 18 years of age and under believe there is a big difference between the culture an organization claims to have and what actually happens
- Working parents need support for their wellbeing and attach great importance to it. The benefits and services offered to support health and wellbeing is the second most cited reason by parents (35%) for staying with an organization, after liking the work they do (44%)
- 30% of working parents chose better support for their wellbeing over a 10% salary increase

Organizations have a decisive role to play and are uniquely positioned to support employees with familial responsibilities.



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## Impact of the pandemic on children.

Parents are concerned about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental, social, and academic wellbeing of their children. According to research conducted by TELUS Health, more than half of Canadian parents report some negative impact from the COVID-19 pandemic on their children.

While provincial education systems scrambled to adapt, implementing distance learning models, students lost between 20% and 50% of their school year. Growing evidence indicates that severe disruption during the 2020 and 2021 academic years will have lasting detrimental effects on youth. The consequence of which is even greater for children from marginalized communities.

In July 2022, more than one in five parents reported a negative impact on their children's mental health and nearly one-quarter observed social development repercussion. In many instances, lockdown measures exacerbated existing mental health issues or gave rise to new conditions, including among children, who are showing higher incidences of anxiety and depressive symptoms. Alarming, parents reporting a negative impact on their children also report poorer mental health, which in turn will make it more difficult to support their children. Children of parent(s) with poor mental health are four times more likely to have poor general health and twice as likely to have mental, behavioural, or developmental disorders. The duality of the crisis requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses the risks and needs of parents as vital members of the workforce.





## What can leaders and organizations do about it?



### **Offer flexibility where possible.**

Parents report that the most important actions taken by their employer/manager in supporting their mental health are flexibility and empathy. Building on existing flexible workplace practices, working parents may require additional flexibility to meet job demands as well as attend to their family's needs. Empathy and regular communication are essential and will build trust and appreciation for both employees and employers.



### **Promote and enhance family-oriented support programs.**

Consider organizational programs and services through the lens of working parents. Do your programs support caregivers and those being cared for? Reinforce the breadth of support available. Communicate clearly and often. Our [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#) provides access to safe, confidential resources to manage stressful circumstances and personal issues. Around-the-clock access to professional support is a tremendous asset for working parents navigating the demands of life. This benefit demonstrates an investment in the emotional, social, physical, and financial wellbeing of working parents and is fundamental to optimal workplace performance.



### **References**

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