

Policy Recommendations and Takeaways

From the Better Life Lab's Men and Care Series

In 2019, New America's Better Life Lab engaged in a multi-modal data collection effort to understand men and their attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, desires, and motivations around and about family caregiving. After diving into the rich quantitative and qualitative data, the Lab published a series of reports that cover the state of men and care, focusing on the most timely and crucial findings for families and policymakers. The Better Life Lab produced six reports in total:

- Men Value Care. But it's the experience of giving care that can shape attitudes and transform men's lives
- A Portrait of Caring Black Men
- Professional Caregiving Men find Meaning and Pride in their Work, but Face Stigma
- The Bipartisan Case for Caregiving
- Engaged Dads and the Opportunities for and Barriers to Equal Parenting in the United States
- Lifting the Barriers to Paid Family and Medical Leave for Men in the United States

American values around men and caregiving have evolved tremendously in recent decades. American men today are participating in caregiving in significant ways, with benefits to themselves, their families, and U.S. society more broadly. But simply asking men to step up to care without implementing the policy and workplace supports that make such participation possible will continue to result in limited uptake and impact.

Below are actions families, employers, and policymakers can take to achieve gender-equal parenting and meet the needs and desires of mothers and fathers across the United States.

For Policymakers

If policymakers hope to see positive gender and economic equity outcomes via enacting paid leave policies, the policies must be designed in a way that encourages men to take leave following the birth or adoption of a child, or to care for a family member.

To accomplish this, paid leave policies must include a level of financial remuneration that men will consider as adequate compensation for their time off from work. Other policies include:

- A permanent and universal [paid family and medical leave policy](#) of at least 12 weeks so people can care for newborn children, seriously ill family members, and their own health conditions.
- Improve workplace standards to help families feel more stable by increasing the federal minimum wage to a livable level.
- Significant federal investment in a high quality care infrastructure and universal family [care program](#) that everyone pays into, like Social Security, and is applicable to all care contexts such as infant and childcare, care for a disability, elder care, and hospice care.
- A [paid sick days policy](#) to guarantee that workers can take time off when they are sick and still have a job to return to.

For Employers

Workplaces must create supportive environments that accommodate and normalize workers' caregiving responsibilities, regardless of gender, and implement policies that recognize caregiving needs extend far beyond parenthood. Workers often anticipate needing time to care not only for children, but also for themselves and other family members and loved ones, particularly as parents age. Other steps employers can take include:

- Support action for universal, portable benefits through the federal government.
- Discuss workplace policies around family life in gender-neutral terms. Provide examples that include men using the policies and normalize the notion that male employees are also caregivers outside of work.
- Provide gender-neutral family-supportive policies, including paid leave, to part- and full-time employees.
- Give all of your employees the flexibility to determine their schedules and where they work from, whenever possible.

For Individuals and Families

As individuals, we have the power to shift cultural norms via our relationships with friends, family, and the institutions we interact with. Through collective action, we can build a cultural narrative that recognizes, supports, and normalizes the fact that caregivers exist across the gender spectrum.

- Continue to speak out about how you value men's involvement in daily caregiving and the many benefits it brings you and your family.
- Join father and mother groups that support robust work-life policies.

The Men and Care series confirms that a new kind of caregiving, one premised on love, teaching, and direct care for children and family members, has replaced the antiquated gender norms that relegate and minimize men's roles as caregivers.

Dads, families, and supporters of gender equality should mark and celebrate this rapid, historic transformation in roles. They should also note that caregivers are still struggling to balance work and care responsibilities. Though the majority of parents today, regardless of political party, see equally shared parenting as the standard they hope to achieve, they still see inequality around them. That inequality comes from many sources—from workplaces that disallow or invalidate men as caregivers, to public policies like the lack of federal paid family and medical leave, which makes it financially difficult for families to spend time together. Once our policies catch up to the needs of people, individuals and families are sure to thrive.