

## **Fostering Resilience for Long-Term Care Providers**

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Long-term care providers play a vital role in supporting one of society's most vulnerable populations—older adults and individuals with chronic health conditions. Caring for these individuals is both noble and demanding, often involving long hours, emotional investment, and caring for complex medical needs. This unique environment can place significant strain on providers' mental and emotional well-being. By proactively addressing the stressors of this profession and prioritizing self-care, training, and supportive workplace cultures, long-term care providers can better safeguard their own mental health and, in turn, deliver higher-quality care.

### **Recognizing the Challenges of Long-Term Care**

Long-term care settings, which include nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and home-based care, inherently come with emotional and physical stressors. The round-the-clock nature of these roles can lead to fatigue, burnout, and compassion fatigue—an extreme form of emotional exhaustion that arises from continual exposure to distressing or emotionally charged situations. Providers often form close bonds with residents, and the declining health or loss of a resident can take a profound emotional toll.

In addition, long-term care environments frequently face staffing shortages, which intensify the workload for existing staff members. Understaffing can mean caregivers have less time to decompress, reflect, and recharge. This is especially true for veteran employees who worked through the Covid crisis but still carry that emotional burden. This dynamic can foster a cycle of compounding stress, as caregivers strive to meet both the clinical and emotional needs of residents while feeling overwhelmed themselves.

### **Importance of Mental and Emotional Well-Being**

Mental and emotional wellness directly influences a caregiver's ability to provide empathetic, patient-centered care. When caregivers experience high levels of stress, their focus and emotional bandwidth can diminish, potentially affecting communication with residents, families, and colleagues. In contrast, caregivers who

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*To ensure the contents of the newsletter are helpful and important to you, please feel free to send comments, suggestions, and feedback to:*

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prioritize their well-being tend to have stronger coping strategies, exhibit greater resilience, and cultivate healthier relationships in and out of the workplace.

Additionally, promoting caregiver well-being can lead to reduced turnover and improved job satisfaction. Burnout not only harms an individual's personal health but also jeopardizes the stability of care teams, leading to constant recruitment challenges and potential disruptions in continuity of care. By fostering a culture that values mental and emotional health, long-term care organizations can increase retention, build cohesive teams, improve care outcomes, and earn a sterling reputation in their communities.

### **Promoting staff resilience**

The most important element of a resilience program is to get people to talk about the issue and make it "OK" to seek support. Regular workshops and training sessions on stress management, self-care practices, and mental health awareness can empower staff with practical tools. Long-term care organizations might collaborate with mental health professionals to conduct sessions on recognizing early signs of burnout, practicing healthy boundaries, and developing coping strategies for emotionally challenging situations.

Structured opportunities for team members to discuss challenging or distressing experiences can alleviate feelings of isolation and helplessness. Peer support groups, led by trained facilitators or mental health professionals, allow caregivers to openly share their experiences, learn from one another, and strengthen collective resilience.

One of the highest impact programs that a facility can offer is an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) as part of their employee health plan. Making these services confidential and easily accessible is crucial, as caregivers may hesitate to seek help for fear of stigmatization or jeopardizing their job security. Encouraging openness about stress and mental health issues also helps to normalize seeking professional support.

Another valuable option is a structured wellness program that might include opportunities for mindfulness, meditation, or light exercise. Even short breaks devoted to relaxation or guided breathing can help caregivers manage acute stress. Offering on-site yoga classes or partnering with local gyms to subsidize memberships provides tangible methods to encourage physical well-being, which is closely connected to emotional health.

One of the most direct ways to reduce caregiver burnout is ensuring that facilities are appropriately staffed. Balanced schedules and regular shifts can help caregivers plan for rest, address personal obligations, and maintain a sense of control over their work and personal lives. Managers who rotate assignments to avoid excessive emotional strain and provide varied tasks can also help mitigate the risk of compassion fatigue.



### **Cultivating a Supportive Work Culture**

Beyond specific programs and initiatives, fostering a supportive workplace culture is fundamental. Leaders in long-term care facilities play a key role by openly discussing mental health, modeling healthy stress management behaviors, and praising staff who prioritize self-care. Encouraging two-way feedback—both from leadership to staff and from staff back to leadership—helps ensure that employees feel valued, heard, and empowered to suggest improvements in the workplace environment.

Recognition programs that celebrate staff achievements, large or small, can also reinforce a positive atmosphere. When caregivers feel appreciated for their hard work, they are more likely to remain enthusiastic and emotionally invested in their roles. Simple acknowledgments, like thank-you notes or shout-outs at staff meetings, can go a long way in boosting morale.

By integrating these practices and fostering a culture of understanding, long-term care providers can maintain their own emotional well-being as they continue to serve one of society's greatest needs—caring for those who rely on their dedication and compassion.

