New America

BETTER LIFE LAB

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Men and Caregiving: Opportunities for and Barriers to Meaningful Involvement



The 2026 Men and Care findings show a continuation of a trend from the 2019 Male Caregivers Survey: that U.S. culture today broadly accepts men as caregivers and sees caregiving as a gender-neutral, learnable skill—not a fixed trait tied to biology. But practice, identity, trust, and structural barriers like workplace practices and public policies haven't fully caught up with these shifting attitudes, as the data show that flexible work and access to supportive policies are key for enabling men to care.

The findings are based on interviews with 3,345 men and women across the United States, including oversamples of fathers of children eight and under, men of color, and men aged 18-29. The samples have been weighted to provide an accurate snapshot of Americans' diverse views on gender and care, and men's role in caregiving across the life cycle.

Most adults believe care is valuable and can be learned.

Most adults in the United States strongly believe that gender does not play a role in who is best suited to provide care (74 percent) and say care should be shared equally (74 percent, rising to 95 percent when those who said the statement describes their view somewhat well are included). Yet among caregivers and parents, only 40 percent of respondents say they actually share care equally. Most respondents agree that men and women should share caring for children equally once they are beyond the breastfeeding stage (87 percent). There is broad agreement that being an involved father is an important part of being a man (85 percent), that the care work people do inside their home is as valuable as paid work done outside the home (76 percent), and that care work is valuable to society (75 percent).

People in the United States also tend to see caregiving as learned rather than innate. Roughly two-thirds (68 percent) say the phrase "caregiving is a skill that can be learned with time and experience" describes their view "extremely" or "very well," while just 29 percent say the same of the idea that "caregiving is a skill people are born with."

Caregiving is also experienced as overwhelmingly meaningful among both men and women: 91 percent of all caregivers find caregiving meaningful and 88 percent say people respect them in their caregiving role. But meaning doesn't eliminate strain: 84 percent report their caregiving is a source of stress at least sometimes. Joy varies by type of care rather than by gender. Among caregivers, those who were also parents were significantly more likely to describe their caregiving as a source of joy than caregivers who were not parents (54 percent versus 35 percent).

Many fathers would like to be stay-at-home parents.

Nine in 10 fathers view teaching a child about life, showing love and affection, protecting their child from injury or harm, and providing regular financial support as "very important" things for fathers to do. Fathers generally feel the same things are important for mothers. The share saying it's "very important" for fathers to provide direct care such as feeding or dressing was 84 percent, compared to 78 percent in 2019. Mothers (53 percent) were more likely than fathers to say they would be a stay-at-home parent if they had the choice. Still, a third of fathers (36 percent) said they would be a stay-at-home parent if given the choice, and another 24 percent said they were "somewhat" interested. This suggests that a desire for more time for care and connection with children is important to a significant share of both fathers and mothers.

Six in 10 fathers expressed at least some interest in being a full-time parent at home if they had the choice, with 36 percent saying this described them "extremely" or "very well" and an additional 24 percent saying this described them "somewhat well."





Work consequences of care are ratcheting up for men.

Compared to 2019, significantly more men who care for adults or children with extra needs are missing work, rising from 64 percent in 2019 to 76 percent in 2026. Significantly more men are also reducing their work hours (50 percent of male caregivers, compared to 42 percent in 2019), suggesting that more are absorbing the collision between work and care by adjusting their work. The corresponding changes among women caregivers missing work or reducing work hours were not statistically significant: 78 percent of women caregivers reported missing work in 2026, up from 71 percent in 2019, while the share reducing work hours remained unchanged at 45 percent. Fathers earning the lowest wages (less than $30,000 a year) were significantly more likely than the highest-earning fathers (those earning $100,000 or more) to report reducing hours both temporarily and permanently to provide care. And just 31 percent of fathers earning less than $30,000 received fully paid leave, compared to two-thirds (66 percent) of fathers earning more than $100,000.

More men than women also reported temporarily reducing their work hours by a statistically significant margin (39 percent versus 30 percent). Similar numbers of mothers and fathers are experiencing work-care collision: 62 percent of fathers said the demands of their job interfered with their family or personal time, compared to 55 percent of mothers, a nonsignificant difference. Over 40 percent of mothers and fathers reported that their family interfered with their job. Stress levels remained high regardless of gender, with more than 80 percent of men and women who are caregivers of an adult or child with special needs reporting their caregiving could be a source of stress.

Caregivers want more control over where and when they work.

Just one quarter of workers reported having “full control” over their work schedules. Thirty-three percent of fathers said they had “no control” over their work, as did 30 percent of mothers. And more caregiving workers want flexible work arrangements.

Forty percent of parents and 40 percent of caregivers for adults or children with extra needs currently work from home or in a hybrid setting, while 74 percent of both groups would prefer that arrangement, a more than 30 percentage-point gap between the real and ideal. Although both mothers and fathers prefer to work at home or in a hybrid setting, more mothers (83 percent) said that was their ideal work situation than fathers (65 percent). Nearly one-third of fathers (29 percent) said they'd prefer to work in an office, compared to just 13 percent of mothers.

Men are less likely than women to identify as caregivers.

Just 40 percent of men identify as a "caregiver," compared to 47 percent of women. While the majority of parents of children ages 0-18 believe they are caregivers, mothers are about 10 percentage points more likely to claim the title than fathers (72 percent of mothers versus 62 percent of fathers). Parents of children under the age of five are particularly likely to identify as a caregiver: Just 20 percent of fathers with children under six and 14 percent of mothers with children under six do not identify as caregivers. Among parents giving care to a child with special needs, 83 percent of mothers identify as caregivers, compared to 75 percent of fathers.

Caregivers who provide care for an adult or a child with additional needs and sandwich caregivers (parents of a child under the age of 18 who also provide care for an adult) are especially likely to describe themselves as caregivers. Among sandwich caregivers caring for both adults and children under 18, no significant gender difference is evident.





There are differences between men and women in caregiving.

Male and female caregivers report different experiences in their caregiving roles. When it comes to specific tasks, female caregivers for adults are more likely to assist with certain hands-on tasks, such as bathing, toileting, and getting dressed (51 percent versus 39 percent), while male caregivers are more likely to assist with household maintenance (77 percent versus 66 percent). Fathers are involved in many daily parenting activities, such as providing emotional support (75 percent), making meals or feeding children (73 percent), and playing with them (70 percent). And though women are more likely than men to provide care to adult family members or friends, male caregivers (including those who care for adults and kids with additional needs) are more likely than female caregivers to say they share caregiving responsibilities equally at home (44 percent versus 33 percent), revealing a notable gender mismatch in perceptions of how equally the caregiving workload is shared.

As in 2019, when it comes to taking leave from work to provide care after the birth or adoption of a child, we found that men and women both take leave and anticipate needing to take leave in the future at similar rates. But when it comes to actually taking leave, men were more likely than women to have taken fully paid leave (47 percent versus 31 percent), while women were more likely to have taken unpaid leave (36 percent versus 23 percent). Women also took longer leaves: 58 percent of women reported taking leaves longer than one month after the birth or adoption of a child, compared to 22 percent of men. In contrast, the majority of men who took leave reported taking one to two weeks of leave (53 percent), whereas only a quarter (25 percent) of women who took leave reported such short leaves.



Young men's views about work and care differ from young women's.

Young men ages 18-29 were nearly three times more likely than women of the same age group to say that it's okay for men to do some care work, but women are better suited to do most of it (32 percent versus 12 percent). And young men are also more likely than young women of the same age to say that men's role in the family should be providing financial support while women run the household (32 percent versus 14 percent). Young men were also less likely than older men (ages 60 and up) to say that caregiving is valuable to society (66 percent versus 76 percent).

On the other hand, twice as many young women as young men held the view that women are better suited to caring for an adult (32 percent versus 15 percent). In addition, 67 percent of young men believe care is a skill that can be learned, similar to the share of young women who believe this, and 60 percent said mothers and fathers do an equally good job of caring for a newborn, compared to 52 percent of men over 30. Even though more young men endorsed breadwinner-homemaker views than young women, they represented a minority of young men.



There are significant barriers to men's caregiving.

Nearly one-third of fathers (27 percent) said they face barriers standing between them and the father that they want to be, most commonly their financial situation (21 percent) or their work or job situation (16 percent). These findings are similar to those reported by fathers in our 2019 survey. Fathers between the ages of 18 and 44 are more likely than the oldest fathers (ages 60 and up) to report facing barriers (33 percent versus 12 percent). About a quarter (23 percent) of male caregivers and 31 percent of fathers say that people do not trust themselves to do their caregiving because of their gender, compared with just 8 percent of female caregivers and 12 percent of mothers.

Equitable care requires equitable choices.

To be the caregivers they want to be, people need enough income to care without facing a financial crisis, paid time away from work when care demands it, and enough control over their working lives to be present for the people who depend on them. Men also need permission—from workplaces, families, and themselves—to understand that providing care, not just providing income, is part of what it means to provide for a family. When men can care without sacrificing their livelihoods, women are less likely to be pushed into the role of default caregiver—and less likely to absorb the career and economic penalties that come with it.

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Read the full report

newamerica.org/insights/2026-men-and-care-survey

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The Better Life Lab produces and supports independent journalism and original research on work, care, gender equality, and family policy. The Lab covers care across the life cycle, family-supportive policies, and workplace equity, with a team of researchers, journalists, and policy experts who train the next generation of reporters, set the standard for coverage of care and work, and drive action for change across the United States.