

## Work in Progress Episode 366: Paul Irving, Milken Institute senior advisor

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You are listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, Editor-in-Chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators and decision makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

There are more than 5 million paid home health caregivers in the U.S. Many of these workers are women and many are immigrants. The days can be long and the pay can be low. Additionally, it's estimated that between 53 million and nearly 106 million U.S. adults provide unpaid caregiving for children and for ill, aging and disabled family members and friends, often at the cost of their own jobs and careers. As the population ages, the American home caregiving system is under more and more stress, tipping toward a crisis. A new documentary called Caregiving, now streaming on PBS, takes a closer look at the challenges and the triumphs caregivers face every day. Paul Irving is a senior advisor to the Milken Institute, consulting producer on the film, and a good friend to WorkingNation and to me. Paul, welcome.

Paul Irving, Milken Institute senior advisor and "Caregiving" consulting producer:

Thank you, Ramona. Pleasure to be with you.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I really appreciate you talking to me about the subjects. We've had this conversation a couple of times before, about caregivers and all that they contribute to a family, how they help. I think I saw a statement, somebody called it a public good, caregivers are a public good, but they often go unrecognized, they go underpaid. Where are we at in the system today? How do we raise them to public recognition?

Paul Irving, Milken Institute senior advisor and "Caregiving" consulting producer:

That's the \$64,000 question, we feel, on two fronts. One is the massive group, and you identified the numbers of family caregivers, folks taking care of their children and their aging parents, their spouses who need assistance, and who were stressed because they not only have these extraordinarily challenging roles, by the way, roles that Rosalynn Carter famously identified as roles that we'll all ultimately have in our lives, and by the way, Ramona, I've been a caregiver, so I understand some of what many of these folks go through, but many of them are also holding down jobs. About 60% or so of family caregivers are also working, and their care responsibilities leads to absenteeism and presenteeism, and it affects their productivity, it affects their personal health in many, many ways. The stresses and strains of this responsibility that often go on 24 hours a day, seven days a week, have impacts across their lives. And we have nowhere near enough support from employers and from policymakers for the challenges that they face.

And then the second group of people equally stressed, are direct care workers. Those are people who are paid to care for all of us. Oftentimes, by the way, immigrants, routinely women and women of color, who are under-compensated, under-recognized, operate in lonely environments without the kinds of services and supports and encouragement and recognition that they so deserve for taking on these incredibly important roles. And it's easy for any of us to brush this off and say this is somehow unimportant until it affects us and our families, and it inevitably does. So this is an issue that every single one of us, democrats, republicans, independents, those from all regions of the country, every religion, every race, every gender, you name it, we should all be thinking about it, all be striving to try to address and to address quickly.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

That number that I cited earlier, that 53 million plus, and these are people, as you said, 60% of them also hold down another job. Has there ever been a national policy or an attempt at a national policy to have some more flexibility for these folks who have to take care of their family members?

Paul Irving, Milken Institute senior advisor and “Caregiving” consulting producer:

The policy gaps are extraordinary. Where we've seen some progress is in the private sector where some employers, I think the number is around 25%, offer paid family leave. And some enlightened employers, an increasing number, but still relatively small, provide other kinds of supports, mental health assistance, care navigation assistance, some additional supplemental compensation and working arrangements that facilitate care. So things that we learned, frankly, during the pandemic, like virtual work, where I work at home, et cetera, facilitate the caregiving requirements that many of these people have to deal with. And again, if employers, not just folks in the HR department, but people in the C-Suite, really thought about it, what they would recognize is this is something that's affecting many, many of their workers. And by the way, this is not just something nice, it's necessary. It's something that doesn't just affect the worker. It very much affects the employer. People are lost, talent is lost, because of their need to leave for caregiving obligations.

Again, I talked about the lack of productivity or loss of productivity and the absenteeism and presenteeism that is often part of this caregiving challenge. And so employers have an economic interest in supporting their workers and in understanding the implications of this, and in understanding the effectiveness on their business, their competitiveness, the quality and performance of their human capital, their ability to function in the future when we have a smaller and smaller workforce as a result of our demographic shifts. It's lovely for people to do it because it's the right thing to do, but my case to employers is don't do this because it's nice, do it because it's necessary for the future of your business.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

One of the things that we've cited a lot on some of these Work in Progress podcasts is the idea that retaining an employee is more cost effective than going out and recruiting, hiring, onboarding someone. One number I saw, it was from Morgan Stanley Gallup Poll, I believe, said it could be as much as \$19,000 to hire one person. So if there is more thought on that human capital, to use that way to describe a person, but the person at the center of your work who's helping you do the jobs that you're trying to do for your customer, it is more cost effective to do something to keep them there.

Paul Irving, Milken Institute senior advisor and “Caregiving” consulting producer:

And again, this is something else you and I have talked about over the years, we know that we have an aging population. We know that recruitment and retention and realization of the benefits of older workers is particularly important, and older workers may be most at risk of needing to lead because of the challenges they face with aging parents or a spouse that needs assistance. So if you have talent, and you want to keep that talent in its seat, you want to keep that talent performing at a high level, thinking about methods to assist that talent with their caregiving responsibilities, caregiving responsibilities that ultimately virtually all of your talent will have to take on, is just smart business.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

We have a declining birth rate in the country and an aging population. What is the health of that aging population? We're not just talking about, it's not only older people that need the caregiving, because

there's many other people who have disabilities or disease, but what is the health of our current older population?

Paul Irving, Milken Institute senior advisor and “Caregiving” consulting producer:

Well, I mean, I'd like to tell you that it's all wonderful, but that would be sugar coating a challenge. So what I will tell you is that the opportunities for healthier aging are obvious and certainly in front of us, and we know how to achieve them, but the distribution of healthy longevity is incredibly inequitable. And so what we find is that workers from the south, workers from rural communities or Christian communities of color, workers who are lower income, are really not living longer and they're not living healthier. Their life expectancy is not increasing, and their health spans, the period in which they're healthy and remain potentially productive in a workforce environment, those health spans are not increasing.

Now, Ramona, for those of us who are lucky, for you and I, people who are educated, who live in urban environments, who have access to good healthcare, who have access to good health information, who understand the importance of nutrition and exercise and sleep and intellectual stimulation and social connection and all the rest, both life expectancy and health span have expanded somewhat. But the interesting thing is, if you think about the portion of the workforce that may be most at risk of caregiving obligations, caregiving challenges, it's the people that we defined as essential workers during the pandemic. And who are those essential workers? Folks from the communities that I just described who are not living longer lives, not living healthier lives.

We're living in a country where, sadly, we experience longevity and health span inequality, and unless we deal with it, we end up having not just a country that does not care as much as it should, but a country that will not produce economically as much as it should, innovatively as much as it should, creatively as much as it should. So it's incumbent on all of us, I think, to advocate for those people who are least benefited by some of the advances in science and public health and all the rest that have improved lives for those of us who are lucky enough to reap those benefits.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And we talked about this group of people who are taking care of their own family members. And then on the other side of it is those five million people who are, as you already described, a lot of times they can be immigrants, women of color, and they don't get paid enough. This is something that we've talked about, again, for years, you and I. I spoke to Ai-jen Poo a couple of times about it, and she's really been pushing for this worker union.

Paul Irving, Milken Institute senior advisor and “Caregiving” consulting producer:

Yeah, she's a fantastic advocate for that group of people. And by the way, I should note that most data suggests that by 2030, five years from now, we're going to need another million plus, million one, million two, of those workers in the United States. So this speaks volumes to our immigration policies and lack of appreciation of these people who come to the United States, oftentimes willing and able to do work that people born in the United States are unwilling to do.

So, yes, I mean, since we know we have to improve American caregiving, really the only two ways we can do it practically are through changes in immigration policy and the elevation of care-focused technologies, which are, by the way, progressing but will take time. We have to recognize that we not only have to change laws, policies and practices, but we have to change culture. We have to recognize, as I think we did for a little moment during Covid, the value of essential workers. We should thank people when they come to our borders and are willing to work in our assisted living and skilled nursing

communities, when they're willing to engage in home healthcare, when they're willing to assist with child care. We should be thanking them. We shouldn't be vilifying them. They're providing a wonderful service and we need them badly.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So the new documentary Caregiving really is looking at this whole system that we have in place, whether it is the paid or the unpaid, and I call it a system, but it's a reality. It's part of our lives. It's part of the fabric of our lives. As you said earlier, we're all either going to experience it sometime in our lives ourselves, where we need care, or we're going to help someone else who needs care. So Caregiving, this new PBS documentary, it was initiated by Bradley Cooper, the actor, director, after he went through his own kind of revelation with his own father. Are you able to share that story?

Paul Irving, Milken Institute senior advisor and "Caregiving" consulting producer:

Yeah, he was a caregiver for his dad. He's a highly-educated, smart guy, in addition to being a movie star. And I think he recognized that if the challenges were so significant for him, the frustrations, the loneliness, the learning that needed to be done and all the rest, how must it be for those of us who are not Hollywood movie stars? And I think that motivated him to become involved in this work and to become involved in this documentary. And I'm really proud of it, I think it's a really important work. And as is the case with most documentaries, this is stories. It has entertainment value. It's stories about families struggling with this challenge, recognizing both the great strains and the sadnesses that come with caregiving and loss, and also the incredible joys and satisfaction that come from this really, really important work that we do for our families.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

There's some of the stories in there of taking care of a 14 year old, or a 14 year old taking care of her father, stories of a young man whose father was a Navy SEAL, and now he's having to carry him up and down the stairs because he needs that help. But I like one of the things you just said, that I think we should hold on to and celebrate, is these are families, and they're showing love for each other, and I see that in the stories that you're telling.

Paul Irving, Milken Institute senior advisor and "Caregiving" consulting producer:

And look, you make the point, and I think it's an important point to underscore, caregivers are not just older adults. While a lot of caregiving does fall to older adults, it's not just older adults. We have a generation of people who are taking care of both children and aging parents, and there are a remarkable number of millennial and Gen Z caregivers who are taking care of parents and grandparents. So this is something that is almost an ageless challenge, or a challenge I guess maybe better said for all ages. And so this is, again, one of those things. There aren't many things today in our divided society, Ramona, that we can talk about and share. We have so many differences in America, there are so many things that we disagree about, but this is something that regardless of our politics, regardless of our religion, regardless of our geography, we can share and understand and appreciate, have empathy for and do something about, to not only improve lives for other caregivers, both paid and unpaid, but ultimately to improve our own lives, because we'll all be there.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

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If somebody watched this documentary, and it could be an individual, it could be a nonprofit, it could be a government official, what do you want people to take away or how do you want to see change? What change would you like to see?

Paul Irving, Milken Institute senior advisor and “Caregiving” consulting producer:

A little bit of different change from each of those categories, but let me try. So from the employer, what I'd like to see, and I actually wrote a piece about this not too long ago, I think actually, you published a piece, Ramona-

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I did.

Paul Irving, Milken Institute senior advisor and “Caregiving” consulting producer:

That I wrote for [inaudible 00:15:21]. Maybe you want to link it, which is a series of proposed ideas for employers to incorporate in their human resources policies, their benefit policies, that I think could make life easier for those employees of theirs, those members of their workforce who have caregiving responsibilities. So certainly from an employer perspective, that's what I would hope. And I would hope that anyone who's employed listening to this would try to surface those ideas with their human resources officers, and ultimately, with their business leadership.

At a policy level, there are many, many things that we could do providing additional services and supports, understanding the challenges that we have right now on the policy side. There is a little bit of policy support for caregiving in Medicaid currently, not in Medicare. I would certainly like to see that done in Medicare as well, but I think that there are other things that we could do in the federal government to provide some modest, additional supports and certainly in states as well.

And for nonprofits and those involved in the field, I mean, I think this is a question of advocacy. I think there are other things that I think all of us can do at a community level. People in faith institutions can get their churches and synagogues and mosques involved in supporting their neighbors. Local businesses who might otherwise be supporting the local softball team can make sure that if somebody needs assistance, it's not just Meals on Wheels, which by the way, it's subject to threat right now, but that they're providing assistance looking out for people who may need that extra help.

There's something called the Villages Movement, Ramona, I think you know about, coalesces older adults who can assist each other. But it used to be, at least I remember growing up in a very middle-class community that if somebody came next door for a cup of sugar, you gave it to them, and if you knew somebody down the block wasn't feeling so well, you brought them some chicken soup. And I think maybe if we got more back into the culture of thinking about our neighborhoods and communities and what we can do to help each other in America, we would get past some of the ugliness that exists, very sadly, today in our society.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I think those are very wise words and very kind words, Paul. Thank you so much for sitting down with me.

Paul Irving, Milken Institute senior advisor and “Caregiving” consulting producer:

It's always a pleasure, you know that. You're a pal, and I appreciate the work that you do and WorkingNation does.

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Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I've been speaking with Paul Irving, senior advisor to Milken Institute and consulting producer on the new documentary Caregiving. You can now watch it on PBS streaming, and there's going to be a nationwide broadcast premiere on June 24th. As they say, check your local listings. Thank you, Paul.

Paul Irving, Milken Institute senior advisor and "Caregiving" consulting producer:

Thanks Ramona.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I'm Ramona Schindelheim, Editor-in-Chief of WorkingNation. Thanks for listening.