Expanded Back-Up Care Program boosts employee options, flexibility

Life & Work Connections
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The University of Arizona has expanded its backup care offerings to include adults and elders to better help employees balance their work and caregiving responsibilities, reduce stress and improve overall well-being.

The program, which is available to all benefits-eligible employees residing in Arizona, previously applied to children up to 12 years old.

"Dependent care can come in many forms and is not limited to caring for children under 13 years of age," said Josephine Corder, director of Life & Work Connections, which is part of the Division of Human Resources. "This expansion is an important step forward in recognizing and supporting the diverse caregiving needs of our community."

The vendor used for the Back-Up Care Program has been changed to Bright Horizons, which offers options for more types of people needing care, such as a partner with a long-term illness, a child, a dependent adult or an elder. Bright Horizons also offers more places to access care, contracting with hundreds of partner agencies vetted and trained by Bright Horizons as well as providing exclusive access to in-home caregivers and other providers.

Employees can use a total of up to 80 hours of care; previously they were limited to 10 scheduled uses. They can also book backup care up to 30 days in advance. Previously, employees could request care up to 10 business days in advance.

"Having this 30-day window relieves stress for our employees," Corder said. "This is particularly helpful for those looking for in-home adult care, which can be difficult to find last minute."

Most child care centers available through Bright Horizons accept children as young as 6 weeks old through preschool, and many centers can provide care for children up to 12 years old. For example, many centers open special "camp days" to accommodate school closures.

For elder care, employees must add specific family information to match the adult/elder with the correct provider, including food or medication allergies, special needs or medical conditions, and activity restrictions. Employees also can note their elder's preferred language.

Employees can now choose in-center or in-home care for children, giving them more care options, especially for those not in a major city. Bright Horizons has centers in Phoenix, Mesa, Chandler, Scottsdale and Sun City. In-home care takes place at the home of the child. The new co-pay is $6 per hour for in-home care for up to three children or adults and $3 per hour for in-center care for up to 3 children. Care had previously been available for up to five children with a co-pay of $5 per hour.

"Having access to affordable, quality care for a loved one goes a long way toward reducing stress when regular care plans fall through," Corder said.

The Back-Up Care Program, previously available only to University employees living in the Tucson and Phoenix areas, is now available to employees living anywhere in Arizona. Care is available nationwide, so long as the employee lives in Arizona. For example, if an employee's qualifying relative lives in Maine and needs post-surgery support, the employee can request care for them.

Employees who do not have access to a Bright Horizons center or in-home care provider can use out-of-network care, in which they can use a caregiver of their choice and be reimbursed up to $100 a day. Out-of-network care reimbursements must be pre-authorized by Bright Horizons.

It's estimated that 1 in 5 employees in the United States care for an adult or elderly among those aged 30 to 60 care for both their children and elderly relatives.

"Through experience, consultations and research, I have seen a substantial increase in the need to help caregivers of adults and older adults identify what support and resources are available to them," said Eileen Lawless, dependent care specialist with Life & Work Connections. "Expanding the Back-Up Care Program to include adult and elder care shows we value employee caregivers and creates a much-needed visibility into their needs in and out of the workplace."

To use the program, the employee's dependent or relative must meet the qualifications specified in IRS Publication 501.

Before requesting care, employees must enroll to establish eligibility by completing an electronic form every fiscal year. After allowing 48-72 hours for Bright Horizons to confirm their eligibility, employees can register with Bright Horizons.

[1] Back-Up Care Program
[2] 1 in 5 employees in the United States care for an adult or elder
[3] one-third of Americans aged 30 to 60 care for both their children and elderly relatives
[5] must enroll
[6] register with Bright Horizons
Once registered, employees can book care through the Bright Horizons by using its web portal or app, or by calling 877-BHCARES (877-242-2737).

Bright Horizons will hold an online session on Aug. 17 at 9 a.m. to provide information about the program and eligibility requirements, how to use the portal and app, and how to request care. Employees can register for the session online.

Visit the Back-Up Care Program webpage to view the program guidelines, an FAQ and information on getting started. Employees with questions can contact Life & Work Connections at lifework@arizona.edu or 520-621-2493.

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