Paid Sick Days Are Necessary To Manage Chronic Illness

AUGUST 2012

Nearly one in two people in the United States have a chronic medical condition that requires regular care[1] – and chronic conditions are becoming more prevalent. At the same time, more than 40 million U.S. workers don't have access to paid sick days to recover from illness, care for a sick family member, or manage chronic illnesses. **As people live longer and the number of people living with chronic conditions continues to rise, workers need access to paid sick days to care for their own health and the health of family members.**

The Need is Undeniable – and Growing

Many chronic conditions, such as diabetes, asthma, hypertension and depression, require regular medical treatment and monitoring, which necessitates occasional time away from work. Without access to paid sick days, workers with chronic conditions are often forced to risk their health by foregoing important care – potentially increasing the long-term cost of their care. **Now more than ever, paid sick days are critical to meeting the needs of workers dealing with chronic health conditions because:**

> ▸ **Chronic conditions are common and the number of people who have them is rising.** Currently, 147 million Americans are living with chronic conditions. Between 2000 and 2030, the number of people with chronic conditions is expected to grow by 37 percent, an increase of 46 million people.[2]

> ▸ **Caregiving needs are on the rise.** The older an individual gets, the more likely he or she is to develop a chronic condition and need caregiving support. Ninety-one percent of adults over 65 are living with at least one chronic condition and 73 percent have at least two. Sixty-eight percent of adults between the ages of 45 and 64 percent are living with at least one chronic condition, and 43 percent have at least two.[3] As people live longer their caregiving needs tend increase, and this means that more family members need time away from work to manage their loved ones' care.

> ▸ **People are working longer.** Many older adults today are staying in the workforce beyond the standard retirement age. Nearly one in three adults between the ages of 65 and 69, and nearly one in five adults between the ages of 70 and 74, are still working – totaling more than five million older workers who need occasional days off to manage their health, particularly when they are dealing with one or more chronic conditions.[4]

> ▸ **Paid sick days allow for access to primary and preventive care, which are critical in managing chronic medical conditions and reducing the cost of care.** More

**national partnership
for women & families**

than three in four health care dollars are spent on behalf of people with chronic conditions.[5] Access to paid sick days means workers with chronic conditions can take time off to get primary and preventive care – keeping them healthier and preventing unnecessary and expensive hospital visits.[6] A recent study found that if all U.S. workers had access to paid sick days, 1.3 million emergency department visits could be prevented annually, leading to savings of more than $1.1 billion dollars – nearly half of which would come from reduced spending by public programs such as Medicare and Medicaid.[7]

Paid Sick Days: A Critical Step in Dealing with Chronic Conditions

Despite the growing need for paid sick time among workers with chronic conditions – and among caregivers of family members with chronic conditions – there are currently no federal laws that give workers the right to earn paid sick days and Connecticut is the only state to guarantee some workers this basic right.[8] But people in about 20 states and cities are mobilizing in support of setting a basic workplace standard.

The federal Healthy Families Act would set an important national paid sick days standard that would allow workers to earn up to seven paid sick days a year to care for their own chronic condition or help a family member deal with a chronic condition. The bill is critical to meeting the health and financial needs of the modern workforce, particularly as we look toward a future where more people than ever before will be managing chronic conditions.

---

[1] Anderson, G. (2010, February). *Chronic Care: Making the Case for Ongoing Care*. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation & Johns Hopkins University publication. Retrieved 30 May 2012, from http://www.rwjf.org/pr/product.jsp?id=50968

2 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation & Johns Hopkins University. (2010, February). *Chronic Care: Making the Case for Ongoing Care*. Retrieved 30 May 2012, from http://www.rwjf.org/files/research/50968chronic.care.chartbook.pdf

3 Ibid., p. 12.

[4] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Household Data Annual Averages. (2010). *Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by age, sex, and race*. Retrieved 30 May 2012, from http://bls.gov/opub/ee/2011/cps/annavg3_2010.pdf

5 See note 2, p. 14.

6 Kruzikas, D., et al. (2004, September). *Preventable Hospitalizations: Window Into Primary and Preventive Care, 2000*. U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality publication. Retrieved 30 May 2012, from http://archive.ahrq.gov/data/hcup/factbk5/

7 Miller, K., Williams, C. & Yi, Y. (2011, November). *Paid Sick Days and Health: Cost Savings from Reduced Emergency Department Visits*. Institute for Women's Policy Research publication. Retrieved 30 May 2012, from http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/paid-sick-days-and-health-cost-savings-from-reduced-emergency-department-visits

8 The cities of San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Seattle have paid sick days laws.