

A Whitepaper From OnShift

Supporting Your Staff During COVID-19 & Beyond



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A recent OnShift survey of more than 2100 post-acute healthcare and senior living industry professionals found that 65% of respondents recognize fear and safety concerns as a top personal challenge facing employees.ⁱ Employees are struggling and are looking for continual reassurance from their leaders that the highest standards are in place to protect their physical, mental and emotional health.

Every decision you make should take into consideration the health and wellbeing of your employees and residents. Your frontline workers are experiencing an immense amount of stress as many of the constants in their life, such as childcare, transportation or access to food, may have been upended or completely changed with the onset of COVID-19. In fact, 80% of caregivers and hourly workers are believed to be struggling with burnout.ⁱ Now is the time to work with your staff to find collective solutions and let

them know that you are here to support them more than ever before.

To prioritize employees, senior care organizations are changing their policies, benefits and compensation. One survey found that 82.3% of senior living organizations are offering the ability to work from home (for certain positions), 49.6% are offering free meals, 43.6% offer bonus pay and 38.2% are providing additional PTO and paid sick leave.ⁱⁱ

Since the beginning of this pandemic, many thought leaders in the industry have noted that the providers that remain in operation during this crisis will be those who take care of their employees by creating collaborative solutions that benefit employees. In this whitepaper, we outline some of the ways long-term care and senior living providers are working to support their staff during COVID-19, as well as best practices for continuing to do so beyond these trying times.



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Communicate With Your Staff

Many of your employees are going through the most stressful time of their lives. The first step to supporting them through it is understanding what's happening in your communities — and that starts with communication.

First, talk to your employees to better understand their primary concerns right now. Encourage managers to continue strong, open lines of communication with their direct reports and to reassure them that their concerns are being heard. As questions come in and are answered, document them in a common online space where all employees can access them. One provider sat down with their employees at the beginning of the pandemic and encouraged employees to discuss their fears, concerns and feelings. In the end, employees walked out describing themselves as “warriors” who were going into battle to protect their residents.

Second, conduct surveys to get a feel for any major changes in employee sentiment. As the pandemic continues so too will the concerns of your employees. If employee sentiment seems to change quickly, it may indicate an underlying problem that needs to be addressed by management.



Tools like quick pulse surveys provide a day-by-day sentiment analysis to help. Make sure staff have a place in these surveys to leave some quick comments. The information you gather here can be extremely valuable and best of all, actionable.

65% of providers recognize fear and safety concerns due to COVID-19 as a top personal challenge for staff today.ⁱ However, it's important to dig deeper and capture more detail about these concerns to effectively address them. To quickly and effectively collect this feedback, many providers have turned to technology. Consider implementing routine, quick employee surveys to gather real-time insight into specific initiatives or issues. For example, “Is COVID-19 causing issues for childcare or transportation?” or “Do you understand our latest policy updates?”

Third, there is no such thing as overcommunicating right now. Even if you don't have all of the information that you'd like, continue to share the information that you do have with your employees. Providers are creating video messages to communicate with their staff in new ways. Consider setting up a standard time to send out an employee message or note. Test what works best for your organization, whether that's a daily notification or a weekly town hall meeting.

Finally, be open minded and understanding. Let your employees know you are listening and taking action on their most pressing issues. Their number one concern right now is the health and safety of their families, residents and themselves.



Revisit Your Benefits

One of the best ways to support your staff right now is by reminding them of and encouraging them to take advantage of their benefits. You'll want to take a look at where you might be able to enhance your benefits package to better support your employees during this time.

"Now is an excellent time to take a comprehensive look at what your employees need and what would be nice to have," says Lisa Fordyce, EVP of OnShift. "Communities are looking to do everything they can to remind their employees that they are supported now and always."

According to Fordyce, these are some benefits providers can implement to support employees during the crisis:

Access To Unlimited EAP Programs, Chaplains or Therapists

With 80% of employees facing burnout right now, many employees are experiencing emotional trauma by coming to work during the pandemic.ⁱ Because fears are heightened, especially with virus spikes, consider offering unlimited EAP programs with access to therapists. Some employees might not be handling things well and will appreciate the extra assistance. We have also heard of providers who are doing weekly mindfulness sessions with their staff.

Childcare Assistance

59% of caregivers and hourly workers are struggling due to lack of childcare.ⁱ While childcare issues have been a consistent challenge in the past, the closing of schools and

daycares throughout the pandemic has greatly magnified this struggle. Are you able to provide extra monetary assistance or access to an alternate form of childcare? If so, discuss options with your staff and see what works. Some providers are offering in-house assistance for childcare during these times.

Rideshare Services For Your Employees

With the rise of limited public transportation in some cities, some employees are struggling to get to work. Consider offering a rideshare service to help employees who may be struggling getting work based on limited transportation options. Additionally, some caregivers may be reluctant to take on an extra shift due to lack of transportation.

Extra Shirts & Uniforms

To help check one more item off your employees' to-do lists, provide them with clean shirts and uniforms so they won't have to do their laundry as frequently. Consider getting shirts printed with an inspirational quote or statement, such as "I'm essential," "I work with heroes" or "Everyday Hero."

Instant Pay

With the economic uncertainties that surround us all, giving your employees the option to access their pay in real-time is a must. OnShift Wallet, our employee financial wellness software, allows employees to get access to their earned but not yet paid wages in real time. In 2020, we had over \$49 million in funds accessed before payday to help with bill payment, groceries, rent, unexpected expenses and other needs.ⁱⁱⁱ



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—Lisa Fordyce, EVP of OnShift & Former Senior Housing Operations Executive



Bonus Pay

Many communities are offering bonus pay and/or hero pay to their employees during this time. Any amount or program that you might be able to offer would mean the world to your employees, who may have a heightened sense of anxiety given current economic concerns. There are many ways to structure this, such as increasing the per hour rate or offering a bonus for all employees who stay with your community for the remainder of the year.



One provider gave a \$100 bonus to all workers. We've also heard of employers providing retention bonuses where all employees who stay through a certain date will get paid the bonus. Some providers are giving extra pay to those employees who have direct contact with residents who have COVID-19. There are many ways to structure your program based on what works best for you and your employees.

Meals For Staff & Their Families

Stock your fridge with prepared meals that staff can eat during their shift or bring home to their families. It's a great way to show that you care about your employees and their families. One provider shared that they are providing free breakfast and lunch to all employees every day. Another provider is giving their employees gift cards to use at local restaurants in an effort to help their employees with meals while also supporting local businesses.



Spaces To Meditate

Due to the uncertainty of the world, your employees may need mental health support. Create a room where employees can go to sit, reflect and decompress. This is a good place to hang up and reinforce information about your EAP information, wellness apps and chaplain programs.

Make sure to have plants and sunlight. Your goal is to create a welcoming, safe and cozy space where employees can feel grounded and find a sense of calm during these turbulent times.

Extra PTO

Sometimes the best way to care for your staff is by giving them an extra day of PTO. There are many ways to make this program work for you. It can be as simple as giving everyone in the building one extra day of PTO. You can also use this as a way to incentivize people to stay. For example, any employee who stays with the organization until a certain date automatically gets an extra day of PTO.

Offering Jobs To Displaced Family Members

Be mindful that your employees may have had a partner or spouse who lost their job during this time. One organization told all staff that if their spouse or partner lost their job to reach out as they were actively hiring for all types of roles. Not only did this help promote new jobs, but it also helped retain current employees who felt their employer cared for them.



Flexible Scheduling Options

With increased childcare and family needs, your staff may require more flexibility than ever before. Even before the pandemic, nearly 75% of staff reported that they expected their employers to provide more flexible scheduling.^{iv}

67% of industry professionals believe that consistently staffing to meet residents needs will remain the same or worsen over the next three years.ⁱ To support your staff with flexible scheduling, you can consider and implement some of the following strategies.

Make Sure You Understand Your Staffing Needs

Take a look at the data you have available to help you predict your staffing needs. As demand increases or decreases, continue to think about how this will impact your staffing. At times, you will have to think hour by hour instead of day by day.

Consider Shift Length

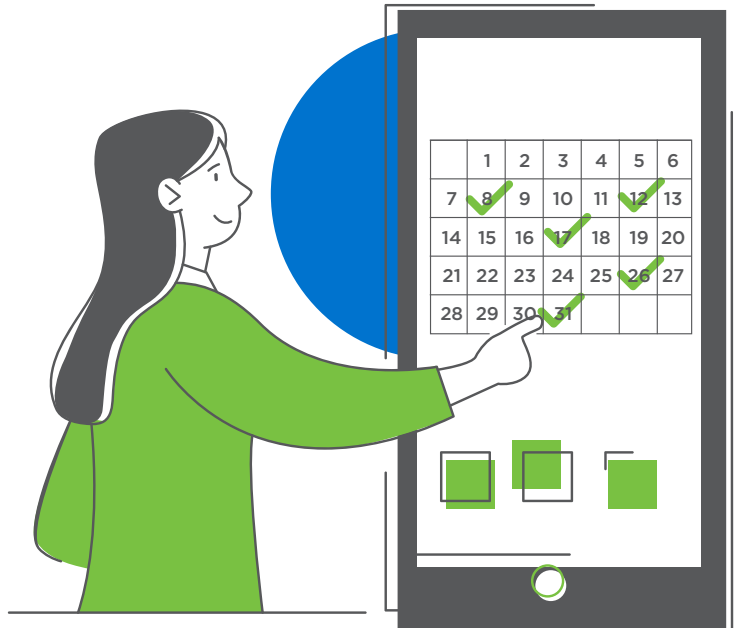
Talk to your staff to figure out the best options for adjusting shift length. While a four-hour shift may be reasonable for a staff member caring for young children or family members, a twelve-hour shift may be perfect for another employee. Talk to your staff to determine what works best for each team member.

Easy Shift Requests

You want to make it as simple as possible for your employees to pick up shifts. Make sure you have a system in place that allows your employees to quickly and easily request shifts and automate those shift request approvals whenever possible (i.e. when employees are not at risk of going into overtime). This not only gives staff an instant answer, but saves your scheduler time from having to manually approve shift requests.

Provide Extra Help During Peak Times

Take a look at your communities and identify the most challenging times for your staff members. Consider bringing on an extra pair of hands to help during these stressful times in the day. This is where offering those shorter shift times can help.



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Reward & Recognize Your Staff Members

Rewarding your employees for their hard work and contributions is always a great idea. Unfortunately, only 51% of industry professionals said that their organization currently offers or plans to offer a rewards and recognition program to their employees.¹

A simple way to get started is by rewarding employees for clocking in/out on time, for not calling off, for picking up extra shifts and for other behaviors that support high quality care and praises employees for going above and beyond. We have seen a myriad of examples of how providers are stepping up and coming together during this time. One provider created a video showing the “heroes” that work in their community. Another provider started to recognize staff on their blog, noting when staff members did something special or out of the ordinary. Others are offering dress down days. We’ve even heard of a few communities that are bringing in horses or other animals that staff members and residents can visit with outside.

Four great ideas to recognize and reward your employees during this time include:

Handwritten ‘Thank You’ Notes To Staff & Their Loved Ones

Show off their hard work to their loved ones. Your employees’ awesome work isn’t always known among their family members. Take a few moments to send a note of gratitude to those most important in their lives.

A Gift Card To An Online Retailer

Consider giving your employees a gift card that can be used online at retailers like Walmart, Amazon and Target. This gives them the flexibility to use your gift card on items important to them in the way they want to use it.

Streaming Service Subscriptions

Providing a streaming subscription to Amazon Prime, Hulu, Netflix or another service is a great way to help your staff disconnect when they are away from work. Also, consider apps that can assist with meditation and exercise.

Employee Of The Week

Your employees are going above and beyond every single day. Instead of an employee of the month celebration, consider alternating to an employee of the week model. Collect the feel-good stories about this staff member from their colleagues and share with the team how they earned this honor and what they’re receiving as a reward. Not only will they feel honored for their accomplishments, but this public recognition will encourage other employees to follow suit. Be sure to recognize those employees in supportive or less visible roles who may not interact directly with residents and, of course, recognize those who work evening and night shifts.



“Put yourself in the shoes of your employees and ask yourself — or best yet, ask them — what type of rewards do they care about most?”

—Lisa Fordyce, EVP of OnShift & Former Senior Housing Operations Executive



Celebrate Your Staff

Kim Warnecke, Chief Human Resources Officer for Health Care Navigator, often says, “celebrate the wins.” It’s her way of looking for every positive thing going on and continuing to celebrate it as much as possible.

Your staff members are heroes for their commitment to their residents, their colleagues and your organization. Encourage your managers and leadership to remind them of how amazing they are through verbal and written praise as much as possible and give awards to those who go above and beyond. Consider ordering hero trophies and passing them out to all of your staff members.

Don’t forget to celebrate national holidays with your staff, such as National Nursing Assistants Week, Careers in Aging Week or Skilled Nursing Week, to name a few. There are many, many days and months of recognition where you can continue to celebrate and honor your staff. Consider alternative ways to recognize these special moments, such as having management send out a thank you video message to everyone for their hard work.

Remember, the organizations that continue to recognize, reward and celebrate their staff during this time will remain viable in a post-pandemic world.



#InThisTogether

While much has changed with COVID-19, OnShift’s dedication to providers remains the same. OnShift continually strives to help providers through these challenging times with our innovative software and services for recruitment, hiring, workforce management and engagement.

ⁱ Workforce 360: Employee Burnout, Fear & Safety Concerns Impact Recruitment & Retention In Senior Care, OnShift, 2020.

ⁱⁱ Staff Compensation & Benefits During COVID-19, Ziegler, 2020.

ⁱⁱⁱ Data collected from OnShift Wallet Software, OnShift, 2020.

^{iv} Meeting The Expectations of Today’s Workforce, OnShift, 2018.

About OnShift, Inc.

OnShift’s next-generation human capital management platform fundamentally transforms the relationship between healthcare organizations and their employees. Our innovative approach to recruitment, hiring, workforce management and engagement fosters a culture where people want to work. That’s why thousands of healthcare organizations rely on OnShift’s integrated suite of software and services to dramatically reduce turnover rates, decrease costs and improve the quality and continuity of care. For more information, visit www.onshift.com.