



***For Immediate Release***

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Working parents caring for children with disabilities face significant financial hardship and widespread job discrimination.

**Attendees from an annual meeting hosted by the Sloan Work and Family Research Network at Boston College call for increased research and public awareness about this considerable, yet relatively hidden, work-family dilemma.**

**9/15/2008 – Boston, MA (The Sloan Work and Family Research Network) —** The [Sloan Work and Family Research Network](http://www.bc.edu/wfnetwork) today released an action plan generated from a panel meeting in May on *Work-Family Issues for Employed Parents of Children with Disabilities*. To address the serious hardships faced by working parents caring for children with disabilities, the report makes two major recommendations: **(1) Advance the knowledge base by conducting more extensive research, and (2) Increase the visibility of this issue for employers, policy makers, and the public.** Given that one in seven children under age 18, or approximately 10.2 million children in the U.S., have special health care needs, the panel is pushing for additional research to increase understanding about the myriad issues experienced by working parents and their families. This panel urged the launching of a media campaign to inform employers, policy makers, and the public about the often-hidden issues facing working parents caring for children with disabilities.

According to Eileen Brennan of the Portland State University School of Social Work, “Families of children with disabilities want to contribute to their communities as employees and parents, but often lack the supports they need, facing stigmatization and discrimination. The Sloan Network report will open a national dialog about the ways in which employed workers with exceptional care responsibilities should be supported.”

The Center for Child and Adolescent Health Care Policy estimates that 8.6% of U.S. workers care for a child under 18 who has special health care needs. For example, a large company with 30,000 employees would have approximately 2,580 employees caring for one or more children with special health care needs, while a smaller company with 500 employees would have 43 employees.

The financial, physical, and emotional impact on parents, children, families, employees, and employers is staggering:

- Poverty rates for these families are double the rate of families with children who are developing typically.
- Median household income is \$38,332 compared to \$48,936 for households raising children without disabilities, a \$100 billion discrepancy in total earnings.



- Nearly 14% of parents caring for children with special health care needs spend more than 10 hours per week coordinating care, which can negatively affect their careers.
- Twenty-five percent of workers have chosen to cut back or stop working entirely, and one-quarter have been fired at least once due to the exceptional care demands of their children with disabilities.
- For families caring for children with more serious disabilities, one parent is often forced to leave the job altogether to care for their children.

What can be done to help working families who care for children with disabilities? Flexible work arrangements can provide the time to take children to health care appointments, attend school meetings, and handle child care concerns. Parents caring for children with disabilities and their employers can benefit from the identification and development of resources that may alleviate strain, such as employee support networks, case management services, community-based supports, and inclusive child care.

For the past 5 years, the Sloan Work and Family Research Network — the premier online destination for work and family information — has convened panel meetings to promote discussion about important work-family issues from diverse disciplinary perspectives. The Sloan Network hosts this think tank to examine current research efforts, workplace best practices, and state public policy in order to develop an action plan for future change. For a complete copy of the findings from this year's conference on *Work-Family Issues for Employed Parents of Children with Disabilities*, go to the Overviews & Briefs section on the Topic Page for Parents Caring for Children with Disabilities at <http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/topic.php?id=40>.

### **About the Sloan Work and Family Research Network**

Founded in 1997, the [Sloan Work and Family Research Network](http://wfnetwork.bc.edu) ([wfnetwork.bc.edu](http://wfnetwork.bc.edu)) is the premier online destination for work and family information. The Sloan Network offers multi-disciplinary, credible teaching resources, evidence-based information on workforce issues, and unbiased policy data about work and family topics for academics, workplace practitioners, and state public policy makers. In addition to disabilities, the Sloan Network provides information on various work-family issues, including child and afterschool care, multi-generational workforce, flexible work arrangements, low-wage workers, family leave, breastfeeding, domestic violence, military families, and overwork.

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