

# Inside Philanthropy

## With a \$50 Million Launch, a Pooled Fund Looks to Build Caregiving Infrastructure

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A group of eight philanthropies have joined together to launch a \$50 million, five-year collaborative called the Care for all with Respect and Equity (CARE) Fund. The [CARE Fund](#), which is housed at the Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, seeks to invest in the necessary change needed to build a comprehensive and equitable care infrastructure in the U.S.

The organizations behind the fund are: the Ford Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Schusterman Family Philanthropies, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Heising-Simons Foundation, the Perigee Fund, Pivotal Ventures and Open Society Foundations.

Care infrastructure includes universal paid family and medical leave, childcare and early education, long-term services and support for older adults and people with disabilities, support for family caregivers, and equitable pay and benefits for care workers.

The fund, backed by some philanthropic heavy hitters, is an outgrowth of decades of organizing in support of multiple forms of caregiving. One goal is to bring them under a single banner in a way that will strengthen the individual movements. It's also building on the heightened recognition of the importance of care to our well-being and economy, made clear by the inequities and stresses exacerbated during the past year.

“The pandemic really put a spotlight on just how tenuous our entire care infrastructure is,” said Erin Currier, program officer at Kellogg. “Families knew this for a long time, but it's now in the public discourse what happens when we don't have access to quality and affordable childcare, when care systems and facilities can't adequately address the safety of those in their care, and when workers have to choose between their health and their livelihood.”

The CARE Fund was publicly announced yesterday, but it has already made its first round of rapid-response grants totaling \$2.5 million, and is aiming to make its next round by the end of this year.

The fund's grantmaking will support work at the federal, state and local levels focusing on policy advocacy, policy implementation, and narrative and culture change. Grantees so far include the Care Can't Wait campaign, Paid Leave for All, the National Domestic Workers Alliance and Caring Across Generations, among others.

## **Care during the pandemic**

While care is essential to our economy, it has long been invisible work. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has thrown into sharp relief the inadequacies of the nation's care systems.

As schools and childcare programs closed and children had to remain at home, many parents found themselves at an impasse. Essential workers have had to choose between their jobs and staying at home to care for their children, while parents able to work remotely simultaneously balanced their work with caring for their families. For many, it's proved to be too much.

It's been especially difficult for women, who are often expected to take on caregiving responsibilities. This extends beyond childcare, and includes caring for family members and parents. According to the recent [jobs report](#), 4.2 million women exited the labor force between February and April 2020. Almost 2 million have not returned.

Although the pandemic has highlighted the need for a functioning and equitable care infrastructure in the U.S., these issues have been around for a long time. Though the economy relies on it, care has typically been viewed as a personal need, not a universal one.

Noted labor activist and founder of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, Ai-Jen Poo, said, “Before the pandemic, most of us thought about care as a personal responsibility. So if we couldn’t afford childcare or if we didn’t have paid leave in our jobs or if we couldn’t afford home care for a loved one with disabilities or an older adult life, that it was somehow our fault and our failure. And I think what we realized in the pandemic is that we’re all struggling with this.”

“Everything started to collapse,” said Poo, “and then people really started to realize that we need infrastructure, we need programs, we need support in order to provide the care that our families need and deserve.”

That awakening, Poo added, has led to an increase in momentum and energy across racial, generational and class lines to demand a change in our care infrastructure. It’s this shift in momentum and awareness that has led to the CARE Fund.

### **A history of undervaluation**

Care has long been undervalued in our society, and has, perhaps not incidentally, been associated with women in families, particularly with working-class, immigrant women of color.

“It’s always been assumed that women will shoulder that work on top of everything else,” said Poo. “Within the care economy, the professionals whose job it is to provide childcare or home and community-based services have always disproportionately been women of color.”

Some of the first care workers in the U.S., Poo points out, were enslaved Black women. Since then, care has been associated with work that women of color do, and as such, has been excluded from equal rights and protection in labor laws.

During the New Deal in the 1930s, Southern Dixiecrats [opposed new labor laws that included protections for farm workers and domestic workers](#), the majority of whom were Black. By agreeing to these demands and denying domestic workers protection under labor laws, Congress set in motion a continuing pattern of treating this work as less than so-called “real work.” This undervaluing persists to this day in both our culture and policies.

Anna Wadia, senior program office at the Ford Foundation, said, “Care is really at the intersection of so many forms of oppression.”

She observed that care has been historically provided by immigrant women at low wages, that women are expected to provide care for free in their own homes to their families, and that older people and people with disabilities have been, and continue to be, devalued. People of color, particularly women of color, have disproportionately borne the brunt of these inequities.

“We are the only advanced economy in the world that does not offer paid family and medical leave to all of its workers,” Wadia said. “Our childcare system is fragmented and unequal, and our long-term policies push people into nursing homes rather than supporting older adults and people with disabilities to thrive with dignity in their own homes. Meanwhile, workers in

the care economy, who are often women of color, are paid far too little in the way of wages and benefits.”

## **Uniting movements**

Both Wadia and Currier pointed out that though these are all distinct problems, they stem from the same place, which is a need for our policies and systems to recognize the vital role that care plays in families’ financial security and in economic stability.

“Our core belief is that each of these care movements—paid leave, childcare, disability and elder care, and care workers’ rights—will be exponentially strengthened by collaborating and working with each other,” Currier said.

Alone, each of these movements have had some measure of success. The National Domestic Workers Alliance, for example, has done impressive work in advocating for a domestic workers’ bill of rights. This legislation seeks to rectify the exclusion of domestic workers, which include home care workers and nannies, from labor protection laws.

By coming together, partners say, these movements can be stronger, which in turn can make our economy stronger. Wadia added that because care has long been seen as undeserving of investments, we haven’t built systems that allow families to be free to make choices about their personal and work lives.

“It’s time for us to flip that script,” said Currier. “We need to listen to the women and women of color who are paid and unpaid caregivers and let them

inform the policy solutions that work best for their lives and for their families.”

Funders are encouraging other philanthropic institutions to join the fund and are welcoming partners who are able to join with multi-year commitments of at least \$500,000 annually.

Poo described the moment as a “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity” for the country to put care at the center of our economic rebirth as we emerge from the devastation of the pandemic.

“It is an all-hands-on-deck situation,” said Poo. “This is a really powerful way for philanthropy to be a part of this moment and to exercise leadership in helping to build a more caring, equitable economy for the future.”