

# Mental Health in the Post-Pandemic Workplace: A Culture Shift towards Transparency & Empathy

Over the past several years, there has been an increasing recognition of the impact of mental health in the workplace. From the pervasive problems of stress and burnout, to the movement toward creating cultures of authenticity and belonging, to the examination of the costs of absenteeism and presenteeism, employee mental health has emerged as a critical component in building and retaining a productive and engaged workforce.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought mental health into even sharper focus. Anxieties about health and safety, social isolation, stress related to job loss and a lack of child care contributed to an **alarming increase in mental health distress** and diagnosable mental health conditions.

From the chief executive ranks, through HR, down to front line workers, employers now recognize the importance of focusing on mental health and creating a supportive culture in the workplace.

Among our BC Center for Work & Family (BCCWF) members, mental health and well-being consistently ranks as the **top future of work issue**. In a recent pulse survey, nearly all (91%) reported that they have expanded mental health benefits and programs in 2021 with increased investment in supports like mental health training, EAP offerings and telehealth services.

As the pandemic wears on, burnout is at an all-time high and an increasing number of employees are willing to leave or turn down promotions in order to preserve their mental health.

In response, employers must invest adequately in **holistic well-being programs**, which aim to reduce stigma around mental illness, enable access to a continuum of care, and create a culture of health which puts behavioral health on equal footing with physical health. The future productivity and prosperity of the organization and its people will depend on it.

**In January 2021, 41% of adults reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depression up from 11% prior to the pandemic.** - Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), 2021

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## Mental Health by the Numbers

In a given year, 1 in 5 adults in the U.S. experience mental illness, and more than 1 in 25 live with a serious mental illness (National Alliance on Mental Health, NAMI). In a survey of working adults, 76% of U.S. employees report having struggled at some point with at least one mental health issue, and 42% have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder (American Heart Association AHA).

Despite the number of people who struggle with mental health, it is often not discussed openly in professional settings. As a result, the prevalence of common diagnoses among working adults may be underestimated by employers and not properly addressed.

Of those diagnosed with a mental health disorder, 63% have not disclosed it to their employer (AHA) and almost 60% had not received mental health services in the previous year (NAMI). That said, increasingly employees expect employers to be the main source of mental health support.

**Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health.** With already high rates of mental illness and substance abuse prior to the pandemic, mental distress during the pandemic is on the rise.

The share of US adults who said **worry and stress related to the pandemic** had a negative impact on their mental health rose from 32% in March 2020 to 53% in July 2020 and has leveled off at 47% as of March 2021. (KFF 2021)

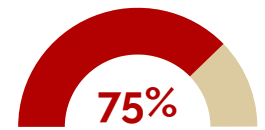
- **Younger adults** (ages 18-29) and **women** are most likely to report that the pandemic has had a negative impact on their mental health. In fact, nearly seven in 10 women under age 30 (69%) report negative mental health impacts. (KFF 2021)
- **Access to providers** and **cost of care** are top barriers for those seeking mental health treatment. (KFF 2021)
- Utilization of **telehealth** skyrocketed 4,000% at the start of the pandemic with 54% seeking help for behavioral health, up from 15% prior to the pandemic. (Journal of General Internal Medicine 2021)

Unresolved employee mental health issues can lead to absenteeism, reduced productivity, and medical costs totaling **over \$210B each year.**

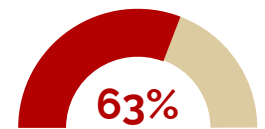


**1 in 5**

of US adults experience mental illness



of lifetime mental illness begins by age 24



of US employees diagnosed with a mental health disorder have NOT disclosed it to their employer

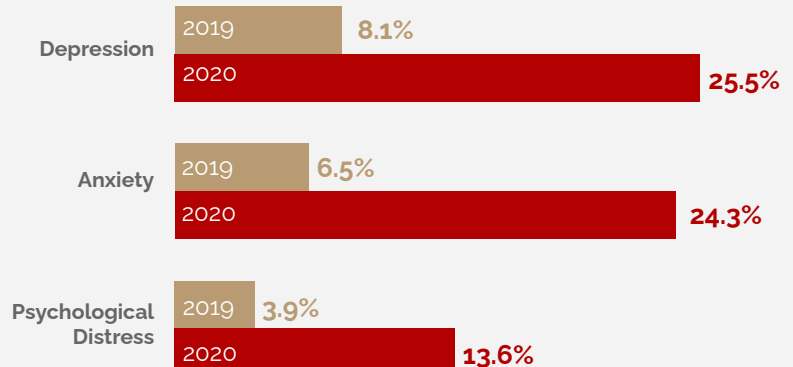
Sources: NAMI

### MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES GROW DURING THE PANDEMIC

The incidence of **depression, anxiety and psychological distress** have more than tripled during the pandemic.

Among those whose mental health was negatively impacted by the pandemic, **32% could not get the mental health services they needed.**

Source: CDC MMWR 2020



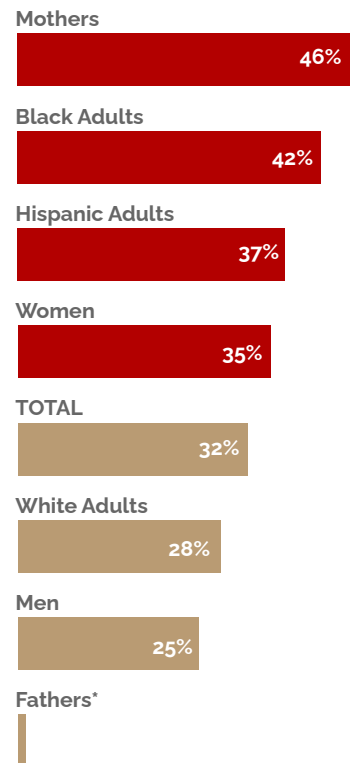
## Disparities in Mental Health by Age, Gender, and Race/Ethnicity

Several groups reported disproportionately worse mental health outcomes during the pandemic across a range of conditions or symptoms. **Young adults, Hispanic adults** and **essential workers** were most likely to report much higher than average anxiety, depression, substance abuse and suicidal ideation (CDC MMWR 8/20). Top stressors included COVID-related health and safety concerns, lack of child care, and food and housing instability.

- Young adults.** According to the CDC, young adults (age 18-24 years) were **most likely to report anxiety and depressive disorders** among all subgroups. Compared to all respondents, young adults were far more likely to report at least one adverse mental health symptom (74.9% vs. 40.9%). Closures of universities, loss of employment and increased isolation/loneliness due to remote work were contributing factors.
- Women and caregivers.** Women, particularly caregivers, were at increased risk for mental health disorders during the pandemic and **least likely to receive the care they needed.** According to the CDC, unpaid caregivers were most likely to report COVID-related stress (48.4%) and most likely to start or increase substance abuse to cope with the pandemic (32.9%). In an April 2021 KFF report, 55% of mothers reported that COVID-related worry and stress had a negative impact on their mental health compared to 38% of fathers.
- Underrepresented groups.** Compared to other racial/ethnic groups, Hispanic adults reported the highest incidence of mental health conditions. Stress related to **food and housing instability** was most prevalent for this group. Black adults followed closely behind, while Asian adults were *least* likely to report these conditions. Cultural and structural barriers such as stigma and a lack of cultural competency among providers often lead to underreporting or underdiagnosis for this group, in particular. (APA)

These same groups were less likely to receive the care they needed over the past year. Among those reporting poor mental health, **32% who needed care did not get the mental health services they needed.** Mothers, Black and Hispanic adults, and young adults report even higher numbers.

Among those who reported a negative mental health impact due to COVID, some groups were more likely to say that they **did not get the mental health services they needed:**

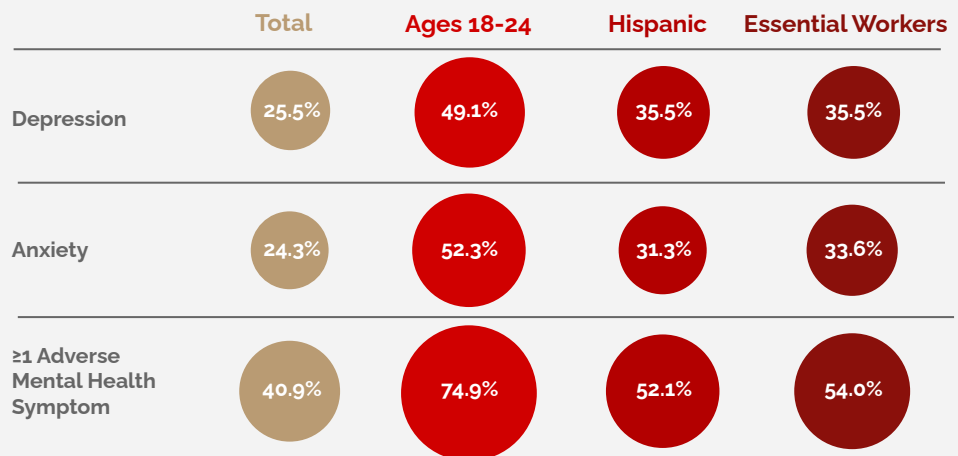


Source: KFF, April 2021

### DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS AT HIGHEST RISK

Young adults, Hispanic adults and essential workers were most likely to report much higher than average anxiety, depression, substance abuse and suicidal ideation

Source: CDC MMWR 2020



## Stress and Burnout

In a recent survey of BCCWF Roundtable members, employers ranked Stress/Anxiety and Burnout as the top mental health issues among their workforces. While stress is often temporary and some can be healthy, prolonged periods of stress can be debilitating and lead to burnout. Burnout is now recognized by the World Health Organization as an occupational phenomenon, which results from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.

Common **signs and symptoms of burnout** can include:

- Irritability, anger or cynicism at work
- Lack of interest or motivation; uncontrollable procrastination
- Suddenly and intensely disliking your job; decreased sense of accomplishment
- Exhaustion, inconsistent sleep habits and other frequent health problems like headaches and colds (ASANA)

A 2021 Visier survey of over 1,000 US employees concludes that burnout is an epidemic which **disproportionately impacts younger and female employees**. 89% of employees report experiencing burnout in the past year, while 70% would leave their organization for one offering resources to reduce burnout.

Additional key findings include:

- 73% of employees said **alleviating burnout is their responsibility** (not their employer's)
- 52% of employees cite **overwork** and 33% cite a **toxic workplace culture** as factors that contribute most to burnout
- 42% of women felt **uncomfortable talking to their boss** about burnout compared to 30% of men
- 39% say **flexible work hours** would help alleviate burnout, more than any other benefit. Notably employees preferred **paid sick days over PTO**, which they felt alleviated burnout only temporarily.

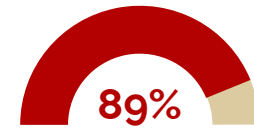
## Isolation and Loneliness

With the enormous shift toward remote work during the pandemic, isolation and loneliness, especially among young adults, is on the rise. A 2020 Lancet article reveals that periods of isolation — even less than 10 days — can have long-term negative effects on mental health lasting up to 3 years.

Research shows that **feeling socially connected is the most important factor in workplace happiness** and is correlated with higher psychological well-being, productivity and performance. (Business Insider) In response, employers should make it a strategic priority to facilitate networks that employees can turn to for connection and support.

**Those satisfied with their level of social connectivity are 3.2 times likelier to have maintained/improved pre-COVID levels of productivity than those who were unsatisfied.** - BCG. 2021

**Burnout** is a state of emotional and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.



**89%**  
of employees report experiencing burnout in the past year



**70%**  
of employees would leave their organization for one offering resources to reduce burnout

Source: Visier 2021

### TIPS TO REDUCE BURNOUT

- **Ask your team.** Make time for 1:1 meetings and explicitly ask about overwork and burnout.
- **Share context.** Ensure employees know how their work relates to team and company goals, so they can prioritize their work.
- **Prioritize impact.** Encourage team members to decline or delegate low-impact meetings and work in favor of priority projects.
- **Lead by example.** Model work/life balance by declining additional work, taking time off, and sending messages and requests inside normal working hours.

Source: [ASANA](#)

## Persistent Stigma in the Workplace

While great strides have been made in acknowledging the prevalence of mental health conditions, there remains a stigma surrounding mental health that prevents employees - and even leaders - from coming forward with their struggles and seeking the treatment they need without fear of judgment or repercussions.

### What does stigma look like?

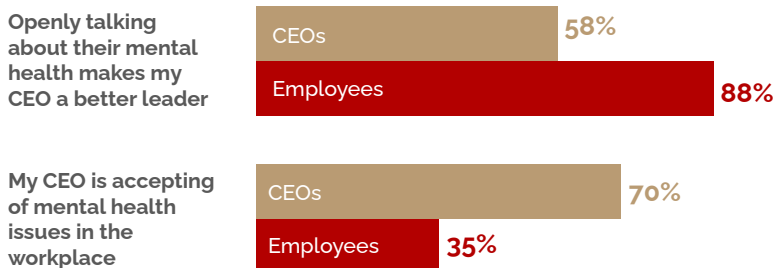
- 11 years is the average **delay between symptom onset and treatment** for mental health disorders. (NAMI)
- 8 in 10 workers say shame and stigma **prevent them from seeking treatment** for mental health. (NAMI)
- Approximately half of millennials (50%) and Gen Zs (53%) believe that **discrimination based on someone's mental health** frequently happens in the workplace. (Deloitte)
- 46% of companies still **don't proactively share their mental health resources** with employees, creating a gap in information and support for those who require care. (HBR)
- While 58% of CEOs believe **talking about their own mental health** makes them a better leader, 56% also believe that it will **reduce their credibility and employee confidence**. (Ginger)

### Leadership's role in reducing stigma, supporting mental health

The vast majority of BCCWF members (83%) have observed increased leadership support for mental health efforts in the past year and 74% believe leaders have had a somewhat or extremely positive impact on mental health efforts.

However, there is still a reluctance on the part of CEOs to share their own mental health struggles and a **disconnect between CEOs' and employees' perceptions** of their support for mental health. In a 2021 Ginger survey of CEOs and employees, 96% of CEOs believe they are doing enough for employee mental health but only 69% of employees agree.

### CEOs' and employees' perceptions of workplace support for mental health differ



Source: Ginger 2021

When leaders show more open acceptance of mental health issues, starting with their own struggles, they are more likely to build a culture of transparency, empathy, and loyalty.

## REDUCING STIGMA

A *Harvard Business Review* article lays out five actionable steps managers can take to reduce stigma and create a more mental health positive culture.

**1. Pay attention to language.** Using phrases like "that's depressing" or calling someone "crazy" can stigmatize mental health conditions and make those struggling feel unsafe coming forward. Managers should think about the way they speak about mental health and call it out if they hear a co-worker speak in a harmful way.

**2. Rethink "sick" days.** No one questions if an employee needs to take time off when dealing with a physical illness. Managers can encourage employees to request days off to take care of their mental health.

**3. Encourage honest conversations.** Leaders can work to create safe spaces for employees to open up, including sharing their own experiences. This shows that it's okay to speak up when dealing with mental health issues and doing so won't affect career advancement.

**4. Be proactive.** Companies can help employees reduce stress and burnout by proactively offering access to programs, resources, and educational opportunities that aim to manage stress before it becomes a more serious problem.

**5. Train people to notice and respond.** Resources like [Mental Health First Aid](#) can help train employees to recognize the signs that someone is struggling and learn how to listen, assess risk, and connect them with the resources they need.

BEST PRACTICE

## Providing Recognition, Acceptance, and Support

Merck is committed to creating an inclusive and supportive work environment that values every employee and their family's overall health. This includes their emotional and mental wellbeing. Through **Mind Well**, the company is working to reduce mental health stigma through storytelling, resilience building and providing access to mental healthcare and resources. Like physical health, mental health is an integral part of overall wellbeing.

A major component of Mind Well is the champion volunteers. Merck has over **100 Mind Well Champions** in place who have completed the **Mental Health First Aid training** and are available to colleagues for emotional wellbeing and mental health information and resources. These champions continue to work at a grassroots level to reduce the stigma of mental health by helping to raise awareness about mental health conditions. The company offers a robust suite of benefits and resources for our employees and their families. A vital component of Mind Well Champions is the promotion of these programs that demonstrate the importance of emotional wellbeing, such as daily mindful minutes sessions, the Calm premium app Lyra, which



provides fast access to high-quality mental health care, and our EAP Resources for Living.

Merck designed and launched a global **Mental Health Awareness for Managers** training in 2020. Managers play a critical role in the work ecosystem. Approximately 3,000 colleagues have completed this training and we continue to promote this resource through town hall events, mental health campaigns, and our Mind Well Champion network. This training provides employees with the tools to connect colleagues with emotional and wellbeing resources and educates them on emotional intelligence and how to respond with compassion towards a colleague who may be struggling.

Merck fosters work-life balance by emphasizing the importance of self-care, time off, and flexibility to meet the changing demands of a global environment and our diverse workforce. Overall, Merck is focused on the safety and wellbeing of employees and their families. **We are all accountable for creating a work environment that is psychologically safe, emotionally supportive, and free from stigma.**

## Digital Health Solutions on the Rise

Technology-based mental health use grew from 29% in 2020 to 48% in 2021 with 76% of those who accessed mental health support doing so virtually. Notably CEOs preferred virtual therapy more than employees (68% vs. 52%) and **caregivers preferred virtual therapy twice as much as non-caregivers** (57% vs. 28%). (Ginger 2021)

The Human Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) projects **shortages in all but 2 of 9 mental health provider types** by 2025. With increasing demand for services, digital health solutions are emerging as a cost-effective, scalable way to overcome reluctance, access and cost of care barriers. As these solutions proliferate, employers should seek credible sources to review quality and efficacy, such as the [Digital Psychiatry Division of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center](#).

### ADVANTAGES OF DIGITAL HEALTH SOLUTIONS

- Large scale and accessible anytime, anywhere.
- Shorter wait times
- Easy to use, anonymous
- Allow users to seek help sooner, before issues become acute

**"From our experience, a lot of patients struggle to seek help for a long time because they try to solve their problems on their own. The magic of digital solutions is to give patients that opportunity [and] reach them early."**- Hanne Horvath, founder of HelloBetter

THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN MENTAL HEALTH

**Untreated mental illness is costly and severely impacts productivity in the workplace.**

- Globally mental health disorders are on the rise in every country and costs total \$1 trillion annually, including an estimated 12 billion working days in lost productivity. (Lancet 2018)
- In the U.S., the economic cost of mental health is over \$193 billion per year - higher than the economic burden of heart disease, stroke, cancer, and obesity combined. Of this total cost, \$66 billion is a consequence of productivity losses related to mental health. (NAMI 2021)
- Mental health accounts for approximately one-third of short and long-term disability claims and 70% of workplace disability costs. (Deloitte Insights)

**Investing in mental health improves employee health, productivity, and loyalty.**

- The World Health Organization estimates that for every \$1 put into treatment for common mental health disorders, there is a return of \$2-\$4 in improved health and productivity.
- 89% of workers at companies that support well-being initiatives are more likely to recommend their employer to others. (Beheshti, 2019)
- 80% of employees treated for mental illness report improved levels of work effectiveness and satisfaction.

**High performing organizations invest more in holistic well-being and see greater returns.**

- According to an Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp), high-performance organizations are 1.5x more likely to emphasize emotional/mental health and 2.5x - 4x more likely to emphasize financial, community, career, and social/relational well-being.
- Compared to low-performing organizations, top performers are more likely to report lower absenteeism, higher talent retention and enhanced innovation and creativity.

**Investments and focus on well-being will continue to grow.**

- In a BCCWF member survey, 78% reported increased focus and 65% reported increased budget for mental health over the past 12 months.
- Among i4cp study respondents, 90% of high performers and 60% of low performers expect mental/emotional health to be a key area of focus in two years.
- Deloitte predicts health care spending will shift dramatically from 80% spent on treatments/diagnostics today to 60% spent on well-being-focused areas by 2040.

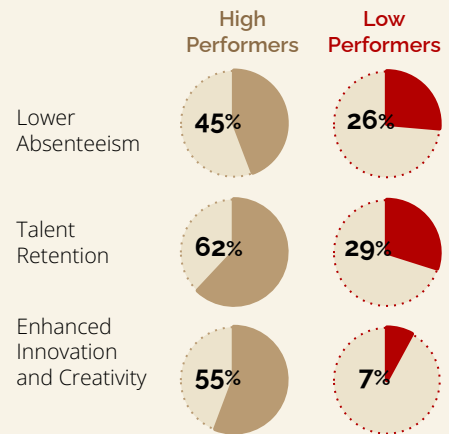
Each year **\$1 trillion** in mental health costs is incurred globally...



...and is expected to reach **\$16 trillion** by 2030

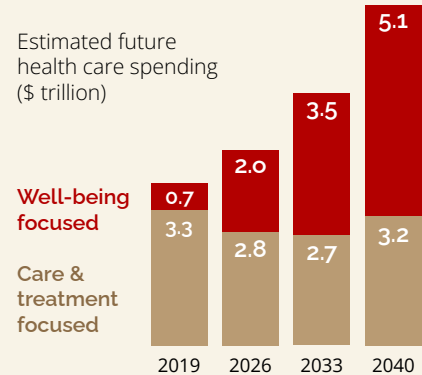
Sources: NAMI 2021, Psychiatric Times 2021

**High performing companies are more likely to invest in mental health and see better employee outcomes**



Source: i4cp, 2021

**By 2040 there will be a shift in spending from care and treatment to prevention and well-being**



Source: Deloitte Insights

## BEST PRACTICE

# Leading Practices for Workplace Mental Health



Ernst & Young LLP (EY US) has a multilayered, proactive approach to workplace mental health, which has grown during the past year and a half as we have adapted our professional and personal lives to meet the challenges of the pandemic.

**Better You** is the organization's holistic approach to well-being and includes:

- **Robust mental health resources** to meet the varied needs of our people
- **We Care:** anti-stigma initiative to learn the signs that someone is struggling and how to help
- **Resilience initiatives:** mindfulness community and programs, along with multifaceted activities to promote emotional and physical well-being

### ROBUST MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

EY US has a hybrid internal and external employee assistance program (EAP), known as "**EY Assist**." The internal clinician team provides crisis intervention and support to individuals with significant life events as well as consultative support to HR and leadership on mental health initiatives. This is in addition to providing a wide array of trainings.

A robust suite of vendor-provided services is also available. In 2021, EY US expanded the EY Assist counseling benefit from five to 25 no-cost sessions for all EY employees and family members in their households. Included with this benefit is a network of mental health coaches and therapists who all practice evidence-based care. Mental health coaches address milder issues, such as burnout and stress management, while therapists address more significant matters, like depression and anxiety. The

#### EY MINDFULNESS PROGRAM IN 2020:

- Introduction to mindfulness classes: about 80 sessions reaching over 14,200 people
- Daily mindfulness drop-in sessions: Over 200 sessions reaching over 55,000 people
- Mindful Leadership at EY, eight-week masterclass: nearly 15 cohorts reaching almost 2,000 people

firm also provides access to digital tools to promote sleep health and resilience.

**The impact of EY Assist mental health programs has been dramatic:**

- Improved access to care — six days is the median time from initial request to first appointment with a mental health professional.
- 85% of EY people report reduced symptoms after working with EY Assist.
- The internal EY Assist team provided more than 200 virtual trainings on a variety of well-being and emotional health topics that were attended by more than 40,000 people in 2020.

Additionally, EY digital mental health tools have reduced symptoms of anxiety, depression and burnout by at least 27%. EY professionals also report at least four additional hours of sleep per week.

### MULTIYEAR MENTAL HEALTH ANTI-STIGMA INITIATIVE

**We Care** began in 2016 to address the stigma of mental illness and addictions. The initiative encourages peers, colleagues and leaders to recognize the signs that someone is struggling. We ask if they are OK and, if needed, connect them with EY Assist. The initiative has expanded to include addictions, caregiving, financial difficulties, isolation, relationship issues and current events.

**The scope and impact of We Care:**

- Nearly 50 *We Care* events in 2020 were attended by more than 12,000 EY people.
- Because of the increased awareness from *We Care*, *EY Assist* utilization has increased more than 200% in five years. This is a strong indication of the progress that EY US is making to erode the stigma around accessing mental health care.

**Resilience initiatives** include the EY Mindfulness Network and Mindful Leadership program. EY US hosted a Recharge Challenge focused on whole-person well-being, including sleep, unplugging from technology, prioritizing the day and expressing gratitude.



## Employers' Growing Role in Supporting Mental Health

Increasingly employees expect their employers to be the main source of mental health support. In a 2021 Atlassian survey of 2,300 US employees, more than one third (38%) of employees — including 52% of millennials - agreed that their **employer is the most important provider of mental health support**. Notably 64% of workers are willing to **turn down a job promotion** in order to preserve their mental health.

### Key Elements of a Holistic Well-being Program

Employers should develop a holistic well-being program that helps to build a psychologically healthy workplace and support employees and their families struggling with pre-existing mental health conditions. A holistic approach should emphasize transparency and empathy and invest adequately in work-life programs and behavioral health benefits and tools.

- **Training and education.** Employers should provide guidance to leaders and managers on how to talk about and reinforce well-being among the workforce. Programs like **Mental Health First Aid** are critical in educating employees about risk factors and warning signs, strategies for how to assist in crisis and non-crisis situations, and where to turn for help when it is needed.
- **Support networks and mental health champions.** Developing relationships among employees has an under-appreciated but significant impact on well-being. i4cp found that the most impactful employee well-being measures for higher performing organizations were **employee participation in social activities, community programs and volunteerism**. Onboarding mentors for new employees, dedicated employee resource groups (ERGs) for mental health, and well-being champions are also powerful sources of information and social connection.
- **Flexible work models.** Coming out of the pandemic, nearly three quarters (73%) of workers globally want flexible work options to stay. (Microsoft 2021) Autonomy over how and when work gets done has an enormous impact on well-being, in particular. According to Visier, flexible work would help alleviate burnout, more than any other benefit or initiative.

#### OBJECTIVES

- ▶ Understand employee mental health and barriers to achieving well-being
- ▶ Reduce stigma, increase empathy & social connection
- ▶ Alleviate stress & burnout
- ▶ Enable access to timely, high quality care

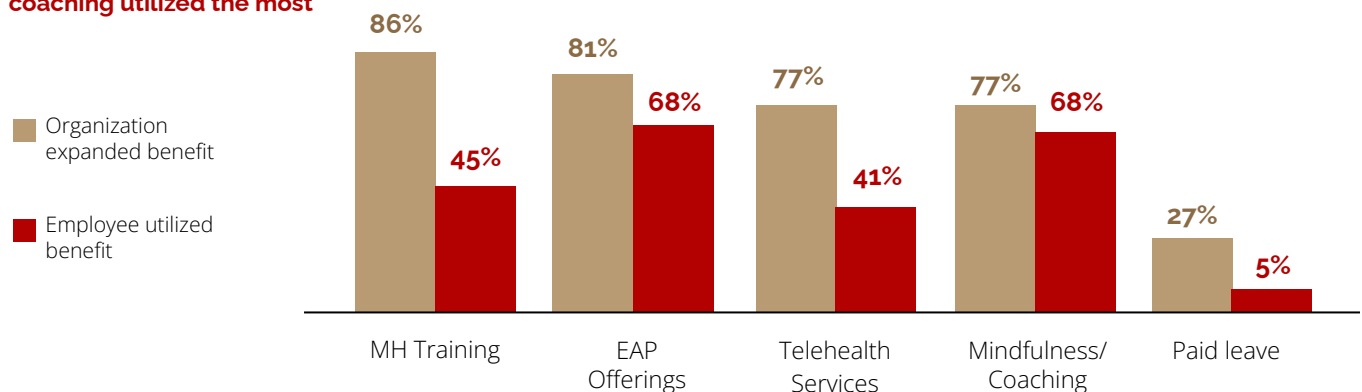
#### ELEMENTS

- ▶ Training & education
- ▶ Support networks, mental health champions
- ▶ Flexible work models
- ▶ Comprehensive behavioral health benefits
- ▶ EAP Offerings
- ▶ On-demand resources

#### KEYS TO SUCCESS

- ▶ Leadership support & communication
- ▶ Metrics & accountability
- ▶ Adequate focus & investment

### The majority of BCCWF members expanded multiple mental health supports in 2021 with EAP offerings, mindfulness & coaching utilized the most



Source: Member Pulse Survey, 8/21

### Key Elements of a Holistic Well-being Program (continued)

- **Comprehensive health coverage.** According to SHRM, 56% of employees say **health coverage is a key factor in staying at their job.** With over 40% of the global workforce considering leaving their employer this year, coverage for mental health support is critical and generally affordable. The cost of mental health benefits is usually under \$500 per person. (Office of Disability Employment Policy)
- **EAP offerings.** A study in the Journal of Management found that employees who took advantage of EAPs - including short-term counseling, screening, and awareness tools - showed improvements in anxiety, depression, and alcohol abuse symptoms after 5 months. During COVID, BCCWF members reported that EAP offerings, including on-site EAP counselors, were **utilized more than any other benefit or program.**
- **On-demand resources.** On-demand and app-based mental health tools are gaining ground as a means to support **skill-building** and **self-care**, including teletherapy (e.g. BetterHelp), coaching, or guided meditation (e.g. Calm). Research shows these tools are most effective with an introduction and referral from a clinician or health coach. (Psychiatric Times 2021)

**"Employees are more likely to use solutions when they are positively framed - for example, as a way to boost well-being and performance."**

- Manuel Ronnefeldt, CEO of 7Mind

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN EVALUATING QUALITY IN MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

As employers embrace their growing role in the mental well-being of their workforce, they must routinely assess the quality of new and existing mental health benefits and vendors and ask:

- Does the network of providers practice **evidence-based treatments** (EBT) - such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) - and use **validated third-party clinical assessments** to track member progress?
- Are the **number of sessions** provided adequate to enable members to achieve lasting improvement?
- Are **provider networks up-to-date**, accepting new patients, and include the right mix of expertise? Do they offer **cultural competency** to serve diverse groups?
- How do they **attract and reimburse** high-quality providers?
- Can the vendor(s) provide **solutions across modalities**, such as digital content, virtual and in-person therapy, coaching, and onsite services?
- Does coverage extend to **minors and dependents**?
- Do they have **peer-reviewed research** proving the efficacy of their care? Are they willing to put some of their **fees at risk** depending on members' clinical outcomes?
- Can they provide **quarterly data** on access to care (time to first appointment), utilization, member satisfaction, and clinical outcomes?
- How are interventions impacting **insurance costs/claims, absenteeism, and productivity**?

*Adapted from Lyra's [A Buyer's Guide to Evaluating the Quality of Mental Health Benefits](#)*

BEST PRACTICE

## Prudential's Holistic Approach to Wellbeing



**Prudential**

Prudential embraces a holistic approach to the wellbeing of its employees and understands the health of its workforce is intrinsically linked to that of the organization. Its multi-dimensional definition of health focuses on the physical, emotional, social, cognitive, spiritual and financial well-being of its employees and provides a foundation for the development and delivery of its programs and services.

### PROACTIVE APPROACH TO SUPPORTING EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Within that framework, Prudential recognizes behavioral health as an integral component which serves the emotional and overall health needs of its employees. And Prudential does not rest at offering mental health related benefits to its employees and their families. Rather, their proactive approach encourages employees to become actively involved in their emotional health.

An extensive Behavioral Health program provides a myriad of programs and services, including

- Confidential expanded virtual and in-person EAP counseling
- Life, budget and adult care coaching
- Mental health related webinars
- Mindfulness sessions
- Health coaching
- Work-life resources and referral services.

### ENHANCED RESOURCES

Prudential is also now offering enhanced virtual and digital behavioral health support for employees on a medical leave of absence. A

newly developed Mental Health Hub focuses on highlighting the support and resources available for employees and their dependents who are seeking help regarding their mental well-being. The company is also launching new training programs to increase awareness of mental health concerns and encourage allyship. The EAP team partners with managers to appropriately address behavioral concerns and crisis response within the workplace. They also serve as an excellent resource to assist in identifying services which support the emotional health needs of employees, both at work and at home.

### COMMITMENT TO REDUCING STIGMA

To compliment the broad scope of services offered, Prudential facilitates a variety of forums that encourage employees at all levels to participate in open conversations focused on mental health and wellbeing. To this end, employees have shared their stories of mental health challenges and their journey to health. The company has also launched a **Mental Health Champions** initiative to reduce stigma and encourage healthy conversations about mental health through the development of a community of allies. The company's commitment to a healthy workplace is underscored by the recent addition of executive sponsors who serve to promote the importance of mental health, help reduce stigma and encourage those in need to reach out for support.

Prudential understands that the work environment is a critical driver of health and is committed to continuing its focus on reducing the stigma of mental health in the workplace and building a culture of health that benefits employees, their families and the enterprise.

“ Prudential is committed to creating a culture where employees feel safe both seeking support and being supportive of each other, free of stigma. ”

*Sharon Smith, Chief Medical Officer, Prudential*

## Conclusion

Organizations which demonstrate a sustained commitment to well-being are more likely to attract and retain employees, particularly during this period of intense burnout and threats of a “great resignation.”

Employers should seek to design workplaces and well-being programs with the following objectives in mind:

- Understand employee mental health and barriers to achieving well-being
- Reduce stigma, increase empathy & social connection
- Alleviate stress & burnout
- Enable access to timely, high quality care

With stress and burnout commonplace and anxiety and depression on the rise, notably among young adults and caregivers, employers play a key role in helping employees identify issues and seek treatment early. They also serve as a critical support to employees and their family members with more acute needs.

With a focus on training and education, maximizing flexibility and minimizing overwork, and offering comprehensive supports, employers can meet the moment. However, building and sustaining a culture of health requires the following:

- Leadership support and communication
- Metrics and accountability
- Adequate focus and investment

Leaders must communicate consistently around well-being, promote the organization’s resources, and share their own mental health stories. They should **frame well-being broadly in terms of physical, mental/emotional, and financial well-being in equal parts**. And leaders should be prepared to invest adequately in all aspects of well-being, recognizing the payoffs in lower healthcare costs and increased employee engagement, loyalty and productivity.

With technology-based metrics and mental health solutions on the rise, employers have the ability to provide high quality support to an increasingly diverse and often remote and far-flung workforce. With a focus on transparency and empathy, employers can re-imagine the workplace with the mental well-being of their workforce front and center.

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### The Boston College Center for

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