**APRIL MENTAL HEALTH AND DE&I UPDATE**

**April 3rd, 2023**

**Assembled By
Matt Glowacki, Diversity Equity & Inclusion Chair**

**Jefferson County HRMA & WI SHRM**

**Matt@MattGlowacki.com**

**Only 19% of Employees Used Mental Health Benefits in 2022: Weekly Stat**

Employees' mental health is taking a toll on productivity, but new data shows benefits are going unused.

As employee benefits continue to be an important factor in the competition for quality talent, executives have looked to new offerings to gain a recruiting advantage. Ranging from free coffee and snacks, all the way to access to professional mental health care treatment, organizational efforts to create work environments that promote fulfillment and productivity have become widespread.

Despite these efforts by leadership, overall employee satisfaction remains low in some areas. [Many executives want out](https://www.cfo.com/human-capital-careers/2022/11/employee-retention-career-satisfaction-csuite-worklife/) of their current roles, [pushback on phasing out of remote work](https://www.cfo.com/human-capital/labor-management/2023/02/hybrid-workers-remote-work-productivity/) is prevalent, and many companies are still having [trouble finding quality employees](https://www.cfo.com/human-capital/leadership/2022/11/training-development-employee-retention-employee-attraction/).

A new report by [One Medical and Workplace Intelligence](https://www.onemedical.com/resource-center/workplace-health-report-2023/), which surveyed 800 employees and 800 human resources (HR) professionals, found that, not only did over nine in 10 (91%) employees tell surveyors mental health was negatively impacting their productivity, but the usage of benefit offerings already in place by employees was extremely low. Less than a fifth (19%) of employees said they used their mental health care benefits in 2022.

Health Benefits Complexity

As human resources departments [starve for innovation](https://www.cfo.com/digital-transformation/2023/01/digital-acceleration-cybersecurity-data-saas-shelfware-human-resources/), many may fail to communicate the layers of employee benefits and the ways in which they can be accessed. Over half (55%) of the 800 employees surveyed by One Medical reported feeling overwhelmed when navigating their health care plans and systems, and only half (50%) of employees said they’re aware of “all” or “most” of their employer’s health care offerings.

Whether this complexity is entrenched in the business model of the benefit providers, or a communication breakdown between employees and their HR departments, it is preventing employees from proactively accessing benefits. Less than four in 10 (37%) of employees reported using their benefits for any preventive care.

“Mental and physical health are fundamentally linked, and employees need easy access to comprehensive primary care to help manage their whole health — from preventive and acute care to chronic disease and mental health care management,” said [Andrew Diamond](https://www.linkedin.com/in/andrew-diamond-96752b8/), One Medical’s chief medical officer.

Employees don’t have to jump through hoops to receive their salary, and want their health care to be just as seamless. When asked what factors make up “best in class” health care in an employer, top responses were all about transparency and reductions in complexity. Nine in 10 respondents chose things like price transparency (92%), easy-to-use benefits (90%), and convenient access to in-person care (90%).

The technology or virtual access to benefits were of much less concern.

Employee Wellness Declines

Despite efforts from many executives and managers alike to make their work environments as ideal as possible, many employees report feeling emotionally unwell. Three quarters (75%) of employees said their mental health declined or stayed the same last year. Around a third saw decreases in both their physical health (34%) and mental health (32%) within the same timeframe.

Mental and physical health are fundamentally linked, and employees need easy access to comprehensive primary care to help manage their whole health. — Andrew Diamond, One Medical

Declining wellness directly impacts productivity. On top of 64% of workers telling surveyors they are struggling with mental health issues, almost half (45%) said their mental health is costing them and their employers over five hours of working time per week. HR teams and executives face the challenge of these numbers while the cost of benefits continues to rise. Over eight in 10 (82%) of HR leaders expect increases to their health care budget this year.

HR leaders — 91% of those surveyed — are encouraging employees to be diligent in seeing a primary health care provider. Primary health care providers offer more access to certain types of benefits at lower cost, and data shows primary care may solve a lot of the issues employees are facing.

The Underutilization of Health Benefits

In order to solve the underutilization of mental health care benefits, HR leaders several levers they can pull. With 47% telling surveyors improvements in the health care experience for employees through care navigation solutions is a top strategy, as well as increasing awareness and communication around benefits and improving mental and behavioral health benefits.

Employers have come a long way in their support of employees’ mental health, but workers aren’t making the most of the benefits available to them. — Dan Schawbel, Workplace Intelligence

HR will also continue to push for primary care solutions, the most added solution (56%) within health care initiatives from industry leaders this upcoming year. Solutions for chronic disease management, telemedicine, and care navigation were also popular additions.

“Employers have come a long way in their support of employees’ mental health, but workers aren’t making the most of the benefits available to them,” said [Dan Schawbel](https://www.linkedin.com/in/danschawbel/), managing partner at Workplace Intelligence. “It’s critical that companies focus on improving care navigation, including pointing people to primary care as a first step, if they want to move the needle on this issue. Those that don’t will continue to experience productivity losses and other negative outcomes that can result from poor workforce mental health.”

<https://www.cfo.com/human-capital/employee-benefits-and-compensation/2023/03/mental-health-benefits-health-care-preventative-care/>

**45% of Workers “Too Busy” to Seek Help for Mental Health**

A recent survey found that a further 25% were "too embarrassed" to do the same, while 22% said they can't afford it.

A new survey of hundreds of HR professionals and full-time employees has found that while nearly two-thirds of workers are struggling with their physical and mental health, 45% say they’re “too busy” or “too embarrassed” to seek care.

Worryingly, even though the vast majority of employees report that their health has stayed the same or worsened in the past year, most HR leaders and decision-makers reported that their workforce’s health had improved.

The results are a reminder for businesses to ensure that their staff members feel able to take mental health sick days when they need to, and that everyone is set up with [video conferencing](https://tech.co/web-conferencing/best-video-conferencing-app), as well as other remote-working essentials, so they're able to work from where they feel the most comfortable.

Health and well-being company One Medical [has surveyed](https://www.onemedical.com/resource-center/workplace-health-report-2023/) 800 HR and employee benefits leaders and 800 employees working full time in the United States, with the help of data analytics and research firm Workplace Intelligence.

They found that 64% of employees are struggling with mental and behavioral health. 78% said they’d struggled for over a year with their issue/s, whereas 48% have had trouble dating back to over three years.

78% of surveyed employees said they’d struggled for over a year with mental health issues. 91% reported this affecting their productivity; 45% claim it affects over 5 working hours a week

The overwhelming majority of survey respondents – 91% – reported that they’re less productive when under intense mental or physical stress, and 45% said that this affects more than 5 hours of their work per week.

Workers Too Busy, Too Embarrassed

One Medical’s survey also found that despite 84% of employees using their healthcare benefits during 2022, “they aren’t making the most of them.”

Less than a fifth of poll respondents confirmed that they’d sought help for mental health issues, while only 37% used their health benefits plan to receive preventive support.

Concerningly, when respondents were asked why they weren’t seeking help, 45% said they were too busy, while a further 25% said they were too embarrassed. 22%, on the other hand, said the care they required was too pricey.

However, the data suggests that the communication issue seems to go both ways. 28% of staff said they don’t receive any general health advice from their employer, and 17% said that they don’t receive any information about healthcare benefits offered by their company.

Employee Struggles Not Relayed Upwards

Although 75% of employees surveyed reported that their mental health had worsened or stayed the same throughout 2022, 60% HR leaders thought their workforce’s mental health had improved during that twelve-month period, while 59% came to a similar conclusion about their physical health.

One Medical says that this “indicates that leaders may not appreciate the extent to which their team members may be struggling with their health”.

If a significant proportion of workers feel too busy and too embarrassed to even seek help in the first place, then this might explain why colleagues higher up the food chain have an inaccurate picture of precisely how much their counterparts are struggling.

Putting Employees First

One Medical’s survey results, although concerning, did provide some promising findings too. For instance, 45% of HR leaders said that “improving awareness and communication around their benefits is one of their top strategic priorities for 2023”.

You can provide as many formal benefits as you like, but important as they are, it will all be in vain if you fail to create an environment within which employees feel comfortable requesting the support, they need to put their mental health first.

Ensuring employees have manageable workloads – and that there's a fair process for adjusting them when necessary – will go some way to absolving the guilt or pressure some people feel to work beyond their means.

As mentioned earlier on, making sure your employees have the resources they need to work from home, such as [video conferencing equipment](https://tech.co/web-conferencing/best-video-conferencing-equipment), as well as giving them the flexibility to do so, will go a long way to alleviating stress levels on a day-to-day basis.

For businesses and staff alike, the post-pandemic era has been disorientating. Building trust through prioritizing the mental well-being of your workforce, however, is one way to create stability you can sustain.

<https://tech.co/news/45-percent-workers-too-busy-seek-mental-health-support>

**Most workers are struggling with their mental health, and company’s confusing healthcare programs aren’t helping**

It doesn't matter if we're talking about [quiet quitting](https://fortune.com/2022/11/05/the-problem-with-quiet-quitting/), [bare minimum Monday](https://fortune.com/2023/02/13/bare-minimum-monday-is-the-latest-workplace-trend-hitting-productivity/), it's "almost Friday" Thursday, or "I swear if there's one meeting on my calendar" Friday—it's obvious the American worker is going through it. Two-plus years of an isolating, anxiety-inducing pandemic gravely impacted people's mental health. We worked through it for the most part, or simply dove right back in in the post-vaccinated world.

Three out of four U.S. employees, according to a new study from One Medical and Workplace Intelligence, say their mental and physical health either worsened or stayed the same in 2022—a year marked by pushes to return to "normal" and [get workers back to their desks](https://fortune.com/2022/12/11/the-2022-return-to-office-war-year-in-review/) in corporate offices.

One Medical, a membership-based primary care practice, surveyed 1,600 U.S. workers and HR leaders, 64% of whom reported struggling with mental or behavioral health issues. As a result, 91% of those workers say they’re less productive. What's more, 45% of employees struggling with mental health at work report a productivity loss of more than five hours a week.

The study lays out the major problem: As workers contend with higher levels of anxiety and stress at work and increased workloads, they're unable to access the care and information they need from their employers to get help. More than half of the respondents say they feel overwhelmed when navigating the healthcare system, and despite the 64% of workers reporting struggling with mental health, only 19% say they used their company's mental health care benefits in 2022. That's partly because companies aren't necessarily making it easy to navigate them.

“Employers have come a long way in their support of employees’ mental health, but workers aren’t making the most of the benefits available to them,” Dan Schawbel, managing partner at Workplace Intelligence, says in a statement. “It’s critical that companies focus on improving care navigation—including pointing people to primary care as a first step—if they want to move the needle on this issue. Those that don’t will continue to experience productivity losses and other negative outcomes that can result from poor workforce mental health.”

It's clear that companies need to do more when it comes to addressing employee's mental health. In a 2022 survey from PwC of more than 720 executives, roughly 62% acknowledged they had either already implemented, or have a plan in place to expand, [mental health benefits for their workers](https://www.pwc.com/us/en/library/pulse-survey/managing-business-risks.html). A little more than 20% of respondents said they were considering developing a plan.

There's a benefit for companies to invest more both in developing their mental health programs and making sure employees understand and utilize them when needed. When they invest in mental health needs, companies tend to see a 4x return on their investment.

Plus, 97% of the HR leaders in One Medical's survey agreed that providing healthcare benefits that are high-quality, patient-centered, and a good value increases job satisfaction, employee engagement, and their ability to recruit and retain employees—all leading to more productive workers.

<https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/most-workers-struggling-mental-health-120000866.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAGCiIJS6VHOtHxPz3agtpNMHtO2btfrQzVU5kQgBFJerxjIxm4Ci8Rc9xjwRGt0gxa81uJDws-VZxOsXpqtAndoTl_xAAxobWZDup_aa-VxC8bsemPBZ_nDDpAo_Df0u4MNvlMTbM4TyHP2DwCOSFU1XN-Y66Az6NS8u_mqlhmNF>

**Half of HR leaders say employees flout in-office policy, study finds**

Employment experts say while there is not much leeway for breaking the rules, discrimination claims could be brought

Nearly half (44 per cent) of HR leaders say employees come to the workplace but not as often as required by the in-office policy, research has found.

The Gartner research, which collated results from several surveys, found only a quarter (25 per cent) of HR leaders said their organizations’ workers fully complied with their in-office requirements.

Taking results from a webinar – How HR Leaders Navigate Return to Workplace – and its Hybrid Collaboration Survey of 3,575 HR leaders and employees, it also revealed that surveyed employees find going to the office ‘burdensome’, with half (48 per cent) stating that going to a workplace required a high amount of effort, with a third (32 per cent) of organisations not offering incentives for workers to come into their office.

Chris Thompson, employment partner at Gateley Legal, said there was not much leeway for employees contractually to flout the rules. “Where the normal place of work is identified in the contract of employment it will clearly be a reasonable instruction for an employee to attend as required by the business,” he said. “Claims that the contractual terms have been varied by the work from home arrangements during the pandemic are unlikely to find much support.”

Thompson added that employees would have more power legally if an office mandate amounted to indirect discrimination, but noted that employers would have a defense to such claims if they could show the requirement was “justified”.

“To succeed in a claim for indirect discrimination there needs to be a provision, criterion or practice that places those who share a protected characteristic at a disadvantage and that the claimant is disadvantaged,” he said. “For example, it may be argued that the requirement amounts to indirect sex discrimination as it places women at a disadvantage because they are likely to have primary responsibility for childcare.”

Additionally, in Gartner’s 2021 Hybrid Work Employee Survey of more than 4,000 employees, three quarters (75 per cent) of hybrid or remote workers said their expectations for working flexibly had increased since the pandemic.

Gemma Bullivant, HR coach and consultant, said there was a “disconnect between what leaders and employees want” and that companies needed to be clearer in their reasoning for working in the office. “Setting up a policy to mandate something doesn't work in the modern workplace,” she said.

“Employees will vote with their feet. So, companies end up with policies in place that they are not willing to enforce. We need to be clear on why in-office presence is beneficial for both parties. It starts with establishing clear reasons for in-office time (not simply two or three days a week with no clear reasons) and getting clear on how to use the time in both locations in the most effective way.”

According to the research, more than half (55 per cent) of employees feel they can better achieve their daily goals when they work from home, and 62 per cent said they were more likely to get work done when they control their environment.

Alessandra La Via, digital wellbeing consultant at Live More Offline, said the “future of work demands intentional digital design” and called on businesses to show more support and understanding of employees’ working preferences.

“People can find they are more productive working at home as there are fewer interruptions,” she said. “Those with young families may value the flexibility but other underrepresented demographics can also thrive in remote work. Being supportive of people's preferences in remote work can help to create an inclusive culture, from a gender, ethnicity and neurodiversity perspective.”

The findings also revealed a lack of application among businesses with their office mandates, as nearly half (45 per cent) did not track their employees’ onsite attendance, while less than a quarter (23 per cent) of organisations were willing to take disciplinary action against non-complying employees, including lowering performance reviews, reducing bonuses and terminating employment.

<https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1818231/half-hr-leaders-say-employees-flout-in-office-policy-study-finds>

**Feds should improve retention efforts to boost workforce diversity, EEOC says**

The data provides a snapshot into one of the country’s largest DEI efforts.

In the federal workforce, Hispanic women and people with disabilities made significant gains during fiscal year 2020, yet some inequities still persist, [according to a March 23 update](https://www.eeoc.gov/fy-2020-annual-report-federal-workforce-part-2-workforce-statistics-and-eeo-commitment#_Toc115091779) from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

Nearly all demographic groups had the highest participation rates in lower positions and pay levels, except for White men, Hispanic men, and Asian men and women, who had higher participation in senior executive levels. This points to opportunities for better recruitment, retention and advancement — for all levels and especially in higher-level positions, the EEOC said.

“We continue to see slow but steady progress in the federal sector with regard to key indicators of the EEOC’s mission to prevent and remedy unlawful employment discrimination and advance equal opportunity for all,” Carlton Hadden, director of the EEOC’s Office of Federal Operations, [said in a statement](https://www.eeoc.gov/newsroom/eeoc-issues-federal-workforce-report-2020).

With the federal government as the country’s largest employer — with more than 2 million employees — the report may also shed light on trends seen at companies nationwide.

Overall, most groups by race/ethnicity and gender participated in the federal workforce at higher rates than in the civilian labor force, the report found. However, some groups had rates below that level.

For instance, White women and men and women of two or more races had decreases in participation rates between FY 2016 and FY 2020. Participation rates of Hispanic and Latina women, on the other hand, increased from 3.7% in FY 2016 to 4.4% in FY 2020.

In addition, the participation rates continue to increase for persons with disabilities (PWD) and persons with targeted disabilities (PWTD), who have severe disabilities associated with high rates of unemployment and underemployment. For PWD, participation rates increased from 8.7% in FY 2016 to 9.45% in FY 2020, and for PWTD, rates increased from 1.01% to 1.84%.

At the same time, the increases are still below the federal sector goals of 12% for PWD and 2% for PWTD. The increases were seen among those with deafness or serious difficulty hearing, as well as those with blindness or serious difficulty seeing. The participation rates dropped for those with partial or complete paralysis, intellectual disability, significant psychiatric disorder and dwarfism.

Similar to the trends for race/ethnicity and gender, PWD and PWTD had higher participation in lower positions and pay levels than in senior levels. About 91.9% of agencies reported prominently posting reasonable accommodation procedures for those with disabilities.

However, compliance with a direct reporting structure showed mixed results. About 37% of federal agencies didn’t have the agency head as the immediate supervisor of the EEO director.

“Although only a snapshot, this data helps indicate how federal agencies can enhance their ongoing efforts to make the federal government a model employer free from unlawful discrimination,” Charlotte Burrows, the EEOC chair, said in the statement.

As the Americans with Disabilities Act celebrates 33 years this July, the EEOC report serves as a reminder that employers can take steps to [create a more inclusive workplace](https://www.hrdive.com/news/what-employers-need-to-know-about-disability-at-work/626774/) for everyone, even as return-to-work plans and hybrid schedules continue to shift.

<https://www.hrdive.com/news/eeoc-report-more-diverse-retention-federal-workforc/646303/>

**Transgender Inclusion at Work Reaches Record Numbers**

As organizations around the world celebrate the accomplishments of transgender people on International Transgender Day of Visibility, the number of companies incorporating policies to protect transgender workers has surged in recent years.

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation's 2022 corporate equality index (CEI), which assesses critical policies and practices indicative of employers' commitment to equality, showed that [97 percent of businesses included in the CEI](https://reports.hrc.org/corporate-equality-index-2022) have protections for nonbinary and transgender workers.

In 2002, just 5 percent of CEI companies had such policies in place for these employees.

"This year's CEI was yet another record year for companies moving toward greater inclusion for their transgender workers," said Jay Brown, the HRC's senior vice president of programs, research and training. "These are positive steps toward fuller inclusion."

The annual report, which surveyed more than 1,200 companies, also revealed:

More than 660 major businesses have adopted gender-transition guidelines to establish best practices in transgender inclusion for managers and teams.

About 66 percent of Fortune 500 companies have transgender-inclusive health care benefits, such as routine, chronic care and transition-related medical coverage.

There are 22 times as many employers offering transgender-inclusive health insurance coverage as there were in 2009.

Tara Taylor, managing director of business consultation firm ADR Vantage Inc. in Washington, D.C., said employers that offer transgender-inclusive policies and practices can boost recruitment and retention.

"[Employees today] want to work for companies that value diversity and work to make inclusion a core part of how they do business," she said. "Gender should never be a barrier to employment or to enjoying all the same rights, benefits and opportunities that an employer has to offer."

Many Transgender Employees Still Feel Unsafe

While progress in transgender inclusion and awareness has improved, the group continues to face discrimination and violence that can influence their psychological safety.

On March 30, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) sued T.C. Wheelers Inc., a company that runs a New York-based bar and pizzeria, for allegedly harassing and driving out a transgender employee.

According to the EEOC's lawsuit, one of T.C. Wheelers' owners repeatedly harassed a trans man who worked for the company, including telling him that he "wasn't a real man," asking invasive questions about his transition and intentionally misgendering him by using female pronouns.

The employee eventually resigned to "escape the harassment," the EEOC charged.

"This new lawsuit, filed one day before [Transgender Day of Visibility](https://www.glaad.org/tdov), reflects the EEOC's long-standing commitment to protecting transgender persons from employment discrimination, including the type of egregious harassment alleged in this case," EEOC Chair Charlotte A. Burrows [said in a statement](https://www.eeoc.gov/newsroom/eeoc-sues-tc-wheelers-harassing-and-driving-out-transgender-employee). "In the current climate, where transgender individuals face increasing attacks on their rights and basic humanity, the EEOC will vigorously enforce the Supreme Court's holding in [Bostock](https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/what-does-the-high-court-lgbtq-ruling-mean-for-employee-benefits.aspx) that discrimination against transgender workers violates the law."

More than 50 people who identified as transgender or nonbinary experienced violent deaths in 2021, with more than half of those victims being Black or Latinx, the HRC report stated. Researchers noted that "it has become increasingly unsafe to be transgender, especially as a person of color or another minority."

Geri Johnson, chief operating officer for public relations firm Next PR, is an openly queer woman who said this violence and discrimination can influence the workplace.

"Trans and nonbinary employees can feel constant fear of [not being accepted] and anxiety regarding how to best present themselves," she said.

More than half of transgender employees say they are not comfortable being out at work, according to a [2021 report](https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/being-transgender-at-work) by McKinsey and Co. Two-thirds remain in the closet in professional interactions outside their own companies.

The McKinsey report noted that failing to be their authentic selves at work can result in transgender people having more difficult and inequitable employment experiences and lead to severe mental health issues like anxiety and depression.

[SHRM members-only toolkit: [Ensuring Workplace Inclusion for LGBTQ Employees](https://www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/Pages/LGBTQ_Inclusion.aspx)]

Ways to Enhance Transgender Inclusion at Work

Johnson implored companies to be proactive rather than reactive in creating a safe workplace for transgender people. To foster an inclusive workplace for transgender employees:

Publicly communicate the company's transgender employee rights and job protections to the workforce.

* Provide accessible, educational FAQs and ally education.
* Facilitate trans-specific diversity, equity and inclusion trainings.
* Offer employee resource groups for LGBTQ team members.
* Consider offering a gender-transition leave policy for gender-affirming surgeries rather than having employees rely on their paid time off or short-term disability.

"While companies are being more vocal about LGBTQ acceptance and inclusion in the workplace, transgender and nonbinary people aren't always included or considered in the narrative," Johnson said. "Organizations have a lot more work to do to ensure workplace barriers are broken down and that trans and nonbinary team members feel safe and supported at work."

Brown said that companies must "get loud, get visible and spread awareness" on behalf of transgender and nonbinary workers.

"The more people who show they care, including allies and trans and nonbinary people who speak up for the most marginalized in our community," he explained, "the more hearts and minds we will change."

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/behavioral-competencies/global-and-cultural-effectiveness/pages/transgender-inclusion-at-work-reaches-record-numbers.aspx>

**United States: Best Practices For Engaging In The Interactive Process**

The "interactive process" – the procedure through which an employer determines whether and to what extent it must accommodate an employee's disability or medical condition – is one of the most challenging parts of complying with California's Fair Employment and Housing Act and the federal Americans with Disabilities Act. Unfortunately, there is no one-size-fits-all approach for satisfying this legal requirement, but employers can minimize their risk by following these best practices:

Educate managers and supervisors: An employer's managers and supervisors are often the first (and sometimes the only) company representatives to learn of an employee's need for accommodation. Accordingly, even if managers and supervisors are not primarily responsible for representing the company through the interactive process, employers should ensure that their managers and supervisors understand not only the importance of the interactive process, but how the obligation to engage in the process arises as well as their role in it.

Initiate the interactive process promptly: An employer should begin the interactive process as soon as an employee requests an accommodation or the employer becomes aware (such as through a manager, supervisor, or Human Resources) of the employee's need for accommodation. Once aware of the need for accommodation, employers should initiate communication to confirm the scope of the employee's limitations and identify potential accommodations that would enable the employee to perform the essential functions of the job.

Communicate clearly and effectively: Many disability claims under FEHA and the ADA arise from poor communication between the employer and employee. Communications during the interactive process should be clear and direct, telling the employee precisely what is needed, directly responding to requests and concerns, asking questions to clarify the employee's needs, and responding to the employee in a timely and respectful manner.

Identify reasonable accommodations: Employers must attempt to identify reasonable accommodations that would enable the employee to perform the essential functions of their job. Employers should consider a wide range of accommodations, including modifications to the work environment, job duties, and work schedule. Only after identifying a potential accommodation should an employer consider whether the accommodation would cause an undue hardship on the company. Employers should recognize that mere inconvenience or added cost does not automatically mean that a potential accommodation creates undue hardship and be wary about relying on that potential defense, as courts frequently reject the argument, leading to significant liability.

Follow up and monitor accommodations: Once a reasonable accommodation is identified and provided, the employer should not consider the process done; it should follow up with the employee to ensure that the accommodation is actually effective. If the accommodation does not accomplish its intended purpose, the interactive process should continue with the employee to identify potential alternative accommodations.

Accurately document the process: The interactive process is rarely completed in a single back-and-forth interaction. Instead, it is usually an ongoing dialogue spanning several communications occurring over several days or longer. Because claims alleging failure to engage in the interactive process and/or provide reasonable accommodation often involve disputes about the communication between the parties, employers are wise to document those communications thoughtfully. When an employer follows the recommendations above and documents its participation in the interactive process properly, the record of those communications becomes an incredibly useful tool in proving that the employer engaged in the interactive process reasonably and in good faith.

Maintain confidentiality: Employers should maintain the confidentiality of the employee's disability or medical condition, all related medical information, and the details of the interactive process. Only those individuals who have a need to know should be involved in the interactive process.

Engaging in the interactive process in good faith is a difficult but crucial component of complying with the ADA and California's FEHA and avoiding claims of disability discrimination. Employers without extensive experience in the interactive process should confer with counsel when the duty to engage in the process arises.

<https://www.mondaq.com/unitedstates/discrimination-disability--sexual-harassment/1299532/best-practices-for-engaging-in-the-interactive-process>

**Company Culture Helps Make or Break Mental Health**

Creating and sustaining a psychologically healthy work environment is critical to a company’s success. Likewise, supporting and boosting employees’ mental wellbeing is a talent-management issue, requiring strategic investments of time and money. Everything company leaders do to enhance workers’ wellbeing helps ensure the overall health and success of not only individual employees, but also the business as a whole.

Here are some steps rent-to-own managers can take toward creating a work culture that supports staff through understanding, inclusivity, and belonging:

Regularly audit your Employee Assistance Program to confirm your company is providing the maximum benefit for workers – including verifying that providers follow current research and best practices.

Data from the [National Bureau of Economic Research](https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w24229/w24229.pdf) indicates that employees who don’t use their wellbeing programs tend to require higher rates of medical care, costing their employers more due to the effects of unaddressed mental-health issues on worker performance and productivity.

Be proactive with your commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), using a multifaceted approach to engage employees and advance their wellbeing.

For example:

* Use [inclusive terminology](https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines) – words matter.
* Establish Employee Resource Groups as a space for under-represented workers to connect with each other and share experiences and advice.
* Acknowledge a variety of identities by celebrating [important cultural and religious days](https://www.kazoohr.com/resources/library/inclusive-workplace-calendar) on your company’s shared calendar, and by being mindful about scheduling meetings, events, and deadlines on those days.
* Encourage employees to make time for their wellbeing in order to not only safeguard their mental health, but also improve their job performance. For instance:
* Create a company culture where workers have access to paid time off, and aren’t scolded for missing work. [Multiple studies have shown](https://hbr.org/2004/10/presenteeism-at-work-but-out-of-it) that employees working even though they feel unwell is associated with worse health, higher healthcare costs, and lower productivity.
* Hold company-wide mental-health days when no emails, calls, or meetings are allowed, so no one feels the need to catch up once business resumes the next day.
* Separate paid vacation days from paid sick time to encourage employees to take appropriate time off for mental health, physical wellbeing, and their earned vacation leave.

<https://www.rtohq.org/2023/03/company-culture-helps-make-or-break-mental-health/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=company-culture-helps-make-or-break-mental-health>

**Develop programs and policies that support employee mental health**

There are many ways to support your staff and create a culture that is inclusive, welcoming, and belonging.

Enhancing your employees’ mental well-being is a talent management issue. It requires strategic investments of time and money. And the steps you take to better support your employees at work can empower them to thrive in other areas of their lives, thus ensuring the long-term health and success of your employees and your organization.

Here are five additional steps you can take to improve employee mental health.

Take your EAP a step further

To maximize employee engagement in the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and encourage positive outcomes, regularly audit your EAP to ensure you are providing the maximum benefit for your workers. This includes evaluating your EAP providers to verify they follow best practices and draw on current research.

Consider launching a cross-departmental benefits committee to review EAP offerings and ensure a diverse group of mental health professionals is enlisted to meet the needs of employees with different identities and backgrounds. Ask the benefits committee to find creative ways to remove the stigma around seeking mental health services and encourage employees to take advantage of EAP offerings. This is an opportunity to give employees a voice and then directly respond to their needs.

Use multiple methods to communicate to employees what services the EAP provides, what topics EAP professionals can cover (i.e., stress, mental health, finances, family issues), and that EAP services are available and confidential. It’s important to use messaging that normalizes the use of mental health benefits and to remove any possible barriers for employees.

Rethink how you promote your EAP, so information is easy to find and understand. AI-driven survey tools can guide your employees to appropriate resources for their unique scenarios. Remove barriers by ensuring flexibility so employees can use EAP services during the workday and not be penalized for prioritizing their mental health.

Coach your managers and supervisors on how to use well-being resources offered through the EAP so they are well-equipped to promote EAP resources.

What the research on EAPs says

37% of employees say that employer-provided mental health resources can [contribute to a better work environment](https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/work-well-being/compounding-pressure-2021) (APA, October 2021).

While research shows [EAP services can successfully improve a range of employee issues](https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2015-56110-001.html) associated with lower productivity, a [low percentage of employees use them](https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/winter2019/pages/companies-seek-to-boost-low-usage-of-employee-assistance-programs.aspx).

Data from the [National Bureau of Economic Research (PDF, 884KB)](https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w24229/w24229.pdf) suggest that employees who don’t use their well-being programs (such as EAPs) tend to require higher rates of medical care; annual medical costs are about $1,400 higher for such employees (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2020). These costs build upon the effects of unaddressed mental health challenges on employee productivity and performance.

Offer Mental Health First Aid training to all employees

Just as CPR helps people assist someone having a heart attack, [Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)](https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/get-involved/mental-health-first-aid/) can help managers and supervisors assist someone experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge or crisis.

MHFA is an evidence-based training administered by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing that teaches people how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental health issues and substance use challenges.

MHFA is not just for leaders and managers. Offering MHFA training to all employees equips your entire organization with mental health knowledge and fosters empathy and understanding.

What the research on MHFA says:

Scientific reviews show the [effectiveness of MHFA training in improving mental health literacy and support (PDF, 4.39MB)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5979014/pdf/pone.0197102.pdf) for those with mental health problems up to 6 months after training.

One analysis revealed that [MHFA increases mental health knowledge](https://doi.org/10.3109/09540261.2014.924910), decreases negative attitudes, and increases supportive behaviors toward individuals with mental health problems.

According to the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, more than 2.6 million people across the United States have been trained in MHFA by a dedicated base of more than 15,000 instructors.

Instill a sense of belonging for employees of all backgrounds

Fostering a welcoming and inclusive workplace helps employees feel a sense of belonging and contributes to a healthy work culture. Taking a multifaceted approach that engages employees across your organization reaffirms your commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) while supporting employee well-being.

You can start by using inclusive terminology. Words matter. To build a common vocabulary, APA introduced the [inclusive language guidelines](https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines), containing relevant language to use when communicating about EDI.

Employee resource groups (ERG) create a space for underrepresented employees to find one another, share common experiences, and seek advice. Typically organized around a shared identity, such as race, gender, or age, ERGs are a powerful addition to the workplace with many benefits to the organization, including creating greater inclusivity and higher retention of employees.

Recognize and [celebrate a variety of identities](https://www.apa.org/monitor/2015/03/cultural-competence). Include important cultural and religious days in your organization’s shared calendar. Be mindful of scheduling meetings, deadlines, and events on these days, even if they only impact some employees. [Kazoohr.com](https://www.kazoohr.com/resources/library/inclusive-workplace-calendar) provides a good starting point of dates to skip when scheduling meetings or events.

Be aware of unconscious bias in your organization and educate your entire team in the importance of EDI initiatives. When you’re training team members about issues that might incite defensiveness, be aware of communication methods that support attitude changes.

Regularly reviewing your organization’s hiring practices and ensuring equitable pay supports EDI and contributes to job satisfaction.

Make sure your efforts are sustainable by promoting team buy-in. People may be more receptive to EDI initiatives when they know it’s a long-term investment in your organization.

What the research on a sense of belonging says

Psychological science shows that the language people use is critically important as individuals strive to create a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive world.

Survey data show [unconscious bias training](https://rework.withgoogle.com/guides/unbiasing-raise-awareness/steps/learn-about-Googles-workshop-experiment/) can be an effective way to improve team members’ mindsets about the importance of EDI.

Some experts say that sharing messages that explain [we all have unconscious biases](https://hbr.org/2017/04/dont-give-up-on-unconscious-bias-training-make-it-better) helps learners to avoid becoming defensive and rejecting the training.

Encourage employees to unplug

Productivity is more complex than logging as many hours as possible. Encouraging employees to carve out time for their well-being not only protects their mental health but can also improve job performance.

If employees feel they’ll be reprimanded for missing work, they may continue working when they feel unwell, which is [known as presenteeism](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01745/full). Presenteeism, in multiple studies, is associated with [worse health (and higher health care costs) and lower productivity](https://hbr.org/2004/10/presenteeism-at-work-but-out-of-it) than if the employee had taken appropriate time off work.

Creating a culture where workers have access to paid time off—and, just as important, feel encouraged to take it—helps with [psychological recovery, which can enhance job performance later.](https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2017-14293-001) The number of emails and impending workload people face post-vacation can make employees regret taking time off.

Company-wide mental health days are an opportunity for the entire organization to unplug on the same day and for employees to truly focus on their well-being, not having to worry about catching up the following day. It’s important for the CEO to communicate to all staff that the mental health day will only be effective if no one works or sends emails that day.

Encourage self-care by separating paid vacation days from paid sick time. Employees may hesitate to take days off for mental health if they’re saving them for vacation or hesitate to plan more days off if they’re worried about needing sick days in the future.

Employees who worry about being perceived as less committed may not take vacations as readily. Encourage the use of vacation leave by taking time off yourself and encouraging managers to do the same.

When you’re off the clock, led by example. Be wary of sending emails outside working hours and on vacation or sick time and clarify ahead of time with your organization what warrants a true business necessity for emailing outside of these windows. If you do need to send emails outside of hours, use the delayed send function in Outlook so your employees do not feel pressure to respond outside of work hours.

What the research on the value of unplugging says

Workers who take short breaks throughout the day are more productive, have fewer health issues, and suffer lower rates of burnout ([Journal of Applied Psychology](https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2015-36861-001), Vol. 101, No. 2, 2016).

APA’s [2018 Work and Well-Being Survey](https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2018/06/vacation-recharges-workers) found that taking time off helps workers recover from stress and experience positive effects that improve their well-being and job performance, but for nearly two-thirds of working adults, the benefits of time away dissipate within a few days.

According to 2021 data from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), 35% of workers have not used paid time off for rest and relaxation since the start of the pandemic.

Research on telepressure has found that [when leaders send emails outside normal hours](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267753716_Please_Respond_ASAP_Workplace_Telepressure_and_Employee_Recovery), employees follow suit—even to the detriment of their well-being.

Continue evaluating outcomes

With any occupational health intervention, good evaluation design is as important as the right strategies.

Establish a baseline by surveying employees before you launch new programs, and be sure to implement tools for measuring progress, such as further employee surveys and focus groups.

Keep channels of both bottom-up and top-down communication open, whether via email, Slack, or Microsoft Teams; ongoing staff conversations with leadership; and/or an employee intranet, and create channels for your managers to regularly share feedback.

Just as important, make changes if you aren’t seeing positive results and as staff needs evolve.

Your employees are the heartbeat of your organization, and your best resource for understanding how to improve the well-being of your business.

<https://www.apa.org/topics/healthy-workplaces/mental-health/develop-programs>

**73% of U.S. employee caregivers seeking more mental-health benefits: survey**

Nearly three-quarters (73 per cent) of U.S. employees who are caregivers for dependents with mental-health challenges wish their employers would offer more mental-health benefits, according to a new survey by the New York Life Insurance Co.

The survey, which polled 1,000 employees, found mental-health benefits play a key role in employee satisfaction. The vast majority of respondents said these benefits contribute to positive working experiences (92 per cent), make them feel supported by their employer (92 per cent) and are a reason to remain in their current role (83 per cent).

In addition, a majority (80 per cent) of employees said helping dependents manage mental-health challenges has impacted their own mental health and stress levels and six in 10 (61 per cent) said caregiving has impacted their work productivity. Indeed, nearly half (48 per cent) of respondents have helped a loved one live with a mental-health challenge in the last year and 45 per cent of this group noted their dependent is experiencing mental-health challenges more often this year than in the previous year.

Although many respondents said they’re feeling stressed (62 per cent), exhausted (48 per cent), distracted (48 per cent) and overwhelmed (47 per cent) at work, nearly half (47 per cent) admitted they avoid taking time off to support their own or a loved one’s mental health. A similar percentage (46 per cent) cited heavy workloads as a reason for not attending to their self-care. A significant number of respondents — particularly women (63 per cent) — said they haven’t informed their company about their need to support their dependents’ mental health.

The survey also found two-thirds (65 per cent) of respondents reported needing more assistance to address their own mental health. Although more than half (54 per cent) are familiar with the mental-health resources offered by their employer, 48 per cent said they haven’t used these resources and 31 per cent said this was by choice. More than a quarter (29 per cent) said they don’t believe there’s anyone at their company who’s equipped to help them find resources if they had mental-health challenges.

“Employers have the power to create a workplace culture that supports mental well-being and individuals at all levels can play a role,” said Meghan Shea, vice-president and head of strategy and solutions for group benefits at New York Life, in a press release.

“Human resources and benefits teams can be advocates at the company level, making sure that mental-health resources and programs are communicated to employees. But what’s often missing are advocates at the local level, such as team leads and managers. By training managers on how to effectively discuss mental-health needs with their employees, they can reinforce and drive awareness of available support during one-on-one discussions.”

<https://www.benefitscanada.com/benefits/health-benefits/73-of-u-s-employee-caregivers-seeking-more-mental-health-benefits-survey/>

**Are Workplace Diversity Programs in Jeopardy if the Supreme Court Ends Affirmative Action in College Admissions?**

With the U.S. Supreme Court seemingly poised to end affirmative action for college admission programs, many U.S. employers are wondering whether or to what extent they can continue their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and affirmative action programs. Although a Court decision ending or limiting the use of affirmative action for university admissions will not likely have direct application to workplace DEI and affirmative action programs, companies may be indirectly impacted by the decision, including through potential legal challenges to their programs.

Employers are also increasingly having to navigate the growing trend of state legislation and measures seeking to limit workplace DEI efforts. In light of these trends and the anticipated Court decision, employers should anticipate increased challenges to their DEI and affirmative action programs; monitor state legislation and regulation aimed at restricting workplace DEI training, policies, and practices; and review their existing DEI and affirmative action programs to determine if they might be vulnerable to attack.

Background on the College Admissions Affirmative Action Cases

Under current Court precedent, educational institutions can lawfully consider race as a factor in their admission processes in order to increase diversity in their student populations. This practice is commonly referred to as “affirmative action” in college admissions.

The two cases pending before the Court were originally brought in 2014 by the Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. (SFFA), challenging Harvard University’s (Harvard’s) and the University of North Carolina’s (UNC’s) use of race as a factor in their admission programs. SFFA specifically claims that Harvard’s and UNC’s admission policies violate Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI) and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution by, among other things, unlawfully using race to give a preference to underrepresented minority applicants.

In January 2022, the Court agreed to hear SFFA’s cases against UNC and Harvard. In these cases, SFFA is seeking to have the Court overrule its long-standing precedent in Grutter v. Bollinger, 539 U.S. 306 (2003) and other cases permitting the use of race as a factor in college admissions.

The Court Is Expected to End Affirmative Action in College Admissions

During the nearly five hours of oral argument on October 31, 2022, the Court explored numerous issues and hypotheticals. Below are a few of the more notable takeaways from the oral argument:

The 25-Year Sunset on Affirmative Action: One of the more significant topics at oral argument was whether affirmative action would even be necessary for colleges after the 25-year horizon outlined in Grutter expires. In Grutter, the Court majority held that race‑conscious admissions policies would no longer be necessary for colleges and universities “in 25 years” to achieve diversity in their student bodies and would then be rendered unconstitutional. During oral argument, the Justices sparred over whether universities could use race-conscious admission programs after the 25-year timeline sunsets in 2028 or whether that timeline was a mere projection of when the Grutter Court thought race‑conscious admissions would no longer be needed for colleges to achieve diversity. Justices Roberts, Kavanaugh, and Barrett, the most likely swing votes on the Court for these cases, focused much of their attention on this timeline and the seeming inability of the lawyers for Harvard and UNC to articulate an exact timeframe for when race-conscious admission programs would achieve the diversity necessary for colleges to end such preferences.

Some Justices Questioned the Value of Racial Diversity: Justices Thomas and Alito expressed doubt about the need for diversity on campus as a cognizable interest—let alone a compelling one. Chief Justice Roberts and Justice Gorsuch raised concerns that continuing to use race in college admissions under the guise of diversity could be a subterfuge for racial quotas that has a negative impact on Asian applicants and could be similar to the holistic approach used in the 1920s that imposed quotas on Jewish applicants.

Workplace DEI Programs Rarely Mentioned: The role of race in the workplace diversity policies was discussed only on a few occasions during oral argument. Some Justices, including Justices Kagan and Sotomayor, appeared to support the benefits of diversity in the workplace and more broadly, while other Justices, such as Justice Thomas, appeared to disagree.

Given the current composition of the Court, statements at oral arguments, and recent decisions by this Court, the Court is expected to strike down the use of race as a factor in admissions programs for colleges and universities.

Potential Impact on Workplace DEI and Affirmative Action Programs

If the Court strikes down affirmative action for college admissions, the decision is not likely to have direct application to workplace DEI or affirmative action programs and initiatives. Rulings relating to Title VI and the U.S. Constitution in the educational context do not necessarily affect workplace-related policies. Instead, employer DEI and affirmative action programs are governed by Title VII and other federal and state employment anti-discrimination laws. Under most employment discrimination laws, using protected classes, such as race, to make employment decisions is generally unlawful.

Although the Court’s ruling may not directly affect the workplace, the Court’s decision could encourage challenges to workplace DEI and affirmative action programs. Depending on the Court’s reasoning, the importance of diversity as a compelling interest more broadly could be impacted and might indirectly undercut some of the rationales used to support DEI initiatives and affirmative action measures in the workplace.

As a result, employers should understand the differences between permissible and potentially unlawful DEI and affirmative action programs.

DEI Programs: DEI programs are not the same as affirmative action. DEI in the employment context generally relates to companies having policies and practices geared towards ensuring equal opportunities and outreach to certain underrepresented groups in the workforce, such as women, people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities.

DEI policies might include outreach to diversity-focused recruitment sources to find a strong pipeline of diverse talent, creating training and mentoring programs aimed at supporting diverse talent within a company, and having other policies and practices to champion and promote diversity within the workforce, such affinity groups. Significantly, DEI does not involve using protected categories, such as race, to make employment decisions or creating set asides or hiring quotas based on a protected class.

Federal Contractor Affirmative Action Plans: The Court’s decision is not expected to have any direct impact on the affirmative action requirements that apply to federal contractors because those programs do not raise the same race-conscious concerns that the Court is considering in the university context. Under Executive Order 11246 and other affirmative action laws that apply to federal contractors, covered companies are legally required to create affirmative action plans annually. These affirmative action plans generally require performing various data analyses of workforce demographics. If contractors find that females, minorities, individuals with disabilities, and protected veterans are underrepresented based on those analyses, they must set placement goals to increase representation of those groups.

Affirmative action under these laws, however, expressly prohibits using protected categories, such as race or gender, as a factor in making employment decisions or having any quotas or set asides based on race, gender, or other protected characteristics. Instead, these laws require contractors to focus on increasing representation of certain underrepresented groups through various outreach and DEI efforts, including undertaking recruitment practices aimed at creating diverse candidate pools, which, over time and through application of a neutral selection process, should lead to progress on placement goals.

Voluntary Affirmative Action Programs: Absent legal requirements to create affirmative action plans, employers can, in certain limited instances, create voluntary affirmative action plans, allowing the employer to engage in certain preferential treatment based on a protected class.

Employers, however, must have a sufficient justification and meet certain criteria to ensure these plans are permissible under anti-discrimination laws. Under Court precedent, a voluntary affirmative action plan is generally permissible only if: (1) it is designed to eliminate a manifest imbalance in traditionally segregated job categories (i.e., it is remedial); (2) it does not unnecessarily trammel the interests of non‑diverse candidates; and (3) it is a temporary measure intended to attain, not maintain, a balanced workforce.

The EEOC also has [long-standing guidance](https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/cm-607-affirmative-action) on voluntary affirmative action programs, which identifies three limited circumstances where voluntary affirmative action programs can be used by employers: (1) where an analysis reveals that existing or contemplated employment practices are likely to cause an actual or potential adverse impact; (2) where a comparison between the employer’s workforce and the appropriate labor pool reveals that diversity efforts are necessary to correct the effects of prior discriminatory practices; and (3) where a limited labor pool of qualified people of color and women exists due to historical restrictions by employers, labor organizations, or others. Because employers typically do not conduct the analyses required to determine whether there are any workplace diversity imbalances, many employers do not meet the criteria necessary to have voluntary affirmative action programs.

State Legislation Creates Risk for Workforce Diversity Programs

Companies are increasingly having to navigate the growing trend of lawmakers passing and considering various legislation and measures aimed at limiting certain DEI policies, trainings, and practices. Although much of the state legislation and measures relating to DEI efforts only apply to educational institutions and universities, a few states have taken measures targeted at employers outside the educational context.

Florida: In 2022, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed into law the Stop W.O.K.E Act (“SWA”). The SWA, among other things, prohibited employers in Florida from requiring Florida-based workers to attend certain types of DEI trainings, if such trainings could espouse, promote, advance, or compel specified diversity concepts, such as critical race theory. In August 2022, a federal judge in Florida temporarily blocked the SWA provisions relating to workplace DEI efforts on grounds that those provisions violated the First Amendment, which was upheld by the U.S. Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals on March 16, 2023.[[1]](https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/are-workplace-diversity-programs-in-5266972/#_ftn1) In the meantime, Florida continues to challenge employer DEI policies this legislative session, including introducing the “Reverse Woke Act,” which aims to discourage employers from offering insurance to cover gender-affirming care by making employers responsible for the lifetime costs (even if not employed) for an employee’s detransition care.

Texas: In February 2023, Texas Governor Abbott issued a memorandum to state agencies warning them not to use any DEI programs in hiring that are “inconsistent” with Texas law, including setting diversity goals or interview targets for diverse candidates. The memorandum provides that hiring cannot be based on anything “other than merit.” Although the memorandum is aimed at Texas public employers, it is unclear whether the guidance in this memorandum could also apply to private companies that contract with Texas or whether the Texas Governor may take similar action towards private employers in the state.

Kansas: Kansas lawmakers recently passed a budget amendment to Kansas’ Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board, which oversees licensing for various professionals in the state, including psychologists, social workers, addiction specialists, and family therapists. The amendment seeks to prohibit using that Board’s budget to require “licensees or permit holders to go through training or education on ‘diversity, equity, inclusion, . . . or other related topics.’”

Perhaps in response to legislation and other social movements seeking to limit DEI in the workplace, companies are also seeing an uptick in the number of cases challenging diversity programs. Although these suits have largely been unsuccessful, employers should be cautious in creating and executing their DEI efforts to avoid inadvertently treading into practices that could be found to be unlawful. In October 2021, for instance, a jury in a North Carolina federal court awarded a former white Senior VP $10 million in damages based on its finding that the employee was terminated due to his employer’s “intentional campaign to promote diversity in its management ranks.”[[2]](https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/are-workplace-diversity-programs-in-5266972/#_ftn2) The evidence presented to the jury, among other things, showed that, shortly after the company formed a special counsel in 2018 to address its failure to meet leadership diversity targets, white men were discharged and women and people of color were promoted in near uniformity.

Although reverse discrimination cases challenging workplace diversity programs is not new, the potential risks of these types of claims may be heightened by the current trend of laws limiting DEI programs and the Court potentially ending affirmative action in college admissions.

Practical Steps to Mitigate Risk for Workplace Diversity Programs

In anticipation of the Court overturning affirmative action for college admissions and considering the increasing trend of state laws seeking to limit DEI programs and reverse discrimination litigation, employers should consider reviewing their DEI and affirmative action efforts closely and consider measures to mitigate potential risk.

Review DEI Programs for Vulnerabilities: Companies should review existing DEI efforts with an eye towards areas of vulnerability. Employers might consider their DEI policies, internship programs, employee resource groups, and other diversity efforts to ensure they do not create unlawful preferences based on protected characteristics or include quotas or set asides. Hires and promotions should be based on business-related criteria and merit. If employers intend to increase diversity by using preferences based on protected characteristics, employers should tread carefully to ensure those programs comply with Court precedent and EEOC guidance for establishing lawful voluntary affirmative action programs. Employers should also review their policies, procedures, and promotional materials about their DEI programs for any statements that describe the companies’ practices in a manner that could viewed as unlawful. In some cases, plaintiffs have used statements in DEI policies and literature to support reverse discrimination claims.

Justify Efforts for DEI Programs: In anticipation of the Court ruling against affirmative action, employers should be prepared to justify the importance of their existing DEI programs and how those programs are consistent with the law. Such justifications could include tangible evidence to demonstrate how increased diversity can improve the company’s bottom line through increased collaboration and better decision-making.

Train Managers on Not Using Race or Preferences in Employment Decisions: Employers should consider conducting manager and employee training, emphasizing that the company’s anti-discrimination policies are aimed at ensuring fair and lawful employment decisions, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, and other protected characteristics. The training should explain that recruiting for diversity is legitimate, but that selection should be based on the most qualified candidate (regardless of their demographics), and not take protected characteristics into account.

Review Diversity Trainings for Risk: Review current diversity trainings, including unconscious bias training, in light of recent legislation aimed at limiting DEI programs and trainings that might make it vulnerable to attack. Employers might be able to mitigate risk by making some of the diversity trainings voluntary or including disclaimers (e.g., trainings are provided purely for education and are not intended to compel employees to believe any of the concepts discussed).

Monitor State Laws Limiting DEI Programs: Continue to monitor state laws and regulations aimed at limiting DEI programs and determine whether those laws could affect the company’s diversity training, programs, and strategies.

<https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/are-workplace-diversity-programs-in-5266972/>

**Does therapy during the workday get in the way of productivity?**

Since the pandemic pushed [virtual health](https://www.benefitnews.com/news/this-brooklyn-mental-health-clinic-is-making-comprehensive-mental-health-care-accessible) appointments and work-from-home into the mainstream, it's never been easier for employees to see their therapists during the workday. Yet, it still comes with a host of challenges.

Nearly 22% of adults in the U.S. received [mental health](https://www.benefitnews.com/tag/mental-health) treatment in 2021, a 2% jump from 2019, according to the CDC. As mental health help becomes further destigmatized in America, this number is likely to trend upwards, and employers should be prepared to accommodate employees seeking to better their health — even if that means cutting out some time during the workday, explains Annie Rosencrans, director of people and culture at HR management platform HiBob.

"A lot of therapists don't have availability on weekends or before and after work," says Rosencrans. "Managers need to consider the needs of the role and when it's reasonable for someone to take some time off."

Three years on from the start of the pandemic, and remote or hybrid work has become a permanent fixture for many knowledge-based workers who previously...

Rosencrans notes that even if an employee can find a therapist appointment before or after work hours, their own personal commitments may make it difficult to consistently attend appointments. Rather, managers should be willing to help an employee set aside an hour or so a week to receive treatment if the employee is having trouble doing so by themselves.

"If an employee feels like they have to hide it or it needs to be a secret, that's not a great reflection of the manager-employee relationship," says Rosencrans. "It doesn't support the productivity of the employee either."

In fact, Rosencrans can personally attest to the [positive impact](https://www.benefitnews.com/news/wellness-in-the-workplace-a-cpos-advice-on-avoiding-stress-and-burnout) therapy is having on her own mental health and her work. She has a virtual therapy appointment every Friday afternoon.

"A lot of my anxiety and mental health challenges are often related to stress from work," she says. "So it's particularly helpful to take a step back and get an outsider's perspective on some of the things I'm going through. It refreshes me, and if I'm having a tough day, it helps me rest, get my mind organized, and better approach the day."

Still, that doesn't mean the only challenge employees will encounter is scheduling the appointment itself or even talking to their manager. Therapy is an emotional experience and can be exhausting on its own, let alone in the middle of the workday.

"If an employee breaks away for an hour to talk about something really personal and emotional, it may be hard for them to get back into the flow of the day," says Rosencrans. "The need for transition time should be taken into account."

In other words, employees may not be able to readily jump straight into a meeting or an intensive task. However, this shouldn't deter employers from encouraging employees to seek help during the workday, underlines Rosencrans. Instead, managers should be considerate of this hour block on their employee's calendar and refrain from filling up their schedule with meetings right after unless absolutely necessary.

Ultimately, Rosencrans advises employers to make it easy for employees to take care of themselves. Otherwise, many employees will postpone treatment — and whether their ailments are physical or mental, it will likely impact their work if left untreated.

"Employees need to be able to proactively take care of themselves," says Rosencrans. "If they're not doing that, how can they possibly bring their best selves to work?"

<https://www.benefitnews.com/news/should-you-have-therapy-during-the-workday>

**Five Tips to Increase Your Productivity and Manage Your Mental Health When Working From Home**

Productivity and mental health are closely linked. With companies now offering hybrid work or the ability to fully work from home, it is even more vital that employees look after themselves.

With depression, anxiety and burnout being the most common manifestations of poor mental health, the experts at [Joy Organics](https://joyorganics.com/) have compiled a list of five tips to help manage your mental health and increase productivity when you work from home.

Take a break

It’s important to be away from your work every few hours otherwise your brain will freeze up and feelings of burnout or anxiety will start to become stronger. Only eleven out of fifty states mandate some type of rest break for workers. If your employer allows a break, you should make sure it is uninterrupted.

This is difficult when an office is also a kitchen or a bedroom but a small walk in your garden or just around your neighborhood will help.

Having a break allows your brain to reset itself from any stressful situations. Research from the association of psychological science suggests that a ten-minute break for every hour you work is a good balance to maintain productivity.

Don’t take on too much

Hustle culture has become common in workplaces over the past few years, where everyone is trying to take on everything their managers give them. This can be a huge contributor to stress and depression as the work keeps coming in.

You have a finite number of hours at work, so don’t take on a week’s worth hoping to get it done in a day. Set boundaries and know when to focus on the work you already have.

It is tempting to work extra hours when working from home as access to documents on your laptop is so easy. However, this will only hurt your mental health. A healthy separation of work and private life is one of the most important things for remote workers. Think about putting everything work-related onto a different browser or screen to simulate ‘going to the office.’

Communicate

Having another perspective is useful for lowering your stress levels. Talking to your team or a manager alleviates the feeling of being lonely and means that you can solve problems faster.

Feelings of isolation are much more common in remote work, however there are ways you can alleviate those feelings.

Instead of struggling with a project alone, ask for a quick meeting or an informal chat to have another set of eyes on it. Reach out to other team members and organize a brainstorming session. Be aware that communication does go both ways and you should be available to help others just as they help you.

Set Small Objectives

Looking at your work as a huge single object is daunting. Those feelings of dread can feed into depression and anxiety so splitting up your work into manageable chunks will make things easier.

A simple way to do this is by using Stephen Covey’s four quadrants of time management approach. This method uses four categories:

Urgent and important – unforeseen events and urgent matters

Not urgent but important – smaller tasks that won’t affect your deadlines

Urgent but not important – meetings and phone calls

Not urgent and not important – checking social media

Get a good night’s sleep

When you’re tired and low on energy it becomes harder to concentrate. Getting at least eight hours of sleep each night will allow your brain to rest and you will be better equipped to deal with whatever the workplace throws at you.

Before going to bed, you should do something relaxing and not stare at a phone screen or catch up on work. This helps to signal that it’s time to sleep.

A spokesperson for [Joy Organics](https://joyorganics.com/) commented that:

“According to a study by [stress.org](http://stress.org/), more than 50% of workers are not as productive at work due to stress, and 39% claim workload is the main cause.

“Workplace stress can affect anyone, but research has shown that women must contend with their hormones on top of everyday stresses. In fact, 57% of women reported feeling burnout because of work stress, compared to 48% of men.

“It’s important that companies work towards more inclusive workplaces that have a healthy work-life balance and manage employee stress by being transparent.”

<https://northfortynews.com/category/health-and-wellness/five-tips-to-increase-your-productivity-and-manage-your-mental-health-when-working-from-home/>

 **To Curb Burnout, Design Jobs to Better Match Employees’ Needs**

Burnt out employees show that there are urgent problems to be addressed at the heart of any organization. But burnout is a management and organizational issue, not a physical or mental health issue, so promoting self-care won’t usually help employees recover.

Burnout is a response to chronic job stressors — high-frequency events embedded in workplace practices that have not been successfully managed. Over time, these stressors lead to an erosion of workers’ energy, involvement, and self-confidence to the point where they feel exhausted, cynical, and ineffective in their job and “burnt out.” There are many well-intentioned efforts to solve burnout in the world of work, but frequently, they address the effects of the problem — not its source. Burnout is a management and organizational issue, not a physical or mental health issue, so promoting self-care won’t usually help employees recover.

Think of burnt-out employees as canaries in the coal mine. When the canary keels over, we acknowledge that the environment is hazardous — we don’t tell the canary that it should take a long weekend.

The whole notion of burnout treatment needs to be flipped. Burnt out individuals show that there are urgent problems to be addressed at the heart of any organization. The real solution is to redesign workplaces so that the causes of burnout are no longer so frequent or intense. In other words, how can chronic job stressors be successfully managed at their source?

The answer to this question lies in improving the match, or good fit, between workers and the workplace. Yes, it is OK to help individuals cope with burnout, but it is more important to create better job matches for them. This article will show leaders and managers how to begin.

The Various Sources of Mismatches

The kinds of chronic job stressors that cause burnout — the “pebbles in your shoe” that lead to [exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4911781/) — can emerge from several kinds of mismatches.

These mismatches reflect a bad fit between the job and basic human needs, such as

competence, belongingness, and psychological safety. Such mismatches can occur in [six core areas](https://www.amazon.com/Burnout-Challenge-Managing-Peoples-Relationships/dp/0674251016/ref%3Dtmm_hrd_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=1678289989&sr=8-3), which apply to all people, regardless of their job:

Workload

Control

Reward

Community

Fairness

Values

A mismatch in workload often involves high demands and insufficient resources to meet those demands successfully (for example, not enough time, staff, information, equipment, etc.).

A control mismatch involves inadequate autonomy to do the job well, while a reward mismatch means that good work is not receiving appropriate recognition or opportunities.

Community mismatches are most extreme in socially toxic workplaces where there is incivility, bullying, or harassment, rather than mutual trust and support. A mismatch in fairness involves discrimination and inequitable practices, while a values mismatch means that there are ethical, moral, and legal conflicts in the workplace.

In our book, [The Burnout Challenge](https://www.amazon.com/Burnout-Challenge-Managing-Peoples-Relationships/dp/0674251016/ref%3Dtmm_hrd_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=1678289989&sr=8-3), we describe these six areas in more detail, in terms of both matches and mismatches, and give examples of how various organizations have worked to improve the matches. These descriptions can help readers assess which mismatches might be prevalent in their workplaces.

The six mismatches framework can be used to better understand the true nature of chronic job stressors. For example, we worked with the CEO of an 800-person organization who believed that his employees would have negative ratings about workload (because “everybody complains that it is too much”) and reward (because “everybody wants a higher salary”). However, after we conducted a survey assessment of the organization, the CEO was shocked to see that instead fairness was the most severe mismatch. One fairness-related stressor that stood out: a “distinguished service award” that employees overwhelmingly felt was rigged to be given to undeserving recipients.

Once it became clear that the nomination and decision processes were widely despised and distrusted, the company set out to redesign this award and eventually agreed to a new way to recognize distinguished service and to reward it appropriately. When we visited the organization a year later to do a follow-up assessment for our research, we found that the issue of fairness was no longer a company liability. This example shows that identifying the specific area of mismatch is just as important as identifying the stressor; if the CEO had attempted to address derision about the service award as a “reward” problem, he might have exacerbated the situation by increasing the cash prize associated with it.

Another important aspect of moving from mismatches to matches is gaining flexibility. The U.S. Air Force’s search for the perfect fighter jet cockpit provides a valuable lesson. In the 1950s, Air Force engineers took on a huge project to measure the exact dimensions of an average man’s body (only men were Air Force pilots in those days). From length of shin to the width between a fully extended thumb and little finger, no calculation was too small. Their goal was to design a seat and instruments that would be perfect for the average person. The glitch was that they discovered there were no people who were average on all measurements. They had built a perfectly average cockpit that fit no one. To their credit, rather than give up, they turned the project on its head, and designed cockpits that were adjustable across the critical dimensions. That approach allowed people with all their distinct personal dimensions to create matches with their working environment.

This example of building flexibility around physical qualities sets us in the right direction to explore flexibility around psychological qualities in order to create better matches between workers and jobs. For example, in our research we frequently identify micromanagement by supervisors — a mismatch of control — as an employee stressor. Lack of control over when, where, and how to work frustrates people’s sense of autonomy and competence. But, as with designing jet fighters, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to creating a control match. Rather than trying to generate one ideal system of control, organizations should foster a flexible dialogue that can adjust to the qualities of the supervisor, the employees, and the nature of their job.

Redesigning Jobs to Create Better Matches

Improving matches — helping people find fulfillment within an area of work life — can nudge employees away from burnout and toward engagement with work. Leaders should embrace the idea that developing their workplaces is a creative process. Fixing problems won’t involve applying a single “best practice.” A leader’s job is not coming up with the answer; it is running a collaborative process with employees to address the persistent mismatches that employees experience at work.

We recommend five critical steps:

1. Ask for input on mismatches.

Although assessments often do confirm what leaders think is happening, it is important for them to be open to learning something new. The most direct route to identifying mismatches is to ask people (anonymously) about their experiences and their suggestions for how to make improvements. Administering a survey starts a conversation with employees. Their responses are their proposals for consideration by leadership. What are the chronic job stressors, and how might these be modified or eliminated?

Sometimes the message is straightforward, such as “the workload is just too much.” But often the message is more nuanced. In some organizations the workload may be challenging, but there may be greater concern about the amount of autonomy employees have over what they do (a control mismatch). In other settings, people have indicated they could handle the workload if team members could work together in a more respectful and cooperative way (a community mismatch).

After asking for input, it is essential for leaders to summarize the findings and share them publicly. This is the only way to convey that “we have listened to your input, and this is what we have learned from it.” [In a previous HBR article](https://hbr.org/2021/03/how-to-measure-burnout-accurately-and-ethically), we noted that it is essential for leaders to provide feedback to employees who have taken the time to answer their survey questions.

2. Pivot to consider a range of positive matches.

The next step is to develop new ways of doing things. A timely and thoughtful public presentation of the survey results for the organization as a whole, as well as for each unit, continues the conversation by shifting to the possibility of positive change. It is important to immediately ask for ideas of how to do things better. This step calls upon creative problem-solving to find viable solutions for persistent mismatches.

For example, a recent survey we administered ended with an open-ended invitation to share two ideas to improve the respondents’ experience at work. The feedback presentations ended with a slide summarizing these responses. A working group can build on such ideas to develop detailed plans for change.

3. Begin with attainable goals.

Often when designing better matches, it is more important to make small, tangible gains quickly, rather than to embark on a long journey toward a large gain. For example, unit managers in a hospital we visited complained of a tedious procedure for approving overtime for nurses. When such procedures were streamlined in the wake of the pandemic, the unit managers gained more time to devote to their staff and patient load. Plus, being given the authority to make these approvals demonstrated a show of trust and respect from higher-ups they hadn’t felt before. This easy win improved their matches on control and workload with minimal risk or cost to the employer. Although modest in scope, the change demonstrated leadership’s willingness to improve job conditions, as well as employees’ potential to have a voice in decisions that affected their work life.

4. Use design principles.

People often describe processes that lead to mismatches as too complicated — rules and regulations that add unnecessary steps to their job and interrupt a sense of flow to their work. When redesigning jobs, simplify them wherever possible. If new tasks are being added, then other tasks need to be subtracted. Good design also balances intensity with restful periods. It alternates social involvement with deep work alone, and alternates stretches of intense concentration with periods of quiet reflection.

For jobs where remote work is possible, strict office-only and hybrid-work policies can lead to many types of mismatches. People chafe at inflexible policies that insist that everyone must come to the workplace all the time when some tasks can be done just as well at home. Developing a process with a practical rhythm of “together time” balanced against “solitary time” (perhaps remote) can have a positive effect on community, workload, fairness, and control matches.

5. Build in progress checkpoints.

Whatever innovations are developed will need continual assessment, adjustment, and refinement. Real progress always involves practice and course-correction. An organizational checkup that assesses the central elements of job-person matches keeps efforts on track. Ongoing monitoring of the workplace through a process of change and continuous improvement can shift the concept of a “job-person match” from an abstract ideal to a practical dimension of workplace management.

We have found that first-line managers are often an important pivot point for addressing mismatches, because they are in the best position to work with their employees and teams to identify problem areas and design better solutions. With sufficient latitude from upper management, they can help people adjust and customize their work environment to enable productive matches.

Rather than discovering a silver bullet to eliminate burnout, executives need a new way of thinking about leadership at work. Managing in the third decade of the twenty-first century calls for greater responsiveness to the mismatches that employees experience at work, closer attention to their psychological motivations, and greater flexibility in job design and work conditions. They must broaden their capacity for leading collaborative problem solving with employees and managers. Burned out employees signal the need to fix mismatches throughout the organization, which will have positive implications for all employees, not just a few. A recent [Gallup poll](https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace-2022-report.aspx) found that 80% of workers worldwide are “not engaged” with their job. Although those 80% are certainly not all burned out, they likely experience some elements of exhaustion, cynicism, or inefficacy at work. Improving job-person matches does not simply avoid the most negative outcomes — rather it increases a workplace’s potential to bring out the best in the workers of the future.

<https://hbr.org/2023/03/to-curb-burnout-design-jobs-to-better-match-employees-needs>

**‘Wellbeing washing’ is the covert workplace trend that could negatively impact your mental health**

Wellbeing washing allows businesses to lure potential employees into a false sense of security, with the perception that they have the tools and the environment to support their staff’s wellbeing without actually doing the work.

When it comes to our [mental health](https://www.stylist.co.uk/health/mental-health/laziness-psychology-burnout/568074), our [jobs](https://www.stylist.co.uk/life/careers/how-to-find-joy-at-work/764205) can play a vital role.

After all, we spend a large proportion of our time at [work](https://www.stylist.co.uk/life/careers/sunday-scaries-work-boundaries-research/770541), whether we’re in the [office](https://www.stylist.co.uk/fitness-health/wellbeing/techniques-to-combat-stress-and-anxiety-at-work-mental-health-tips/171904) or [working from home](https://www.stylist.co.uk/home/productivity-wallpaper-poodle-blonde-working-from-home/603989). It’s also where much of our effort and time is placed, and it can drastically impact our lives – both positively and negatively.

In fact, The Workplace Health report found [35% of employees](https://championhealth.co.uk/insights/employee-wellbeing-statistics/) said that the stress they experience at work is having a negative impact on them.

[Telus Health](https://www.telus.com/en/health)’s global [mental health](https://www.stylist.co.uk/health/mental-health/one-good-thing-aaa-approach/767977) report for 2022 also found that people became 43% more sensitive to [stress](https://www.stylist.co.uk/health/mental-health/vagus-nerve-stress-anxiety-benefits/518252), while 27% can’t disconnect after a work day.

With discussions around [mental health](https://www.stylist.co.uk/health/mental-health/wellbeing-tips-basics/716799) in the [workplace](https://www.stylist.co.uk/relationships/dating-love/workplace-lingo-dating/770797) becoming increasingly common, ensuring that companies are well equipped to support employees’ [mental health](https://www.stylist.co.uk/health/mental-health/automatic-negative-thoughts/722401) and wellbeing is key – but ‘wellbeing washing’ is one covert trend that could affect that.

Wellbeing washing is a phrase used to describe businesses that publicly advocate for employee wellbeing and good [mental health](https://www.stylist.co.uk/health/mental-health/anxiety-fear-of-losing-control/718180) support without backing it up with tangible benefits.

This trend is particularly tricky because it allows businesses to lull potential employees into a false sense of security, with the perception that the [workplace](https://www.stylist.co.uk/life/careers/company-cultures-that-help-women-careers/630829) will have the tools and the environment to support staff wellbeing without actually doing the work.

“Wellbeing washing means that businesses don’t have the infrastructure to adequately support their employees’ [mental health](https://www.stylist.co.uk/entertainment/celebrity/alex-scott-racist-misogynistic-abuse-mental-health/711218) and wellbeing – and by doing this, companies risk eroding their credibility,” says Paula Allen, senior vice-president at Telus Health.

The workplace environment can play a role in mental wellbeing, flexibility, psychological safety and being valued.

“Additionally, it means that the business will not benefit from the advantages of investing in worker wellbeing.”

Allen says that employee wellbeing should be a priority among business leaders; otherwise, they’ll risk losing their best talent to companies that genuinely value their teams’ health and wellbeing.

But how can employees tell if wellbeing washing is happening in their own [workplace](https://www.stylist.co.uk/news/international-day-of-the-girl-future-workplace/717475)? Well, Allen suggests checking on what’s in place at the company you work for so you’re fully aware of the benefits available to you.

“Many organisations have great programs and services such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), but they do not communicate them well,” she says.

“If nothing truly is in place, then make a recommendation to your human resources department. In some cases, there is no focus on what is lacking because it appears that employees do not feel a gap.”

Ensuring that a company isn’t wellbeing washing is important for both employers and employees. It allows for those working for the company to feel supported knowing that there is a system in place while employers can ensure they are adequately advocating for their staff’s mental health and wellbeing as opposed to just claiming to be.

“The workplace environment can play a role in mental wellbeing, flexibility, psychological safety and being valued,” says Allen.

“Organisations that support both [mental health](https://www.stylist.co.uk/entertainment/celebrity/mel-c-spice-girls-mental-health/705621) and wellbeing services like EAP, and a positive culture, are more likely to have higher [mental health](https://www.stylist.co.uk/health/mental-health/monthly-reflection-how-to-reflect/539862) scores on our [mental health](https://www.stylist.co.uk/health/mental-health/talking-about-emotions-young-women/702294) index. This correlates with higher [productivity](https://www.stylist.co.uk/health/mental-health/productivity-paralysis/771361), innovation and customer service.”

With employees feeling more [stressed](https://www.stylist.co.uk/health/mental-health/stress-anxiety-quick-relief/653274) and facing a lack of work-life balance, all talk and no action simply won’t cut it – and wellbeing washing is one thing that mustn’t go unnoticed.

<https://www.stylist.co.uk/life/careers/work-best-friend-benefits/776346>

**Many HR leaders lack resources to meet workers’ mental health, well-being needs**

7 in 10 worried about manager training to provide support to employees

Human resources leaders anticipate that factors relating to workers’ mental state will be among their top hurdles this year, according to a recent report.

About six in 10 cite employee mental health (61%) and employee well-being (56%) among their top challenges for 2023, reports Dialogue Health Technologies.

However, 58% also say providing mental health training/resources for managers will be a challenge. And almost half (48%) say their employee benefits programs do not provide access to a mental health professional.

Forty-five percent of HR leaders find it difficult to ensure employees are making the most of their benefit plans and 70% have not trained managers or feel managers have insufficient training to help them recognize and support employees' mental health needs.

Nearly half (48%) report that their employee benefits programs do not provide access to a mental health professional, and over four in 10 believe their current mental health support is insufficient (29%) or is non-existent (14%).

Overall, only 38% of HR professionals believe [they effectively supported employees with mental health challenges](https://www.hcamag.com/ca/specialization/mental-health/just-2-in-5-hr-professionals-feel-they-effectively-support-workers-mental-health/436454) in 2022, according to a previous report from the Society for Human Resource Management ([SHRM](https://www.hcamag.com/ca/companies/shrm/120873)).

Remote workers and mental health

And the problem is growing. Over three in 10 (31%) of HR leaders with a remote workforce believe that employees’ mental health is getting worse, according to Dialogue’s report, based on a survey of 98 Canadian HR leaders who collectively manage health and wellness benefits for over 50,000 employees, conducted between Jan. 17 and Feb. 2, 2023.

And among the 36% of workers that report mental health problems, many say they are experiencing more stress/anxiety (55%), reduced productivity (39%) and increased absenteeism (33%).

"It's important to recognize where organizational blind spots may be and make improvements that promote a positive and healthy working culture to attract and retain top talent," says Jean-Nicolas Guillemette, COO at Dialogue. "Mental health and well-being will continue to be an important focus for employees. Organizations would therefore gain by providing HR leaders with the resources to adapt strategies to employee needs and by investing in benefits and programs that support a healthy workplace."

Over nine in 10 (91%) of HR leaders agree that mental health tools and resources that employees can use themselves would facilitate proactive self-care, and of Canadians agree that self-guided tools could help them be more proactive about mental health, and they would be likely to use such tools.

[Forty-six percent of workers are “burning out” in their current roles](https://www.hcamag.com/ca/specialization/mental-health/burned-out-employees-declining-but-numbers-remain-high/438971), with younger workers (51%) and women (48%) reporting higher levels of tension, according to a report from Eagle Hill Consulting.

Total well-being

HR leaders believe that the following are important to well-being, finds the Dialogue survey:

Financial situation (96%)

Mental health (94%)

Work-life Balance (94%)

Physical Health (93%)

And many employers appear to be failing not just when it comes providing mental health supports. For financial issues, less than half provide support for these well-being issues:

Financial counselling (48%)

Family counselling (44%)

Legal counselling (42%)

And for physical health, while 43% of Canadians have experienced muscle or skeletal pain related to their work set-up at home:

47% of employers do not include paramedical coverage.

76% do not include wellness spending accounts.

77% do not include healthcare spending accounts.

In 2022, employers were expected to [lose more than $40 billion due to workers dealing with personal financial matters at work](https://www.hrreporter.com/focus-areas/compensation-and-benefits/financially-stressed-workers-costing-employers-billions-report/371122), up from the $26.9 billion they lost in 2021, according to the National Payroll Institute.

<https://www.hcamag.com/ca/specialization/financial-wellness/many-hr-leaders-lack-resources-to-meet-workers-mental-health-well-being-needs/439605>

**How to Create a Trauma-Informed Workplace**

As the July Fourth parade stepped off in Highland Park, Ill., last year, police officers marched near the front with their very own grand marshal—Vinny Duke, a therapy dog. Firefighters and their family members accompanied a vintage hook-and-ladder truck.

Residents, from young children to grandparents, lined the parade route in the Chicago suburb, reveling in the city’s first Independence Day parade since before the pandemic.

Then shots rang out from a rooftop and bullets rained down on young and old, killing seven people and wounding dozens more.

As the crowd fled frantically toward safety, Highland Park’s first responders sprang into action, tracking down the shooter and processing the grisly crime scene.

“Most [first responders] had to leave their families and immediately transition to response,” says the city’s HR manager, Emily Taub, SHRM-SCP. “They did what was needed to be done before they could check in [with their families].”

Taub, filling in for a colleague who was on vacation, was thrust into leading logistics at the emergency operations center while also providing HR support to the town’s 250 employees, especially those first responders.

In addition to juggling nuts-and-bolts tasks such as stocking the emergency center with toilet paper for the influx of staff, she and other leaders kept city employees updated with information during the manhunt and let them know that none of their colleagues had been injured. Taub also called in the 100 Club of Illinois, a group that offers support for first responders.

Between the 100 Club and the city’s employee assistance program (EAP), Taub had mental health counselors available within hours, including two counselors trained specifically in dealing with trauma. In the ensuing days, small groups, such as shifts of firefighters, could talk through what happened, guided by experts.

Taub’s job was hardly done after that day. She has worked for months to help employees through the aftermath.

Her work didn’t start that day, either. She had laid the groundwork earlier by rolling out training programs—including active-shooter awareness for the entire city staff—and engaging in culture-building efforts.

Many traumatic events don’t make national headlines as they did in Highland Park and Chesapeake, Va., where a Walmart manager opened fire on colleagues last November. Plenty of other less-obvious cases of trauma, including car accidents, medical diagnoses, domestic violence and deaths from natural causes, regularly affect those in the workplace.

Fortunately, HR professionals can help by being trained to provide quick and sensitive responses when employees face such life-altering events.

“Because of the nature of our work and where we sit in organizations, it will be something HR professionals will have to deal with in their careers,” says Rebecca Edwards, SHRM-SCP, CEO of Infinite HR, a Charlotte, N.C.-based consultancy. “We have to be that Rock of Gibraltar when something happens.”

HR has successfully pushed to become a strategic partner in the C-suite, but practitioners need to remember what the “H” in “HR” stands for, says Crystal Whittenton, SHRM-CP, HR director at Southern Outdoor Restoration in Raleigh, N.C.

“People are not spreadsheets,” Whittenton says. “If you lose track of the fact they are humans, the strategy won’t matter.”

Provide Training

Given the ubiquity of trauma in the world, some experts are calling on employers to develop “trauma-informed” workplaces. As a result, a number of training programs have popped up to help organizations through the storms.

Joelle Monaco, an organizational development consultant in Albany, N.Y., for instance, offers mental health first aid training for public and private organizations. Instead of medical triage skills, she teaches staffers how to handle traumatic events and other difficult situations.

“We’re more likely to come across someone with mental health or behavioral challenges than someone choking,” Monaco says.

The aftereffects of trauma can lead to self-doubt and an inability to solve problems.

“Unmanaged negative stress can manifest itself if we don’t navigate it with self-care and coping strategies,” Monaco says.

The training she provides teaches leaders and managers to recognize signs of emotional distress in employees and then connect them with care services.

Kelsey Crowe runs Empathy Bootcamp of San Francisco. At her training sessions, she offers an “empathy menu” of things to say and do—along with what to avoid.

The work environment makes what’s already difficult—knowing how to approach someone going through a crisis—even more complicated. Colleagues who don’t know someone well should break through their reticence if they have useful guidance to share, especially from a similar experience, she says. And those who are close to a co-worker going through a difficult time should get past any worries that saying “I’m sorry” isn’t enough.

But expressing concern shouldn’t be a public performance in the middle of a meeting, she notes. Colleagues also can choose a gesture when words fail them.

Crowe’s menu of empathy gestures also includes offering to take someone out for lunch, pooling vacation time to donate to a colleague, offering to pick up work slack for someone distracted by trauma or organizing a fundraiser for a colleague’s favorite charity.

For her book, Crowe surveyed 2,500 people going through trauma, and most said too few people reached out to them.

“If I were to choose between too much care and too little, too little is awful,” Crowe says. “People start to feel like a pariah and everyone is avoiding them.”

Plan a Response

Whatever the traumatic event is, HR needs an action plan, which can include bringing in EAP resources and local government mental health professionals to develop a long-term agenda to deal with the aftermath. Immediate needs can include sharing a list of providers who are taking new patients and arranging group discussions facilitated by a mental health professional, Monaco says.

Not all team members will want help immediately; some will need more time before they’re ready to seek mental health treatment, she adds.

Taub says that after the parade shooting, she made sure to get the message out that there was “no right way to feel.” Highland Park’s municipal employees are spread across various buildings throughout the city, and Taub and her staff visited each one—a practice she had established before the tragedy as a way to get to know workers through “HR office hours” at their worksites.

“We know there are a number of individuals who are having a difficult time,” Taub says. “We want to make sure we are best positioning our employees to serve the community. They can’t do that if they don’t have the support they need.”

To that end, the city extended funding for employee mental health benefits so they would be completely covered at least through the end of 2022.

Katharine Manning, whose Chevy Chase, Md.-based company, Blackbird LLC, offers training and consulting on how to create empathy in the workplace, recommends employers adopt a “LASER” approach:

Listen to the feelings of workers.

Acknowledge the difficulty.

Share information about what happened and the process for dealing with it.

Empower people with resources.

Return to the issue instead of just dropping it.

Employees also need to learn to accept help, Taub says. Giving staffers time to decompress and process the tragedy was especially hard when they were working long hours on tasks such as securing the crime scene. Nearby police and fire departments came in to cover some shifts.

“Our inclination is to say, ‘We’re OK; we can handle it,’ ” Taub says. “We were not OK.”

Clarify Benefits

HR’s role in relaying benefits information can be crucial for those hit with a terminal diagnosis, catastrophic injury or other major trauma. Start by periodically refreshing workers’ memories as to what benefits are available, Monaco says.

“HR people say, ‘No one uses our EAP,’ ” she says. “I say, ‘How often do you market it?’ ”

Monaco suggests creating and sharing short videos on what resources are available. Employers can also bring in an insurance carrier representative to talk about mental health benefits.

Getting the word out, particularly after a tragedy, often requires repetition, says Manning, author of [The Empathetic Workplace: 5 Steps to a Compassionate, Calm, and Confident Response to Trauma on the Job](https://www.amazon.com/Empathetic-Workplace-Compassionate-Confident-Response/dp/1400220025/ref%3Dsr_1_1?crid=3ANIP0CCQ0P7H&keywords=empathetic+workplace&qid=1670878917&s=books&sprefix=empathetic+workplace%2cstripbooks%2c57&sr=1-1) (HarperCollins, 2021).

“When people are experiencing trauma and distress, it’s hard to process information,” Manning advises. “So make sure you’re speaking in short, clear sentences and repeat yourself a lot. It could be the first three times you mention the EAP, it goes over their heads. But the fourth time, it clicks.”

That’s especially true when someone receives a terminal diagnosis.

“We’re trying to explain FMLA [the Family and Medical Leave Act], but the person in front of us is coming to terms with what they just learned,” Edwards says. “It’s more than managing paperwork. Understand what’s happening internally with the person sitting in front of you.”

Edwards suggests putting the information in writing and encouraging the impacted employee to bring someone with them to a meeting with human resources. HR leaders need to make sure their staff is well-trained on available resources, she says, so they can best advise families. For instance, many life insurance policies include funeral planning services.

Don’t Forget About Self-Care

When HR professionals and managers offer help to workers, it’s important to make sure their own mental health doesn’t suffer. Sometimes, the experience of working closely with trauma victims can be too much.

“Managers are not therapists, and you don’t want them to be,” Manning says. “The manager is like the first responder: You provide immediate support and refer them on to the experts.”

Edwards advises building in time for decompression for HR staff who are dealing with traumatized employees, such as offering paid time off or temporarily shifting duties away from them.

“Whenever you are dealing with trauma, there’s a transfer of energy,” Edwards says. “They are going to feel that as a human, even when it’s not happening to them.”

Be Sensitive

HR can help with communications when something goes wrong. Edwards recalls a situation years ago when co-workers planned a baby shower for a colleague. After the baby died during birth, the employee "was terrified of coming back and having to relive this over and over with her co-workers," Edwards says. The woman asked Edwards to let her colleagues know before she returned to work that she didn't want to discuss anything.

Too often, managers assume they should be the ones relaying information about what an employee is going through. But they’re not always the best choice—especially if the worker doesn’t like their boss. HR should ask the employee who they would like to communicate any information they want shared with colleagues.

Crowe says HR practitioners and managers should be sensitive to what they say to those struggling with a traumatic experience, and that means understanding that their own listening skills might need improvement. Don’t minimize what the person is feeling or try to dictate what the individual should do, she advises.

A better approach, Crowe says, is to ask, “How are you doing today?” It’s more manageable and specific to answer.

Taub learned that employees need to lean on each other after trauma, but the bonds between them need to be built beforehand.

“It’s doing what you say, always being willing to assist in your day-to-day work, so in a time of crisis your co-workers know they can count on you and you can count on them,” Taub says.

When crises are handled well, it can help build that sort of culture. Whittenton’s company, which offers pressure-washing services, was rocked when a popular young manager, Marcel Burns Jr., was hit head-on while driving to the gym in the summer of 2020.

His colleagues were devastated, but they couldn’t visit him in the hospital or even deliver meals to his wife and young children because of safety protocols during the pandemic.

“This is a guy who the weekend before was taking his boy fishing and at the height of his physical abilities,” Whittenton says.

Despite having a leg amputated and becoming a quadriplegic, Burns kept up a positive attitude.

The company responded in a way that many small businesses might not be able to afford and larger ones might be reluctant to adopt out of concern that it might set an expensive precedent. But Whittenton says the owners never blanched at doing the right thing.

Southern Outdoor Restoration kept Burns on the payroll long after he became unable to work. The company sent teams of employees to Atlanta during his rehabilitation to wave signs outside his room during the lockdown. And after he went home, employees showed up to decorate his house for Christmas 2021 and deliver presents for his children. Although there wasn’t an existing policy for it, the owners allowed employees to donate their paid time off to him. They even paid for a video greeting from his favorite football player, Lawrence Taylor, and paired it with video well-wishes from co-workers.

“It solidified the culture and team feeling” at the company, Whittenton says. “People saw we weren’t just pretending to care.”

Sadly, Burns had a setback and died in late 2021.

“It was like the rug was pulled out,” Whittenton says of the reactions from the company’s employees.

Company leaders put a lot of thought into how replacing Burns would affect the employees he had supervised. They intentionally hired someone with a different personality, Whittenton says.

Strengthening Ties

Handling trauma well can help companies avoid problems in the workplace and preserve their talent pool and productivity.

The American Psychological Association’s [2022 Work and Well-being Survey](https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/work-well-being/2022-mental-health-support) showed that 81 percent of those asked say mental health support is an important consideration when they look for a job.

“People are starting to value their life and well-being,” Monaco says. “Businesses that don’t value their employees as people are quickly going to see their talent pool dwindle.”

And workers going through trauma can experience “presenteeism,” which is defined as decreased productivity, while they recover from the situation.

“They are going through the motions,” Monaco says.

Employees have been under a lot of stress in recent years. The pandemic meant people lost loved ones, felt isolated working from home and lived in fear of contracting a potentially deadly disease. Repeated incidents of police brutality against people of color brought an additional layer of trauma.

Some employees’ problems spill over onto their colleagues, Manning says, such as an abused woman leaving meetings abruptly when her abuser demands she take his calls or a troubled employee verbally lashing out at colleagues. Proactively addressing the issue with employees can head off lawsuits, negative publicity and other problems.

“It’s better if you can learn to manage this while the costs are still the quiet ones,” Manning says.

Handling trauma well can help bind employees and their organizations, as Whittenton and Taub found.

“The way we show up for each other in moments of trauma has a lasting impact on individual healing, trust between colleagues and on the person in trauma’s trust in the organization,” Manning says.

She recalls a friend who worked for BP when the company was addressing an oil spill. Despite the work pressures, her boss insisted she take time off to be with her dying father. That caring approach left her feeling like she would walk through fire for that leader, Manning says.

HR can coach managers on ways to help, which can boost both loyalty and productivity.

“When you’re in grief, you can stare at a spreadsheet for eight hours” without getting anything done, Crowe says.

A remedy is for managers to instill confidence by reminding the employee of their past hard work and accomplishments and offering time off if needed.

“When somebody receives an empathetic response, it can help improve someone’s focus,” Crowe says.

Although the impact of trauma and the best way to handle it can vary widely, there’s always a way for HR to help.

“Look to the individuals and what they need,” Whittenton says. “It doesn’t matter what happened; you can always start there.”

<https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/spring-2023/pages/how-to-create-a-trauma-informed-workplace-.aspx>

**‘Managers Play A Crucial Role’—Leaders React To Employee Mental Health**

Mental health is a topic of critical importance and front of mind for so many of us. My series on mental health has generated comments, ideas and recommendations—and it’s worth considering all the ways the collective thinking about mental health will shape responses from leaders and organizations.

Compelling data about the [major effects that managers have on mental health](https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2023/01/29/managers-have-major-impact-on-mental-health-how-to-lead-for-wellbeing) helped start the conversation. That led to discussions about [whether managers should be responsible](https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2023/02/21/should-managers-matter-that-much-to-mental-health-3-critical-considerations) for workers’ mental health; the [business benefits of considering employees’ mental health](https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2023/02/28/mental-health-delivers-big-business-benefits-3-strategies-for-success); and how [gratitude](https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2023/03/02/enhance-mental-health-with-a-culture-of-gratitude), [friendship](https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2023/03/07/maximize-mental-health-with-a-few-good-friends-heres-how) and [ensuring people feel seen](https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2023/02/23/4-ways-managers-can-ensure-workers-feel-seen-for-greater-mental-health), can have positive effects on their mental health.

Substantive research paved the way for the content and over 365,000 collective views catalyzed a dialogue with people representing organizations globally.

Hundreds of readers shared in comments on LinkedIn and other social media about the pressures they feel as leaders, the risk of burnout, and how best to support themselves and their teams during difficult times.

Here’s what leaders said about mental health and the ability for individuals and organizations to move forward.

Pressure

There is significant agreement that leaders and managers are under extraordinary pressure today. Their responsibilities go beyond the financial obligations that dominated manager accountability in the past. In addition, the new landscape of work adds strain. David Rosado, talent acquisition manager at Estee Lauder Companies, Inc., said, "With remote work becoming the new normal, it can be challenging to provide opportunities for employees to connect with their colleagues and managers." Today leaders must invest energy and emotional labor as they seek to get the balance right between a focus on people and a focus on business—and between driving results and ensuring supportive, connected environments for people.

Impact

Another key theme surrounded leaders’ significant level of impact. Respondents reinforced that when people leave an organization, it is most often because of their leader, not because of the company more broadly. In addition, leaders set a tone for the team, and their actions become magnified because of their roles. Fama Francisco, CEO global baby, feminine and family care, P&G, emphasizes both the impact and responsibility of leaders: “As managers we directly impact how employees feel about themselves. At the end of the day, we help them learn and grow, be recognized for their achievements and contribute to the success of the team. Leadership is a big responsibility!”

Match and Career Growth

Some commented that not everyone should lead people—and leadership isn’t always a fit based on skills. Career development often entails increasing people’s reporting relationships and spans of control. But it would be better to ensure value is placed on non-people-leader responsibilities as well—so employees can grow in their roles without necessarily leading others.

There was plenty of agreement about the extent of the support necessary for leaders. Coaching for leaders drives not only the quality of the leaders’ experience, but also their effect on others—so it has an exponential impact. And many people pointed out that leaders must be self-aware and understand how they’re coming across, how they can improve and how to communicate with authenticity. “What most connects great leaders is their self-awareness. Authentic leadership styles are many, but it is hard to replace self-awareness with anything,” says Tuula Rytila, board member Bang & Olufsen.

Burnout and Self-Help

In addition to reflections on leadership, people focused on mental health. Many people tied mental health to burnout and its prevalence—and focused on the how organizations can create the conditions for better experiences. They pointed out that mental health is more than a self-help issue, and can be enhanced through giving people meaning, connections, growth opportunities, empathy and resources when they need them. Leaders must be intentional, according to Frank Sottosanti, CMO with Transamerica. “Now more than ever, managers need to create time for making meaningful connections with their employees and ensuring that every team member has the opportunity to be visible,” he said.

Limits of Leaders

People also pointed out that while leaders have a significant effect on mental health, employee wellbeing is not totally within a leader’s responsibility. There are elements of life which are outside a leader’s control—and people must take ownership for their own wellbeing, at the same time the leader, the team and the organization have a role to play.

On Taking Action

In the discussion, there were also pragmatic points about where to go from here—given the importance of mental health and with the effects of leaders and organizations. These are the recommendations people had for improving current conditions.

Supporting Parents

People pointed out that parenting can be especially taxing when employees are juggling tasks, time, family and career—and supporting parents is a meaningful way to foster positive mental health. Recommendations included providing childcare, flexible work hours and locations, parenting affinity groups or the like.

Training, Learning and Development

Discussion often centered around the value of training and developing employees—and the positive effects of learning and growth for mental health. People pointed out that when a manager believes in you or when a company invests in you, these can be validating and reinforcing. Brian Aquart, vice-president for workforce and community education for Northwell Health expresses how powerful appreciation can be. “It’s simple for me, I feel seen and valued when my name is mentioned in rooms of opportunity where I’m not present and I hear about it later,” he said. “It’s validating and appreciated.”

Networking

Leaders can be in a tough position when they need to talk with someone about their struggles, but don’t feel they should divulge too much to their teams. As a result, many recommended that leaders connect with each other, guide one another and foster networks within which they can develop in the safe space of a leadership community.

Empathy

[Empathy has a proven effect](https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2021/09/19/empathy-is-the-most-important-leadership-skill-according-to-research) on mental health and positive results for organizations. People recommended emphasizing cultures of empathy and developing leaders’ skills in demonstrating empathy—starting with curiosity, concern and compassion. Kathleen Hogan, CPO for Microsoft[MSFT](https://www.forbes.com/companies/microsoft) [+1.5%](https://www.forbes.com/companies/microsoft), points to the range of behaviors which matter most. “As leaders, we can make a big impact on mental health by tuning in, listening and demonstrating empathy and compassion.”

Culture

Overall, people referenced culture and the way that leaders have a ripple effect in their impact. Rajesh Gopinath Kumar, CIO for a tech startup, said, “Managers play a crucial role in shaping the work environment and culture, and their actions can have a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of their employees. A positive work environment can help employees feel valued, supported and motivated, while a negative environment can lead to stress, burnout and mental health issues.”

Moving Forward

Overall, people reflected on the importance of the issue, but also the critical need to be proactive. Knowing leaders have such an impact, necessitates action, so that the experience of work can be improved for employees and leaders—and so it can contribute to the very best mental health.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2023/03/13/managers-play-a-crucial-role-leaders-react-to-employee-mental-health/?sh=dc17814333bb>

**Employers over-estimate the health and wellbeing benefits employees gain**

Employers and employees have a differing opinion about the health and wellbeing impact of ‘hybrid’ working, according to new research1 from [GRiD](https://grouprisk.org.uk/), the industry body for the group risk sector.

Two thirds of employers (64%) believe that hybrid working has had a positive impact on their employees’ health and wellbeing, but only 53% of employees agree.

Where they do concur is on the number of people for whom hybrid working can have a negative impact, with 6% of employers, and 7% of employees, acknowledging that it is not a positive experience for everyone.

GRiD believes it’s important to recognize that although this might look like a relatively small percentage of people who feel that hybrid working has had a negative impact on their health and wellbeing, it represents a large number of employees. While many people feel that a flexibility in working location is beneficial, it’s crucial that employers don’t make assumptions or change their workplaces or working practices in a way that could potentially be harmful to their workforce.

Katharine Moxham, spokesperson for GRiD, said: “Employers have a slightly exaggerated view of just how much hybrid working is benefiting the health and wellbeing of their staff. It’s clearly the case that many do find it a positive experience but employers should be careful not to assume this is a panacea for everyone. It’s important to note that health and wellbeing support will still be required for everyone, and particularly for those who have found the change in working patterns more difficult to cope with.”

The benefits of hybrid working for health and wellbeing

Of those employees themselves who felt that hybrid working has had a positive effect, mental wellbeing was the area that employees felt was most improved (68%), followed by social wellbeing (45%), financial wellbeing (44%) and physical wellbeing (43%). Although mental health is clearly seen as the largest beneficiary of hybrid working, and the reduced costs of commuting are associated with financial health, it’s interesting that so many employees reported on the social and physical benefits too.

Katharine Moxham said: “Employers may have already seen the benefits to physical and social health by allowing staff to relinquish their journey to work, allowing employees to spend more time with family and friends and potentially using the time for fitness activities to improve their physical health.”

Giving employees a choice on hybrid working

Half (50%) of employees say they have a choice about whether to work from the office or home which largely tallies with the statistics reported by employers: 22% of employers said that they have given all their employees a choice about where they work from, and 34% have allowed some but not all of their employees to make that decision.

While there is indeed a positive impact on health and wellbeing for many, employers must not consider hybrid working as a benefit in itself. It is no replacement for a comprehensive program of benefits to support health and wellbeing, such as private medical insurance or group risk benefits (employer-sponsored life assurance, income protection and critical illness). When an employee struggles with a health or wellbeing issue, it’s important to have a full suite of support available. Working from home may help some but not all and it certainly isn’t a fix when more serious problems come to light.

Katharine Moxham continued “Employers who fully support the health and wellbeing of their staff through a program of employee benefits and other flexible policies, will be rewarded with more a more engaged and more proactive workforce. Hybrid working can play a role but it’s not the silver bullet.”

<https://ifamagazine.com/article/employers-over-estimate-the-health-and-wellbeing-benefits-employees-gain-from-hybrid-working/>

**A Potential Downside to Remote Work? Higher Rates of Depression**

Remote and hybrid work have become highly desired workplace perks, with plenty of research showing their advantages. In fact, employees who work remotely often say they're [happier](https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2022/05/05/remote-work-increases-employee-happiness-by-20-new-study-finds/?sh=665e6a6c3183), [more productive](https://timeular.com/blog/remote-working-affects-productivity/#:~:text=Remote%20working%20increases%20productivity%20and%2cthe%20same%20period%20of%20time.) and [more likely to stay with their employer](https://www.apollotechnical.com/statistics-on-remote-workers/).

But new research shows there's at least one drawback to these arrangements: Remote and hybrid workers tend to experience higher rates of mental health issues.

Fully remote (40 percent) and hybrid work (38 percent) are associated with an increased likelihood of anxiety and depression symptoms compared to in-person work (35 percent), according to an analysis by the Integrated Benefits Institute (IBI), an Oakland, Calif.-based nonprofit research organization. For its report, IBI analyzed data from the Household Pulse Survey, an online resource created by the U.S. Census Bureau to determine how households were impacted by the pandemic. IBI partnered with Elevance Health (formerly Anthem) to analyze claims data related to mental health.

Although there isn't a massive disparity between in-person and remote workers' likelihood of depression and anxiety, it's an important difference that employers would be wise to pay attention to, researchers said.

"The differences in prevalence of anxiety and depression symptoms between hybrid, remote and onsite are statistically significant. Our research illustrates that remote work may not be the ideal solution for every employee," said Candace Nelson, director of research at IBI, adding that more exploration of the topic is needed.

IBI's analysis isn't the only research to have found more mental health problems associated with remote and hybrid work: A majority of executives (64 percent) said remote work negatively affected their employees' mental health in 2022, up from 55 percent the previous year, according to [an October survey by RSM US, a professional services firm, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce](https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/u-s-chamber-and-rsm-survey-reveals-pandemic-driven-work-changes-are-becoming-permanent-as-competition-for-talent-continues). Seventy-three percent of executives said workers felt isolated, an increase from 68 percent in 2021.

So what's behind the increase in mental health issues for remote and hybrid workers?

While the new IBI report does not address that question, Nelson noted that IBI researchers saw some evidence in their previous analysis on hybrid and remote work. Among the factors: Many employees are dealing with constant interruptions (cited by 43 percent of remote workers) and battling for home office space (23 percent), as well as dealing with "slow internet connections, isolation, a house in disarray, and a seemingly endless workday," she explained. Twenty-seven percent find it harder to balance work and family responsibilities; nearly half report spending too little time with their children under 18; and 40 percent say they spend too little time with their partner. Some remote workers (30 percent) also feel disconnected from their colleagues, IBI found.

The research comes at an interesting time in remote work: Some large employers, including the [Walt Disney Co.](https://www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/disney-wants-workers-back-in-the-office-will-other-employers-follow.aspx) and Amazon, recently announced they will be requiring employees to come back to the office most of the week, but many of those workers—despite the aforementioned challenges—are [pushing back on such policies](https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/amazon-employees-push-back-against-rto-policy.aspx) and petitioning to continue working from home. Employees and employers are engaged in a tug of war over working arrangement preferences.

More Mental Health Help Needed

It's worth noting, though, that mental health issues have been a growing concern for all workers, regardless of their working arrangement. The ongoing pandemic, sky-high inflation and social unrest have all contributed to a decline in employees' well-being over the last few years, and there hasn't been significant improvement since a startling decline in mental health was first seen at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Three years ago, when the pandemic began, the rug was pulled out from under us. We lost a sense of control, and that greatly affects our mental health. Nothing really has turned around since," Paula Allen, global leader of research and total wellbeing at Telus Health, a health care firm in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, [recently told SHRM Online](https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/inflation-is-taking-a-toll-on-employees%E2%80%99-mental-health.aspx). "What you see now is likely not going to change without some significant interventions."

Meanwhile, the rate of individuals taking a prescription medication for a mental health condition has increased to 22 percent from 20 percent year-over-year, and the unmet need for counseling has increased to 14 percent from 12 percent, IBI found.

Employers can do several things to help improve the situation for all employees, Nelson said. Those include increasing access to mental health care; offering programs that help employees coordinate physical and mental health care, as conditions such as diabetes and heart conditions often occur alongside anxiety and depression; and prioritizing inclusivity and access to culturally appropriate mental health care. Improving workplace culture to reduce stigma around mental illness and committing to proactively improving mental health outcomes, such as by adding programs that help employees work through day-to-day life challenges, is also important, she said.

For remote workers in particular, employers might allow flexible scheduling, emphasize connection so remote employees feel less isolated and offer benefits and programs to help employees with child care or pet care. Employers may also consider helping workers prioritize work/life balance—perhaps by encouraging them to log off from work at 5 p.m., for instance.

IBI President Kelly McDevitt said the research is just one example of the complexities of an evolving workplace that has shifted dramatically as a result of the pandemic, and it illustrates the need to support overall employee well-being.

"It highlights the fact that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach for employers to meet the needs of the business and the workforce," she explained. "A single-model approach—whether hybrid, work at home or in-office—may never satisfy the needs of all."

Especially as organizations consider whether to bring employees back into offices or allow them to continue working remotely, McDevitt said employers "should take a step back and evaluate what works best for their people, their business and their culture, and it may turn out to be more than one solution."

Likewise, employees should speak up about what's best for their own mental health.

"Employers may also consider evaluating whether employees are well-suited to working from home (as we did pre-pandemic)," McDevitt said. "Just because we can work at home, doesn't mean we should work at home."

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/remote-workers-experiencing-higher-rates-of-depression.aspx>

**Employees Are Overloaded—96% Say Workplace Tools Aren’t Helping Them Keep Up**

Workers overwhelmingly say they want a way to prioritize work that matters, manage up when overloaded and reduce invisible tasks that involve keeping up with conversations, tracking down data and juggling logistical minutiae, according to a new survey. New research from [Slingshot](https://www.slingshotapp.io/managing-work-in-2023) finds that workplace tools are not addressing the root cause of the problems, and employees want tools that help them work smarter, not harder.

Companies–sometimes thanklessly, sometimes unknowingly–are loading staff up with more work than they can handle. And employees don’t know how to keep up. Job dissatisfaction, sluggish productivity and [burnout are on the rise in 2023](https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2023/02/07/new-outlook-on-burnout-for-2023-limitations-on-what-managers-can-do/?sh=448d72604343), despite the abundance of digital workplace tools that have emerged. Plus, the huge numbers of [layoffs threaten and displace employees](https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2023/03/05/how-layoffs-affect-your-mental-health-and-7-tips-on-how-to-cope/?sh=5102ba057a15)physically, mentally and financially, further eroding trust and exacerbating mental health problems among the American workforce.

Employees Dissatisfied With Workplace Tools

The survey of 1,857 U.S. employees found that almost every employee (96%) said they are dissatisfied with the tools they have been equipped with to manage work and that the tools aren’t helping them keep up. Other key findings include:

“App Switching” is sucking productivity, not creating it. Twenty-six percent (26%) of respondents say that one of their biggest challenges is switching from platform to platform across multiple platforms, with half of them adding that they would prefer one solution that could handle all of their different tasks.

Employees are stunted by a lack of access to the data they need. A quarter of respondents (25%) cited their inability to access the data they need to effectively do their work and make decisions as one of the biggest things holding back their progress. Only 11% of employees said they’re able to adequately gain insight and make decisions with their current tools.

Employees are working on everything, when they need to be working on the most important things. Twenty-one percent (21%) of employees say they need tools that don’t just focus on to-dos and deadlines but also define and prioritize the tasks that will drive the most impact for their companies.

The Root Of The Problem

According to another survey of over 1,000 workers by [mmhmm](https://www.mmhmm.app/home), workers are overloaded and want AI to help, but they’re also scared. The survey found that 86% feel very or somewhat concerned that AI could spread lies across tech platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter. Despite this fear, 90% would like to see AI handle at least one of their work tasks, with a large share of delegation going to communication tasks such as writing emails (53%), answering questions from customers and clients (49%) and writing documents (48%).

to Phil Libin, CEO and co-founder of mmhmm and All Turtles, the deeper issue at play with employee dissatisfaction is a trust gap. “The tech industry is very responsive to demand. Companies hire just as quickly as they fire depending on whether demand is growing or shrinking,” Libin says. “Bosses believe their employees aren’t really doing anything, and employees think that companies aren’t acting in their best interest. The real division is rooted in lack of trust, which needs to be figured out and reversed.”

The mmhmm survey revealed that layoffs and economic uncertainty are exacerbating trust problems:

74% of the respondents have felt distrusted by their employer, and only 37% completely trust their company to fairly conduct layoffs.

57% of employees feel the lack of trust when their employers micromanage them, and 67% want employers to show trust by giving them the power to make decisions.

77% of people have left or would leave a job if they didn't feel trusted.

65% of people feel they’re being asked to do work outside of their job description or what they’re being paid for (also known as [quiet hiring](https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2023/02/06/as-employers-tout-quiet-hiring-3-ways-employees-can-navigate-the-risky-trend/?sh=1adc4b4a2a2f)).

71% of hybrid workers say they’re doing work beyond their job responsibilities.

95% of workers want autonomy and flexibility and say it’s important to be trusted and autonomous in their jobs.

58% of respondents prefer choosing their own hours, compared to 32% who would rather work during the same hours as their colleagues, and 70% of employees say asynchronous work is important to their job satisfaction.

43% feel keeping meetings to a minimum would demonstrate trust.

53% say they want fewer meetings because meetings aren’t productive.

Rick Hammell, CEO and founder of [Elements Global Services](https://elementsgs.com/), remains upbeat about [the erosion of trust issues in the workplace](https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2021/09/05/new-study-shows-a-lack-of-trust-between-employees-and-employers/?sh=6d50b6e6395b). He believes business leaders can build relationships with employees by trusting and allowing them to be accountable for missteps or miscues in the workplace.

Hammell explains that employees are extremely concerned about being monitored or surveilled during their workday. As hybrid workplaces and use of new technology continues to grow, he acknowledges there are countless ways for an employer to track what you’re doing and how often you’re doing it. “For employers to identify solutions, bridge the gap and ease concerns of employees, employers first need to recognize the growing distrust created in today’s work environment. The key to alleviating distrust is investing in solutions and becoming more flexible, transparent and involved.”

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2023/03/10/employees-are-overloaded-96-say-workplace-tools-arent-helping-them-keep-up/?sh=69b085914d88>

**Burned out employees declining, but numbers remain high**

Despite figures being on a downward trend, nearly half of employees across the United States say they’re still suffering from burnout, according to a new report. Findings from Eagle Hill Consulting's survey revealed that 46% are “burning out” in their current roles, with younger workers (51%) and women (48%) reporting higher levels of tension.

The latest data indicates a slight drop from the 49% recorded in August 2022, and much lower than the 58% reported in August 2020, according to the report. Still, that’s no reason for employers to become complacent in addressing employee burnout, according to Melissa Jezior, president and chief executive officer of Eagle Hill Consulting.

"Nearly half of the workforce reports burnout, and that is far too high for organizations that seek optimal performance and retention of their top talent," Jezior said in [a media release](https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/new-eagle-hill-consulting-research-finds-employee-burnout-remains-high-but-trending-downward-301763578.html).

Jezior warned that tired and stressed employees could end up looking for another job, data backed up by the study which found that 30% are planning to switch employers in the next 12 months.

Top causes of burnout

When asked what their [reasons are for being burned out](https://www.hcamag.com/asia/specialisation/workplace-health-and-safety/the-real-reasons-employees-are-burned-out/175877), the respondents cited the following factors:

[Workload](https://www.hcamag.com/ca/specialization/corporate-wellness/2-in-5-workers-say-job-biggest-factor-influencing-mental-health/434049) (53%)

Staff shortages (44%)

Juggling personal and professional lives (41%)

Lack of communication and support (39%)

Time pressure (38%)

Employers should also recognize that recent layoff announcements could "trigger an uptick in burnout," according to Jezior.

"We know that staffing shortages have been a major source of worker burnout. In fact, we asked employees how staff shortages impact their workload, and 83% of workers said it's covering the workload for un-filled positions," she said.

Other effects of staff shortages on workloads include helping others learn their jobs (37%), training new hires (39%), and recruiting and interviewing new hires (28%).

What can employers do?

To address the problem of burnout, [having more control on time](https://www.hcamag.com/ca/specialization/employee-engagement/can-flex-work-help-address-employee-burnout/436789) emerged as the common theme among the top answers of the respondents, which included:

[Four-day work week](https://www.hcamag.com/ca/specialization/benefits/9-in-10-uk-employers-keen-to-continue-4-day-work-week/437184) (71%)

Increased flexibility (66%)

Decreased workload (65%)

Better health and wellness benefits (60%)

Working from home (58%)

Reduced administrative burdens (55%)

More on-site amenities (51%)

Ability to relocate or work from multiple locations (41%)

"It's critically important for employers to dig in to understand exactly what is causing burnout among their workers to properly diagnose and address the problem. Our research shows that workers are comfortable talking about burnout, and those conversations are essential," Jezior said.

<https://www.hcamag.com/ca/specialization/mental-health/burned-out-employees-declining-but-numbers-remain-high/438971>

**More younger employees use workplace mental wellness benefits, say they are “very important”**

Fully 73% of Generation Z employees and 74% of Millennial employees have utilized mental health benefits offered by their employers, while 58% of Generation X employees and 49% of Baby Boomer employees have used the benefits.

Additionally, while 65% of Generation Z and 60% of Millennial workers say it’s “very important” for their employers to provide mental wellness benefits, just 49% of Generation X and 45% of Baby Boomer workers say the same.

These are only two of the key findings from a study exploring barriers and perceived stigmas that prevent employees from seeking and using workplace mental wellness benefits.

Securian Financial, a leading provider of group life and supplemental health insurance benefits, conducted a [survey of 2,500employees of American organizations](https://cts.businesswire.com/ct/CT?id=smartlink&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.securian.com%2Fcontent%2Fdam%2Fdoc%2Fgrp%2Fmental-wellness-benefits-barriers-to-access_102780.pdf&esheet=53355555&newsitemid=20230306005059&lan=en-US&anchor=survey+of+2%2C500+employees+of+American+organizations&index=1&md5=4592dd7c18a6a9e80bf83f3053948928) between August 30 and September 9, 2022. Survey respondents reflect the age distribution of the current workforce1 and the mix of ethnicities in the general population.

“Addressing mental wellness in the workplace has never been more crucial. With burnout and the Great Resignation still in our midst, better understanding employee needs, expectations and concerns around mental wellness is pivotal,” said Darin Reeser, a Securian Financial regional director for supplemental health benefits.

STUDY INSIGHTS

#1: Generations view mental health differently

The study found that the four generations in today’s workforce approach the topic of mental health from different perspectives and experiences.

Generation Z, the youngest generation still early in their careers or just entering the workforce, expect access to mental health services and any historical barriers to access to be fixed already. Leveraging mental wellness resources is normalized for this generation.

“I found out about [mental wellness benefits] through the interview when [the employer] mentioned it to me, and the offering was very positive, which made it very intriguing and made the decision to try it way easier,” said a Generation Z survey participant.

Millennials were raised to believe mental health challenges are problematic but fixable. They’re inclined to have the attitude of rolling up their sleeves and getting to work.

“I think having or using mental health resources should be allowed on all fronts. Different people require different methods. An online or offline method [through work] should be available to anyone depending on their need,” said a Millennial survey participant.

Generation X recognizes access to mental health services can be problematic but just tries to get through it.

“There are only about five elderly [mental wellness] counselors [available to me through work]. There needs to be a better choice in providers,” said a Generation X survey participant.

Baby Boomers, the oldest generation with representation still in the workforce, were taught to tough it out and not talk about mental health challenges.

“I was raised in a family where we don’t share what we are thinking, and we just move on. It’s a hard concept to change in your later years,” said a Baby Boomer survey participant.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR EMPLOYERS: “Mental wellness benefits are crucial for every generation. But because these benefits are expected from Gen Z and Millennials, employers should recognize that to attract and retain young talent, they must provide easily accessible mental wellness resources,” said Reeser.

#2: The most common and most used mental wellness benefits

The top five mental wellness benefits those surveyed said they have through work include...

Mental health coverage through medical insurance: 70%

Set number of free counseling sessions (Employee Assistance Program or EAP): 57%

Virtual counseling: 49%

In-person counseling (outside work): 41%

Grief support: 41%

The top five mental wellness benefits utilized by those surveyed, if they have them, are…

Mental health days off: 54%

Subscriptions to meditation/mindfulness classes or apps: 39%

Workshops or seminars that focus on mental wellness: 35%

Mental health coverage through medical insurance: 34%

Financial planning seminars or counseling: 34%

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR EMPLOYERS: “Employers should explore which mental wellness benefits are expected from their employees and consider expanding the variety of benefits if there is a disconnect between what they offer and what employees want,” said Reeser. “Our survey found that while only a little more than one-third of employers offer mental health days off, many employees—particularly Gen Z employees—say it is the most important mental wellness benefit.”

#3: Financial and mental wellness are interconnected

Financial wellness affects mental wellness. Safety and security are at stake in both areas, so it’s no surprise one influences the other.

65% of all employees surveyed said their financial wellness has either an “extreme impact” (26%) on their mental wellness or a “large impact” (39%).

48% of Generation Z say their financial wellness has an “extreme impact” on their mental wellness.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR EMPLOYERS: “The impact on mental wellness is strongest when financial pressure is highest,” said Reeser. “On the flip side, employees report better mental health when their financial situations are manageable and they’re on track to meet long-term financial goals. This speaks to the importance of employers having a financial wellness program in place for employees. It’s a new era, and traditional benefits are no longer enough.”

BARRIERS TO USING MENTAL WELLNESS BENEFITS

Even if offered mental wellness benefits, many employees are apprehensive to use them. Securian Financial’s study found common barriers among the 38% of those surveyed who said they have not used any of their workplace mental wellness benefits.

Barrier #1: Benefits are undervalued

67% of employees say they haven’t used any mental wellness benefits because they feel they don’t have serious enough issues to use the services. Employees undervalue the versatility of the services provided and feel they are only for the most urgent needs.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR EMPLOYERS: “Communication about available resources must clearly emphasize the range of benefits offered for a variety of situations, from more serious struggles to proactive measures employees can take to prevent future challenges,” said Reeser. “Instead of emails from HR or the company intranet site—the most common ways information on mental wellness benefits are communicated to employees—our survey found that hearing about the benefits from front-line managers and co-workers is far more effective.”

Barrier #2: Confidentiality questioned

Misconceptions that employers know when an employee uses mental wellness services and corresponding concerns about professional backlash prevent utilization of benefits.

Worries about confidentiality are the second most common reason employees don’t use mental wellness benefits, cited by 13% of all employees who haven’t used the benefits.

21% of Generation Z employees who haven’t used mental wellness benefits cite concerns about confidentiality.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR EMPLOYERS: “Employers must prioritize confidentiality when promoting mental wellness benefits. Emphasize to employees that their use of the benefits is anonymous and safeguarded. This is essential to making some employees feel comfortable enough to use the benefits,” said Reeser.

Barrier #3: Younger employees are overwhelmed

While open and eager to use mental wellness benefits, many Generation Z and Millennial employees are too overwhelmed to take advantage of them, especially when they’re needed the most. Burnout further dissuades them, as it causes a lack of time and energy to use the benefits.

21% of Generation Z and 20% of younger Millennial employees who haven’t used mental wellness benefits say they don’t have enough time in the day to use the benefits.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR EMPLOYERS: “Employers should reposition unused time off—which is more common in today’s hybrid and work-from-home environment—for mental health, which will give employees the space to use mental wellness benefits and normalize their use in the process,” said Reeser. “Employers should also consider ‘Lunch & Learn’ sessions during the workday to showcase these benefits and explain how to access them.”

[https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20230306005059/en/More-younger-employees-use-workplace-mental-wellness-benefits-say-they-are-“very-important](https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20230306005059/en/More-younger-employees-use-workplace-mental-wellness-benefits-say-they-are-%E2%80%9Cvery-important)”

**7 Ways to Nurture Employee Well-Being**

While mental and emotional well-being has come further out of the shadows during the last few years, it still has an outsized impact on people at home and work. According to findings from the [2022 Alight International Workforce and Well-Being Mindset Study](https://www.alight.com/Thought-Leadership/2022-Alight-International-Workforce-and-Wellbeing), only half of US employees report having positive mental and emotional well-being. While that's an increase of 11 points from early 2021 during the height of the pandemic, it's still not enough. Yet, three quarters report moderate to high stress levels, which haven't subsided even as the pandemic slowed.

Work is [adding to our burdens](https://qz.com/work/1986405/how-to-manage-burnout). We found that more than 70 percent of employees report effects specifically from job-related stress, including the inability to sleep, low morale, and panic attacks. Three in 10 say that their work has a negative impact on their mental health. And about 10 percent fewer US respondents said they could manage work and personal commitments more effectively in 2022 than in 2021, which can add to stress levels. So it's not surprising that almost half report having at least one symptom of job burnout.

And the pressures we're all under don't seem to be diminishing with multiple viral epidemics, ongoing financial uncertainty, and concerning geopolitical events. These major stressors strain employee well-being, making supporting employees more critical.

7 ways to nurture employee well-being

Many companies are prioritizing mental health, yet people aren't giving employers much credit in return. Fewer than half of employees surveyed believe their employer cares about their well-being and that the burden of getting or staying well is on the individual. As for mental health, only 4 in 10 say that their employer has actively communicated more about mental and emotional health in the past year or made changes to the work environment to better support mental and emotional health.

To get meaningful results for your people and your business, have a solid strategy for both the types of support you offer and how you promote and educate them on how to leverage these. It's not a one-size-fits-all answer. Instead, employers need to think creatively and look for personalized and relevant ways to encourage employees to take advantage of the tools, resources, and guidance they need to improve their mental and emotional well-being.

Here are the seven recommendations employers can act on to support employees' mental health and well-being in real ways and help themselves in the process.

Go beyond the basics of an EAP

Since we first surveyed in 2018, the number of people saying that they or a family member sought counseling or other mental health services doubled (from 26 percent to 49 percent). While employee assistance programs (EAPs) are still beneficial, employers should consider rounding out their offerings with benefits like employee resiliency programs, stress management resources, online mental health and meditation apps, and more.

Give the gift of time

Time can be a huge stressor and obstacle to better mental health. A quarter of people admit that they spend at least five hours a month at work handling mental health-related matters. And 42 percent wish their employer offered more resources and/or time off for mental health. Some companies are even being creative about offering well-being hours or time off to help employees make time for and prioritize beneficial mental health activities.

Offer robust telemedicine resources

Telemedicine really came into its own during the pandemic. But it's not just for your average doctor checkup. Pushing your carriers to cover telemedicine for mental health support can be a game changer by giving your employees the flexibility to get the care they need from home. Employers can only expect the desire for these resources to increase.

Take a stand on stigma and get to talking

Only 46 percent of employees feel they can openly speak at work about emotional health challenges without fear of consequences. The more we talk about mental health at work, it's easier for people to ask for help, and there's a better chance of guiding them to the resources you offer.

Provide the resources to equip employees to help each other

This year's study also showed that only 47 percent of respondents had a co-worker they could reach out to without hesitation for support when they were stressed or worried, and 50 percent had talked to a supervisor about job-related stress. Therefore, employers equipping their employees with the resources and training they need to navigate these situations and provide support will only encourage more employees to take advantage of employers' mental well-being resources.

Make investments in HR technology systems and solutions

Find a technology partner that provides a system or solution that can be tailored to the specific needs of each employee and provides a one-stop shop for all their benefits. Also, ensure the technology offers mobile access and personalized health benefits navigation and information so they can quickly learn and access resources relevant to their needs.

Create mental and emotional well-being campaigns

Offering various programs may check the box, but it may not have the desired impact if people aren't utilizing them. Employers must develop and execute campaigns to improve employee awareness and usage of these offerings. Plus, the value will go up. When asked about the importance of mental and emotional health apps provided by an employer, 62 percent of all respondents said it would be valuable to them. But if you used one of these apps? A whopping 95 percent of those employees said it was valuable to them. That's an ROI that speaks to the power of not just promoting a laundry list of programs but truly activating people to try them out.

Feeling good about your overall well-being means you can live your best life at work and home. By providing and promoting programs that help people be more resilient, maintain positive relationships, and manage uncertainty, you're doing your part towards shining that spotlight on what people can do, how to make well-being a reality, and likely increasing productivity and engagement in the process.

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/people-managers/pages/7-ways-nurture-employee-well-being.aspx>