

# MENTAL HEALTH

A man in a dark suit and tie is sitting at a table outdoors in a city street. He is looking upwards with his hands raised in a gesture of surprise or frustration. A silver laptop is open in front of him. The background shows a blurred city street with buildings and other people.

AT WORK

Employers are prioritizing mental health programs for employees

## EMPLOYERS ARE PRIORITIZING MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS FOR EMPLOYEES

Mental health programs are seeing a rapid increase in adoption and investment in the workplace as the COVID-19 pandemic triggers mental health conditions. The majority of employers surveyed are increasing their investment in mental health programs (90%), followed closely by stress management and resilience programs (76%), and mindfulness and meditation programs (71%) Wellable Labs Jan 5, 2022

Each year, depression and anxiety disorders cost the global economy \$1 trillion in lost productivity. Mental disorders are predicted to cost the global economy \$16 trillion by 2030, with an estimated 12 billion working days lost due to mental illness every year.



### WHAT IS IT?

Until recently, employee mental health was frequently an afterthought: a check-the-box benefit hidden under wellness and “whole employee” products, wrapped up in a nice, tidy box under the Employee Assistance Program. But the pandemic forced a culture shift that’s here to stay.

Based on the trends in this year's Employee Wellness Industry Trends Report, employers should focus on benefit selection and design through a lens of empathy, support, and expectation management, and they should emphasize rebuilding trust within their organization. Those who do will have the best chance of rebuilding their workforce for long-term success as we come out on the other side of the COVID-19 pandemic."

Every dollar of investment in mental health promotion has been shown to result in a three to five dollar benefit for companies. A mentally healthy workplace leads to increased rates of innovation, higher levels of productivity, better customer service and more positive interactions with co-workers.

## WHY ARE THEY DOING IT?

Despite all that, the challenge still plaguing leaders in HR and benefits is how to quantify return on investment (ROI) for many voluntary benefits, including employee mental health solutions. It's time to stop chasing the ROI of employee mental health and instead consider a progressive alternative that makes more sense: value on investment (VOI), measured in four company attributes.

VOI "better reflects the broader financial impact wellness programs can have on an organization." The argument is— that the value of a wellness solution can be measured in qualitative business attributes, including:

- Morale
- Recruiting
- Retention
- Employee engagement
- Productivity
- Presenteeism
- Positivity

It is termed the "whole-person approach" — and the best value of an optimal employee mental health solution — addresses all three spheres of the human condition:

- Psychological — mindset, our thoughts, and emotions
- Social — human interaction and relationships
- Physical — the body (including the muscle called the brain)

Employee mental health can't take a "one size fits all" approach. Brokers need to offer, and employers need to look for, a partner platform that offers expert guidance, scientifically backed tools, data-driven outcomes, and a proactive approach — accessible resources and tools that inspire anyone in the workforce to self-assess and act in order to be their best selves.

Before the pandemic in 2018, 66% of companies said they would invest more in mental health, with 29% saying they would invest the same. In 2022, those numbers had changed, with 90% investing more and only 9% investing the same.

One of the biggest shifts is in telemedicine. Both employers and employees appreciate telemedicine's ability to offer flexible, on-demand, and cost-effective solutions. Company's see this benefit as indispensable.

Predicted outcomes that prove the value of employee mental health investment

There are two questions to ask in order for a company to consider their current employee wellbeing goals.

What is your desired vision of a mental health solution?

What critical business challenges in your organization can a mental health platform solve?

- **Company culture.** One major long-term study found that companies with the best corporate cultures — companies that encouraged all-around leadership initiatives and highly appreciated their employees, customers, and owners — grew 682% in revenue. During the same 11-year period, companies without a thriving company culture grew only 166% in revenue. A mental health culture fosters appreciation and connection.
- **Company reputation.** This is quite simply the way the world — including your employees — perceives your mission, vision, and values. What isn't as clear is how you choose to deliver the value of your company brand. Employers that take a consistent, proactive approach to mental health and build their support of mental health into the total employee experience will benefit from a stronger employer brand and a greater company reputation. You'll increase engagement and be more attractive to job-seekers.
- **Employee performance.** Take a step back from the traditional, ROI-based tactics of performance assessment and talent management technology. Focus instead on another path to improving employee performance. How would employee performance improve if every employee were equipped with the tools to manage their individual, personal challenges? To be supported in life in general? To be able to make incremental changes in their well-being and ability to do their jobs? Maybe that sounds like just another spin on "bring your whole self to work." But it's more than that. It's improving performance by ensuring employees have the most impact in the least amount of time. An employee is more productive when they're focused, healthy, and on their game for three hours than if they're stressed or not well and stringing out the same amount of work over several more hours.
- **Enhanced existing well-being spend.** The most expensive piece of employee health care is spent on reactive solutions (e.g., traditional core benefits focused on treatment) and programs that employees aren't taking full advantage of (like the EAP). It's far more costly to treat a problem than it is to prevent it.



# Be kind

## **HOW CAN WE HELP? HERE ARE 5 WAYS YOUR COMPANY CAN SUPPORT EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH.**

### **1-Understand how mental health impacts your employees.**

“It’s important for managers to be trained to recognize the signs of emotional distress so they can react in a supportive rather than a punitive way,” says Jerome Schultz, PhD, a clinical neuropsychologist and lecturer at Harvard Medical School.

Here are some proactive steps you can take to understand and assess your employees’ mental health:

- Make mental health training mandatory for your company’s leaders to help them be more aware of and invested in this aspect of their employees’ well-being.
- Train managers on what to do if they see signs of emotional distress or substance abuse.

### **2-Include mental health coverage as part of your health care plan.**

- Avoid plans that offer “phantom” mental health coverage. Find out how many psychologists and psychiatrists are in-network.
- Provide a health savings account (HSA) to help offset out-of-pocket costs.

### **3-Establish an employee assistance program (EAP).**

Many companies use an employee assistance program (EAP) to support workplace mental health. Some employees may be reluctant to use this resource due to fear of stigma, shame, and lack of understanding about how these confidential programs work. But there are things your company can do to increase EAP usage.

For instance, New York’s YMCA of Greater Rochester changed their communication strategy about their EAP. Instead of just posting notices in break rooms, they now send out a monthly mental health newsletter.

“The newsletter reminds employees these benefits are available to you. It’s paid for you. It’s there for you. Use it as much as you want,” says Fernán Cepero, YMCA of Greater Rochester’s senior human resources business partner. “Employees know ‘I can call to work out a plan. I can get assistance I need now rather than waiting for a crisis. I can get help before I even have to use my insurance.’”

To encourage employees to use an EAP, your company can:

- Provide direct access to mental health professionals via phone and/or in-person.
- Offer this resource to employees as well as to their immediate family members.

- Make it easy for employees to know who to talk to or where to go to access mental health resources.
- Emphasize that your EAP can be accessed confidentially and free of charge.

#### **4-Use communication to reduce stigma and increase access to mental health resources.**

- Don't wait until open enrollment to mention mental health benefits and community resources. Promote them frequently, such as in monthly newsletters.
- Ensure that your executives mention emotional well-being every time they talk about recruiting talent and building an inclusive culture that helps employees bring their best selves to work.
- Offer workshops so employees can learn more about mental health and resilience.

#### **5-Promote well-being.**

- Build as much flexibility as possible into all employees' schedules.
- Offer access to apps that can help with sleep and stress reduction.
- Consider offering a meditation room, mindfulness training, and/or yoga classes at work.
- Encourage employees to use their vacation time. Some companies do this by limiting the amount of vacation employees can roll over into the next year.
- Provide accommodations and develop a return-to-work process so that employees who need to take a leave of absence because of a mental health issue feel supported when they come back.