

6 Best Practices for Addressing Employee Mental Health Needs in the Workplace

Depression affects as many as one in three adults,¹ and has shown to affect the workforce: 68% of Millennials and 81% of those identifying as “Generation Z” left their jobs in 2021 due to job-related mental health reasons.² COVID-19 has only made these issues worse.

However, a comprehensive program that addresses issues with employee mental health improves productivity and reduces turnover.

Following these six best practices can help build a strong framework for mental wellness both at home and at the office. These best practices were developed by the Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO), a nonprofit dedicated to identifying and sharing best practices on workplace health and wellbeing.

1. Raise awareness about mental health and emotional wellbeing

Reducing the stigma around mental illness in the workplace takes building awareness:

- ☐ Train managers to recognize and respond to employee mental health needs
- ☐ Encourage and give permission for employees to seek help when needed
- ☐ Reinforce the message that maintaining employee mental health is a core value
- ☐ Post interviews of leaders sharing personal stories to help destigmatize challenges that everyone faces



Half of employers blame low EAP utilization on lack of awareness



Only 25% leverage the power of C-suite-led communications, despite its effectiveness in reducing the stigma of mental health issues.³

¹The Brink, “Depression Rates in U.S. Tripled When the Pandemic First Hit – Now, They’re Even Worse,” October 7, 2021.

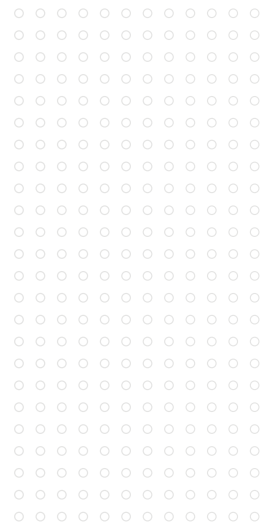
²Harvard Business Review, “It’s a New Era for Mental Health at Work,” October 4, 2021.

³McKinsey & Company, “National surveys reveal disconnect between employees and employers around mental health need,” April 21, 2021.

2. Manage risks related to work, environment and culture

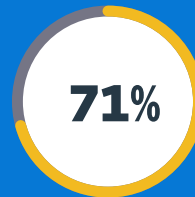
Organizations need to honestly evaluate how the work environment contributes to mental health issues and try to change it for the better:

- ☐ Engage employees and seek their involvement in shaping workplace culture
- ☐ Take work-life balance issues seriously; consider flexible work schedules and assistance with child and eldercare needs
- ☐ Provide workspaces or office environments that encourage collaboration and minimize isolation, and virtual options for a hybrid workforce



Top causes of employer-generated stress:

Low salaries (56% of employees)
Long hours 54%
Lack of growth opportunities 52%

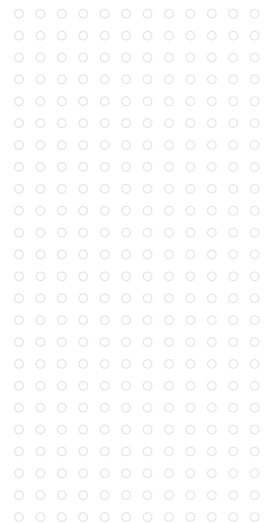


Of those who feel stressed at work will look for new jobs in the coming year.⁴

3. Assess employee mental health needs and measure the impact of intervention

As mental and emotional wellbeing encompasses a broad spectrum of conditions and severity, there isn't a single best solution to mental wellbeing at work. But successful support programs have several things in common:

- ☐ They are grounded in quantitative and qualitative insights into the overall health of the organization
- ☐ They are able to measure success and show what works
- ☐ They usually focus on critical success metrics or KPIs like absenteeism, productivity, motivation, turnover and health outcomes



More than **9 out of 10 organizational leaders** say mental health is a key pillar of their wellness strategy.



However, only **31% measure the value employees get** from mental health services and initiatives; just **14% measure the ROI** of these services.⁵

⁴ American Psychological Association, "The American workforce faces compounding pressure," October 4, 2021.

⁵ Forrester, "The State of Mental Health Support in 2021: Employers Need To Do A Better Job For Their Employees," May 20, 2021.

4. Provide and promote access to evidence-based, high-quality care for mental health

At its base, any mental health wellness strategy needs to include behavioral services:

- ☐ Access is generally through health plans, EAPs and other partnerships with mental health care providers
- ☐ Employers can lower co-pays and fees to reduce financial barriers to care
- ☐ Programs should span mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment
- ☐ Promote awareness through multiple strategies and channels, helping reduce the stigma associated with mental health while improving access



Employees may avoid treatment because they **fear public disclosure of their mental illness (37% of employees)** or **substance abuse disorder (52%)**.

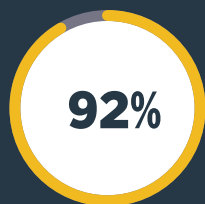


More than 80% of employees think awareness campaigns can help overcome the stigma of seeking mental health treatment, **but only 23% of employers have such campaigns in place.**

5. Integrate employee mental health needs into a comprehensive strategy

There's a link between mental and physical health. Recognizing the following will help integrate mental health initiatives into a comprehensive wellness strategy:

- ☐ Every dimension of wellbeing is linked to mental health and emotional wellbeing
- ☐ These dimensions include emotional wellbeing (which lifestyle coaching can help address), career wellness (career development and coaching) and financial wellness (guidance on budgeting and setting financial goals)
- ☐ A successful and comprehensive wellbeing strategy requires adherence to industry best practices⁸



Of employers say they expanded support for mental health and emotional well-being in 2021.



Budgets for wellbeing programs increased about **22%** in 2021.⁷

⁶McKinsey & Co., "Overcoming stigma: Three strategies toward better mental health in the workplace," July 23, 2021.

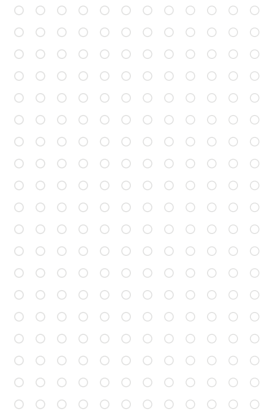
⁷Human Resource Executive, "How much are employers investing in wellness programs?" June 10, 2021.

⁸These categories of best practices include culture; robust mental health benefits; mental health resources; workplace policies and practices; a healthy work environment; leadership support; outcomes measurement; and innovation. Source: [Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Organizational Best Practices Supporting Mental Health in the Workplace](#), December 2021.

6. Partner with local and national organizations

Community and national partnerships benefit both employees and employers:

- ☐ Partnerships provide additional resources that are convenient and often low cost
- ☐ Working with a local or national organization on mental health can help employers quickly establish best practices and increase credibility
- ☐ Partnerships also encourage greater levels of volunteerism, which has been shown to improve mental and physical wellbeing



Make sure you have the right partner to support a healthy workforce.

When you're building a culture focused on wellbeing, you're supporting your most valuable assets: your employees.

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