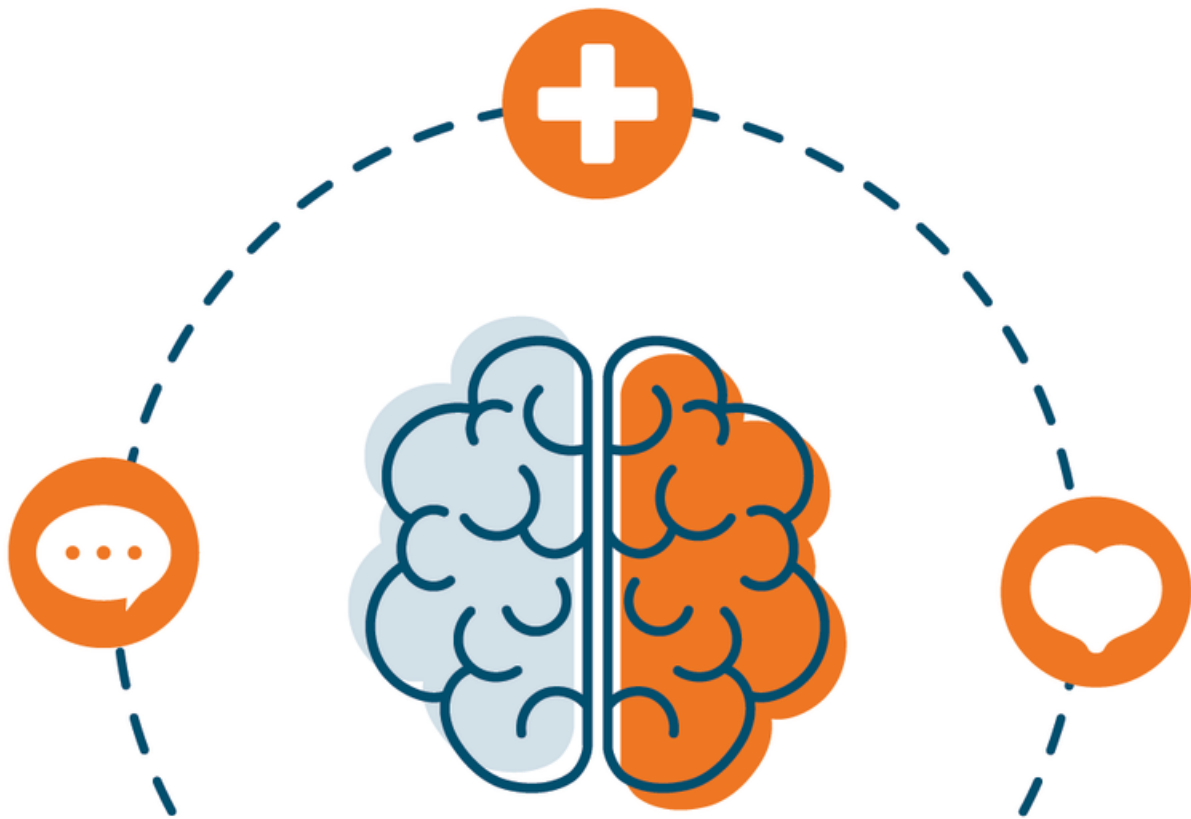


3

Ways To Address



MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE



OVERVIEW

Work is a fundamental aspect of life. The average person will spend between [90,000-100,000 hours of their life at work](#) along with seven out of ten college graduates who [derive a sense of identity from their profession](#). The nature of your job can have a huge impact on your sense of self, your relationships, and your physical and mental well-being.

As such, employers should make a commitment to their employees to address mental health issues in the workplace. Mental health does not exist in a vacuum outside of the office. Instead, how employers choose to handle the issue of mental wellness can affect everything from employee satisfaction and happiness to productivity to company culture, and even financial outcomes. [According to research](#), mental illness is estimated to cost the global economy \$16 trillion by 2030. And a [recent study](#) characterized long work hours as both ubiquitous and associated with physical and mental conditions like cardiovascular disease, stress, fatigue, depression, and anxiety.

In this guide, we'll outline three ways that progressive employers can address mental health in the workplace and help their employees reach their full potential -- professionally and personally.

AWARENESS & DE-STIGMATIZATION

At first glance, employers looking to reverse negative mental health trends may feel dismayed by a deluge of worrying statistics. A [CDC study](#) ranging from 1998-2018 noted a 35% increase in suicide rates. The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) (SAMHSA) found that a quarter of Americans suffer from a mental or substance abuse disorder. Approximately [18% of Americans](#) experience an anxiety disorder each year. Worse, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated sources of stress related to work. [According to researchers from the Harvard School of Business and the NYU Stern School of Business](#), employees worked roughly 50 minutes more per day during the height of the pandemic than they did previously. [70% of professionals](#) have experienced more stress and anxiety at work this year than in any year before.

Though working from home has become the “new normal” for many people over the past several years, there is evidence to suggest that a full-time remote setup contributes to additional emotional strain. Analysts recently found that individuals who work from home [reported increased mental distress](#). And according to a [pre-pandemic study](#), individuals who worked from home were significantly more likely to report feeling highly stressed than professionals who worked primarily in the office. The lack of structure and extended hours often makes remote work more difficult to manage than traditional employment.





The good news that employers should keep in mind is that they are not powerless to affect change at their organization. The truth is there are many ways that businesses can help employees prevent, manage, and overcome mental health issues.

While we'll explore those methods further below, consider first that [92% of our clients' employees say that we've helped them with their wellness issues](#). Across the board, mental health initiatives and programs can lead to increased worker morale, better productivity, and improved professional results for businesses.

The first step to addressing mental health issues in the workplace effectively, then, is to boost awareness and de-stigmatize the topic.

Many organizations already have wellness programs or mental health initiatives in place. Yet, [according to a poll conducted by NPR in 2016](#), only 40% of workers said they participated in such programs. This is why it's so crucial for business leaders to focus on this issue and make it a priority. For employees to benefit from wellness programs, they have to 1) know about them and 2) feel comfortable participating in them. Leaders need to be engaged in this process and continually reinvest in these programs. Having a true "champion" of these initiatives within the company leadership is key to their effectiveness. Norman Winegar, Chief Clinical Officer for Espyr, summed up this problem well.

“

There is a pervasive social stigma associated with seeking help for behavioral health conditions. People fear negative repercussions, both professionally and personally. They're concerned about a potential lack of promotions at work or alienation from friends and family. On a personal level, they question if they will view themselves or be viewed by others as 'weak' if they seek support. Too often people think we must be so resourceful that we shouldn't ever ask for help. The fact is life is challenging even in the best of times, and getting assistance for our emotional well-being is every bit as important as taking care of our physical health.

”



Thankfully, business leaders can encourage greater employee participation in wellness programs and drive positive behavioral change by adjusting their workplace dynamic. Creating an atmosphere where employees feel secure can take many forms. Obvious measures to boost mental health awareness may simply include promoting the existing wellness programs your company already offers. More subtle changes can also help foster a better workplace environment too. For instance, business leaders should take care not to use disparaging or negative language concerning mental health. Phrases like, “he’s crazy,” or “she’s just being bipolar” may seem innocuous to some, but they can add to the stigma of mental health issues. Similarly, managers should strive to build an [inclusive workplace](#) that ensures respect for all employees – regardless of race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. Problems like gossip or jokes that marginalize groups of people can be detrimental to an organization’s culture and undermine its efforts to improve employee morale and job satisfaction. How people speak and act on a daily basis can make a huge difference!

Lastly, it’s worth noting that there is a strong connection between mental health and physical wellness in the workplace. Business leaders would do well to recognize the connections between mental well-being and physical safety and security at work. It goes without saying that employers should take every measure possible to protect the physical well-being of their employees through safety best practices. Additionally, employers can encourage their staff to take regular breaks, exercise daily, get quality sleep, and treat their fellow employees with respect. These practices can have the two-pronged effect of boosting the physical and mental wellness of your workforce.



PROVIDE ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELORS

Most organizations offer some mental health resources to their employees. The issue is that many of these programs are understaffed, underfunded, or outdated. Still, the benefits of launching an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) are well-documented at this point. On average, [employers save \\$3 on healthcare expenses for every \\$1 they invest](#) in evidence-based wellness programs. However, business leaders can revamp their EAP by scheduling seminars on certain topics that are of particular interest to their organization – like stress management, for example.

An EAP is just about the most common form of mental health program an employer may choose to start up. But EAPs aren't the only way businesses can address wellness in the workplace. Behavioral health programs can help employees develop good habits that will lessen the risks associated with mental health issues. Wellness incentives reward employees for making lifestyle changes that enhance their physical and mental well-being. And health coaching and counseling can provide personalized assistance to individuals in need of support, guidance, or treatment as needed.

Ultimately, employers seeking to build a healthier and happier work environment shouldn't be afraid to customize their wellness programs to suit their organization, industry, and current situation. Certain businesses may stand to gain by taking a forward-thinking approach to addressing mental health. For example, programs like [Realyze](#) allow employers to be proactive about mental health issues. Through this program, Human Resources Professionals are able to identify and support at-risk employees to get the help they need right away through opt-in assessments. Or if an employee is





dealing with a stressor anxiety issue, whether it's a result of the pandemic or family difficulties, employers can adopt resources like [TalkNow](#). This is a telecommunications mental health service option that allows employees to contact qualified professionals at a moment's notice. No two companies function in precisely the same way, so it only makes sense for business leaders to pursue wellness initiatives that are likely to produce the best outcomes for their team.

Keeping an open dialogue going -- along with ongoing employee engagement surveys -- will enable business leaders to determine their team's most pressing concerns. Figuring out sources of stress can empower managers to mitigate employee worries, while also helping them offer health services better tailored to their employees' needs. From there, it's also important for businesses to follow through on their programs. A [Deloitte study](#) in the United Kingdom found that only 22% of managers had received some form of mental health training – even though many of them felt responsible for their staff's mental well-being. It's therefore crucial for those at the top to make sure that everyone in their organization has the training and experience needed to address mental health in a meaningful and professional manner.

One final point: there's no way to guarantee every employee will take advantage of wellness programs and resources made available to them by their employer. Some may not want to engage with a mental health program affiliated with their place of work. In such an instance, business leaders may then look to expand and improve mental health coverage offered through their insurance packages. (For reference, around [162 million Americans get insurance through their employer](#).) Making it easier for employees to find therapists in-network can motivate them to seek help when necessary – since paying for an out-of-network therapist could prove prohibitively expensive for some.



Studies estimate that fewer than half of all adults with mental illness receive treatment each year. So, removing bureaucratic and financial barriers to mental health access can lead to significantly improved outcomes – in and out of the workplace.

INCENTIVIZE A HEALTHY WORK/LIFE BALANCE

Business leaders have an array of tools they can use to improve mental health in the workplace. They can invest in expanded and customized wellness programs; they can conduct mental-health seminars; they can train their management staff to prioritize mental wellness; they can alter their company culture, messaging, and brand values; and they can launch awareness campaigns to inspire their staff to seek treatment.

Failing all that, they can also enact policies to directly take on some of the problems that contribute to mental health issues in the first place. Mental health is a product of biological, social, and environmental factors. And as we've established above, the nature of an employee's work and workplace can seriously affect their mental state. According to the American Institute of Stress, 83% of Americans experience work-related stress. In turn, work-related stress costs businesses billions of dollars and countless hours of lost





productivity every year. Even worse, chronic stress can contribute to other conditions like anxiety, depression, obesity, weakened immune system, heart disease, and cancer. Common workplace stressors include long hours, demanding tasks, and financial insecurities. By tackling these issues and incentivizing a better work/life balance, business leaders can improve the mental health of their staff, generate better business outcomes, and save huge amounts of money. Some Methods for reducing stress in the workplace and promoting healthier lifestyle choices are deceptively simple. Scheduling breaks into the workday, encouraging staff members to take walks after lunch, or allowing team members to work from home all have the potential to ease work-related stress. On the other hand, some businesses have decided to take more aggressive approaches to the problem. [Volkswagen](#) expressly prohibits employees from working at night by preventing their servers from routing emails sent after hours.

There is also a strong correlation between mental health and income. One [study](#) found that individuals with family incomes below \$35,000 per year are four times more likely to report being nervous and five times more likely to admit feeling sad “all or most of the time,” than individuals with family incomes over \$100,000. Unfortunately, [the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to negatively affect the well-being of many workers](#). Given all that, it's perhaps not surprising that more and more business leaders are utilizing [financial wellness services](#) to assist their staff. These programs provide employees with access to tools like debt management services and student loan counseling that can help address the burden of financial insecurity.

Of course, business leaders can also invest in expanding employee benefits when possible. Though vacation days and paid leave are essential to maintaining good mental health and reducing stress, American workers [take fewer vacation days and work longer hours](#) than their counterparts in numerous other developed nations.



BENEFITS OF ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

It can be tempting to characterize the benefits of improving mental health in the workplace as self-evident. In a way, these advantages are as meaningful as they are various. To begin with, improving workplace culture and introducing wellness programs can actively make the lives of employees better. Enhanced employee morale and security are also correlated with higher productivity and better professional outcomes in the workplace. From a financial standpoint, the [CDC estimates](#) that by combining medical and behavioral healthcare services, the US could save between \$37-\$67 billion per year. Finally, employees themselves place increasing value on wellness programs like EAPs. [One survey](#) reported that job seekers and employees rate EAPs nearly as high as they do the ability to work from home and to set their own schedule. Business leaders that prioritize mental health in the workplace set up their organization and their team members for greater retention, better financial outcomes, and a happier environment for all employees.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- The nature of a workplace environment can have a significant impact on the mental health and performance of employees.
- Chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental wellness issues are very common and affect a large portion of the population every year.
- Progressive employers can address mental health in the workplace by:
 - Increasing awareness around mental health issues and destigmatizing them.
 - Improving access to mental health programs by investing in new initiatives and training staff to better understand mental wellness.
 - Encouraging a healthier work/life balance through policies designed to relieve stress and boost overall wellness.
- The benefits of prioritizing mental health in the workplace include greater employee satisfaction, better performance, enhanced company culture, and improved financial outcomes.
- Espyr can help your organization implement mental health solutions that allow businesses to achieve their full potential and drive behavioral change.

ABOUT ESPYR

Espyr is a leading voice in the field of mental health solutions. Our mission is to enable people and organizations to achieve their full potential by providing immediate, customizable behavioral health solutions that extend beyond mental health counseling. We aim to help clients care for their members holistically with technology-enabled coaching and counseling, leading to higher engagement, better ROI, and reduced health claims. We offer a wide range of services – from EAPs and financial wellness services to AI-powered chatbots and tele-counseling.

Call: 1-888-570-3479

Visit: espyr.com/learnmore

E-mail: info@espyr.com

