



9 strategies to support the mental health of your employees



Why mental health matters

Mental health is central to being human.

It's deeply integrated into every aspect of who we are — and it influences the possibilities for what we can become.

“Without mental health, there can be no true physical health,” Dr. Brock Chisholm, the first director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO), famously stated. He was a psychiatrist who strongly believed that our mental health and our physical health were undeniably intertwined.

We would expand that statement even further — without mental health, there can be no true health at all.

Now, there's data to back that up.

People with depression, for instance, are at higher risk of other medical conditions, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, stroke, and Alzheimer's disease, according to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).⁹

Our mental, physical and financial health are also interconnected.

Nearly half (45 percent) of Americans say that debt causes them to experience anxiety on a monthly basis, while 20 percent report that it has caused them to feel physically ill.¹⁰

Of course, your employees don't check their mental health at the door when they come into work. It makes or breaks their ability to perform.

Poor mental health and stress can negatively impact employee job performance, productivity, engagement, and even every day functioning, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).¹

On the other hand, positive mental health can help people to⁷:

- Realize their potential
- Cope with stress
- Work productively
- Make meaningful contributions to their community

It might also help to promote creativity and collaboration with others at work.

The big takeaway?

The mental health of each individual has a ripple effect. Collectively, it impacts the well-being of individuals, the people closest to them (family and friends), your business' bottom line, and even society as a whole.

In this white paper, we'll share why employers can't afford to ignore mental health — and strategies they can deploy to support it.



Key Insights



Why You Should Care:

- Five of five of your employees have mental health — and they all could benefit from a mentally healthy work environment.
- Poor mental health and stress can negatively impact employee job performance, productivity, engagement, and even every day functioning.¹
- Worldwide, the number of people suffering from depression and/or anxiety increased by nearly 50 percent between 1990 and 2013, jumping from 416 million to 615 million. Depression and anxiety cost the global economy \$1 trillion each year.²
- Depression causes roughly 200 million lost workdays annually, which costs employers an estimated \$17 to \$44 billion³
- Workplace burnout has become so widespread that it's now classified as an “occupational phenomenon” in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11). Although it's not a medical condition, workplace burnout is included in the chapter that describes the factors that can influence health status or contact with health services. It's described as a “... syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.”⁴
- There's a cost to doing nothing — and a return for taking action. Investing in treatment for anxiety and depression has a fourfold return. Every \$1 invested toward increasing the treatment of depression and anxiety leads to a \$4 return in better health and ability to work.²

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World Health Organization



Who Can Help:

- Most of the world's population (58 percent) spend one-third of their lives working.⁵ In the U.S., employed adults spend more time working than any other activity, aside from sleeping.⁶ That gives employers the unique opportunity to address mental health in an environment where people already are — the workplace.
- Mental health is not a “you” problem, it's a “we” opportunity.
- Positive mental health can help people realize their potential, cope with stress, work productively, and make meaningful contributions to their community.⁷



How you can help

1 Take an honest look at your company culture.
Evaluate your work environment and culture. This can be done through employee surveys or by establishing representative committees. However, many companies find it beneficial to bring in an outside, third-party consultant. If you train individuals on how to become more resilient, but the root cause of their stress stems from their work environment, it's going to be difficult for them to persevere.

2 Encourage your executives to be allies.
When organizational leaders prioritize and talk about their mental health, they empower employees to do the same. These exchanges help to silence the stigmas — not the other way around.

3 Integrate into your well-being program.
Mental health support is more accessible if it's part of a larger program that people are already engaged in. Make sure mental health is weaved throughout your well-being program, especially since it impacts every aspect of your employees' health. Additionally, throughout your well-being program, use technology and people (managers and coaches) to remind employees about employer-sponsored mental health resources available to them.

4 Measure mental health companywide and deploy targeted strategies. Deploy holistic assessments companywide to help employees understand how they're currently doing in different aspects of their lives and find a clear path forward. Based on the results, launch targeted strategies to reach employees by location, job type, team, and more. Use mobile technologies to provide guided choice to each individual depending on where they need support.

5 Empower managers to proactively foster a work environment that promotes psychological safety and is supportive of employee well-being.
Train managers to not only recognize the signs of job stress, but also arm them with tools and skills to lean into these conversations confidently and impactfully.

6 Connect people to resources.
Ask leaders to familiarize themselves with your company and community's mental health benefits and offerings. Consider hosting a companywide training on mental health at the start of each new year. Ask your employees how they navigate your company's mental health resources and implement improvements accordingly. Partner with Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) to leverage applicable mental health resources.

7 Make mental health services more accessible.
One in four Americans had to choose between paying for mental health treatment or paying for daily necessities.⁸ You might consider offering mental health support with low or no out-of-pocket cost to employees. This could include covered services by insurance, as well as virtual care technologies.

8 Listen to your workforce.
Survey your population to get their feedback on your company's mental health offerings. Refine your business strategy based on these insights.

9 Commit to a mental health action plan for your organization. Outline the steps that need to occur, who will take ownership, and how and when each phase will roll out.



Strategies to help boost employee mental health

Now that we know mental health impacts every aspect of our employees' lives — including their work — how can we help to improve it?

It starts by making mental health an individual and organizational priority.

Here are some actionable strategies to help you create a mentally healthy workplace.

Goal #1

Access your work environment and culture

Tactics:

- Take an honest look at your company culture. This can be done through employee surveys or by establishing representative committees. Many companies also find it beneficial to bring in outside, third-party consultants to provide objective feedback.
- Assess your health insurance, benefits and employee perks and programs. Ask your employees how they feel about the current health insurance and benefits package. Have there been any collective pain points? Is there anything they think is being overlooked? Many companies also benchmark their benefits against other competitors of comparable size.
- Use your well-being program to unlock insights into how your people are doing — in key aspects of their lives and also holistically. This helps you understand where individuals and, collectively, population subsets may need the most support. For example, Aduro utilizes a Flourishing Index that looks at how emotional health impacts overall flourishing in individuals.
- Get certified as a mentally healthy workplace by the MHA. This can also help with recruitment and retention, as research shows that most employees want the companies they work for to prioritize mental health.
- Partner with team members focused on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in your organization to understand specific opportunities to improve mental health care access and decrease stigma experienced by underrepresented groups.

Desired Outcome:

Getting honest feedback about your company culture and clear signals about where individuals are struggling and flourishing allows you to identify barriers to employee mental health. Then, you can determine whether the barriers can be removed and, if not, how you'll train employees to move past them.



Goal #2

Create a mental health plan

Tactics:

- Establish a plan for how you will address the opportunities identified in your company's assessment, including clear objectives.
- Create a timeline that denotes when initiatives will roll out. Will it be a phased approach? If so, what comes first?
- Get top-down support of the plan and business case.
- Designate specific people to take ownership of each piece (executives, managers, employees, Employee Resource Group members, etc.).
- Decide how the mental health plan and objectives will be communicated.

Desired Outcome:

After this initiative, you should have a written out, well-communicated mental health plan that gets everyone on the same page. It also gives you something concrete to reference back to during meetings, in order to determine what to focus on now and what to focus on next.

Goal #3

Leverage your well-being program

Tactics:

- Determine how your well-being program can holistically support your mental health plan. It's easier for your employees to work on their mental health if it's part of a larger program that your entire company already participates in year-round.
- Determine how your well-being program can aid in helping you assess your employees' current mental well-being, offer personalized pathways forward, well-timed interventions, and report on progress over time.
- Leverage your holistic well-being program as a way to destigmatize mental health support. Communicating mental health as an integral thread throughout each aspect of life normalizes the topic and makes it more accessible.
- Consider offering a coaching program through your well-being program, which can help your employees increase awareness and learn strategies to overcome common mental health struggles, such as stress. Drawing on the trusted coaching relationship, coaches can also connect people struggling with mental health conditions to appropriate resources.

Desired Outcome:

Nearly half of U.S. worksites offer some type of health program to employees, according to the CDC.²⁶ If you're already paying for it, make sure it's capable of delivering what you truly need — a plan that addresses your employees' total well-being, not just their physical health.

"Your employee well-being program is the right place to incorporate that conversation," says Renee Petrie, Senior Vice President of Innovation at Aduro. "That's where we're tying together all of those resources — we're normalizing the conversation, embracing the whole continuum and centralizing all of the tools and resources that people have access to, wherever they are on that continuum."



Goal #4

Encourage your executives to be allies

Tactics:

- Identify respected executives who you think would champion for mental health within your organization, not because they were asked to, but because it's already a personal priority to them.
- Empower these leaders to kick off and continue the conversation about mental health using a variety of communication methods (in-person town hall meetings, webinars, emails, video messages, etc.).
- Encourage them to humanize their message with their personal story.
- Larger organizations with multiple offices might also consider identifying employees who would like to volunteer to be mental health advocates at their local branch. These employees could be the ones to communicate local mental health efforts to their colleagues through email, video or other formats, in order to make it more relatable and authentic.

Desired Outcome:

When organizational leaders prioritize and talk about their mental health, they empower employees to do the same. These exchanges help to silence the stigmas — not the other way around.

Goal #5

Measure mental health companywide and deploy targeted strategies

Tactics:

- Deploy companywide flourishing assessments to help employees determine their current mental state and find a clear path forward.
- Based on the results, launch targeted strategies to reach employees by location, job type, team, and more.

Desired Outcome:

You want to create a system that regularly measures to what degree your population is flourishing and delivers real-time feedback loops paired with personalized interventions to that population, then monitor the impact.



Goal #6

Empower managers to proactively foster a work environment that promotes psychological safety and is supportive of employee well-being

Tactics:

- Train managers on how they can proactively foster a mentally healthy work environment. According to WHO, a healthy workplace is “one in which workers and managers collaborate to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety, and well-being of workers and the sustainability of the workplace by considering the following, based on identified needs:
- Health and safety concerns in the physical work environment;
- Health, safety and well-being concerns in the psychosocial work environment including organization of work and workplace culture;
- Personal health resources in the workplace; and
- Ways of participating in the community to improve the health of workers, their families and other members of the community.”
- Educate managers about the signs of job stress and make sure they’re knowledgeable about employer-provided mental health benefits and community resources, in order to point people in the right direction.
- Utilize authentic messaging from leadership (email, video, in-person) that speak to the value found in these trainings to encourage managers to take part in these trainings.

Desired Outcome:

Employers aren’t expected to know the difference between an employee going through a challenging life event and those with major depression. Nor are managers expected to be counselors and therapists. They do, however, have an organizational responsibility to recognize when their people are struggling and provide resources to help. And it’s the organization’s responsibility to ensure managers are confident to do so.



Goal #7

Connect people to resources

Tactics:

- Ask leaders to familiarize themselves with your company's unique mental health benefits and offerings.
- Leverage the trusted relationships build in coaching to connect people to support. Work with your Client Experience team member to ensure that your coaching team has access to the most up-to-date mental health resources available to your employees and their family members. If there are community-based resources to promote, include these too.
- Partner with Diversity, Equity & Inclusion initiatives to raise the topic of mental health and mental health resources to underrepresented groups in a sensitive and impactful way.
- Consider hosting a companywide training on mental health at the start of each new year. Or rally around nationwide awareness campaigns such as May, Mental Health Awareness Month. You might enlist a few experts who can help train employees to recognize the signs of stress, anxiety, burnout, and depression — as well as offer tools and resources that can help people take action when these signals come up. Utilize technology for virtual access and/or plan location-specific trainings.

Desired Outcome:

Annual trainings act as a helpful reminder of the mental health supports that are available to your employees, in order for people to better utilize them. (See call-out graphic on “mental health resources.”)





Make mental health services more accessible

Tactics:

- Employers might consider offering free or subsidized clinical screenings for depression from a qualified mental health professional.
- You might consider offering mental health support with low or no out-of-pocket cost to employees. This could include covered services by insurance, as well as virtual care technologies.
- Consider offering flexible work schedules (allowing employees to choose their start and end time from a couple different options). By doing so, employers can make it easier for employees to carve out time for mental health. This might give them the time to take that yoga class that helps them start the day in a healthy headspace — or attend necessary medical appointments, such as therapy.
- Partner with Diversity, Equity & Inclusion initiatives to raise the topic of mental health and mental health resources to underrepresented groups in a sensitive and impactful way.

Desired Outcome:

By making mental health treatment acceptable and accessible, you'll be helping employees seek help who might not have otherwise. Supporting employee mental health now can also help you avoid upstream costs later.



Get feedback from your workforce

Tactics:

- Create a diverse focus group who can weigh in on the company's current mental health benefits and programs, as well as make suggestions about new potential offerings.
- Survey your population to get their feedback on mental health programs offered by your company.

Desired Outcome:

Annual trainings act as a helpful reminder of the mental health supports that are available to your employees, in order for people to better utilize them. (See call-out graphic on “mental health resources.”)

