

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

Depression affects as many as one in three adults,<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

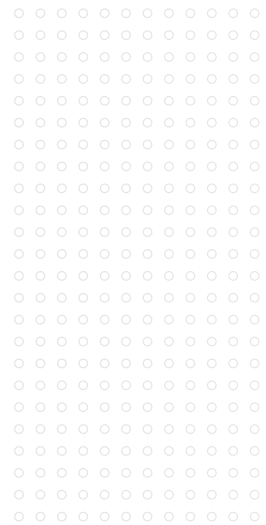
<sup>2</sup>Harvard Business Review, “It’s a New Era for Mental Health at Work,” October 4, 2021.

<sup>3</sup>McKinsey & 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

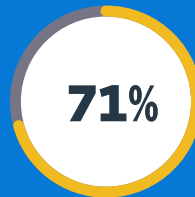
Organizations need to honestly evaluate how the work environment contributes to mental health issues and try to change it for the better:

- ☐ 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%

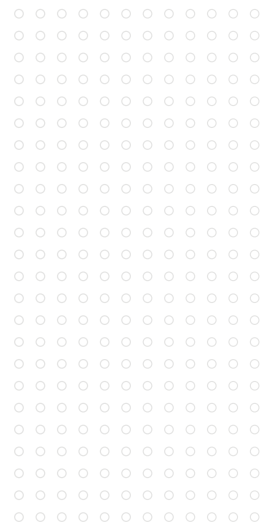


Of those who feel stressed at work will look for new jobs in the coming year.<sup>4</sup>

## 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.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> American Psychological Association, "The American workforce faces compounding pressure," October 4, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> 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%)**.

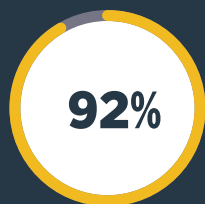


More than 80% of employees think awareness campaigns can help overcome the stigma of seeking mental health treatment, **but only 23% of employers have such campaigns in place.**

## 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 practices<sup>8</sup>



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



Budgets for wellbeing programs increased about **22%** in 2021.<sup>7</sup>

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

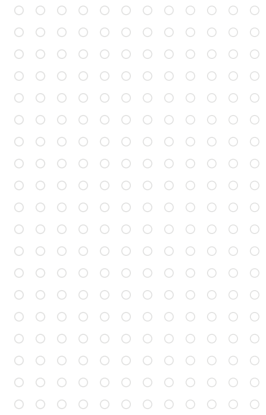
<sup>7</sup>Human Resource Executive, "How much are employers investing in wellness programs?" June 10, 2021.

<sup>8</sup>These 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.**

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