

How Businesses Can Better Support the Mental Wellbeing of Employees and Combat Burnout



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- **McLean Hospital** in citing data supplied by the American Psychiatric Association (APA).

As human resource professionals are well aware, mental health is an important issue that must not be overlooked, especially in the workplace. However, effectively supporting employees is not as simple as providing healthcare insurance with therapy and counseling services.

High employee turnover rates, workers who frequently call out sick, or employees struggling with productivity, burnout and now quiet quitting, are potential red flags that employers should not dismiss. These could be indicators that some associates are experiencing mental health conditions that are going untreated.

Employers must take a proactive approach to address mental wellness. This involves investing in company-wide training and leveraging innovative tools and resources to help support employee needs in today's complex environment. Failure to do so can be costly.

Consider this: Employees with unresolved depression experience a 35 percent reduction in productivity, which contributes to a loss to the U.S. economy of \$210.5 billion a year in absenteeism, reduced productivity, and medical costs, reported McLean Hospital in citing data supplied by the American Psychiatric Association (APA).¹

Meanwhile, additional research found that 66 percent of those who are thinking about quitting their job said getting more mental health services could convince them to stay.² In today's tough job market, losing talent is a gamble many businesses cannot afford to take.

And since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, employee mental health has only grown in importance for businesses.

To help employers navigate the complexities, this white paper explores the benefits of a mentally fit workforce and actionable steps businesses can take to ensure they are effectively supporting the mental wellbeing of their employees.

Mental Health in the Workplace

Employees today are stressed and burned out. In fact, recent Talkspace research found that many Americans are stuck in a mental wellness rut with more than half (51 percent) reporting they are burned out and 46 percent said work is too stressful. What's more, a majority said it has worsened in the last year.³

Why? A major factor is that many workers are being asked to do more with less — fewer resources, less time and less support. When asked about the top stressors at work, employees cited the following⁴:

¹ "What Employers Need to Know About Mental Health in the Workplace." McLean Hospital, www.mcleanhospital.org/essential/what-employers-need-know-about-mental-health-workplace

² Talkspace, 2022, Employee Stress Check 2022 Report, www.talkspace.com/research/stress-in-the-workplace

³ Talkspace, 2022, Employee Stress Check 2022 Report, www.talkspace.com/research/stress-in-the-workplace

⁴ Talkspace, 2022, Employee Stress Check 2022 Report, www.talkspace.com/research/stress-in-the-workplace

- Being asked to take on more work (52 percent)
- Hours away from family and leisure (48 percent)
- Being asked to do work faster (47 percent)
- Being micromanaged (46 percent)

Now, throw into the mix pandemic-related stresses, such as workers feeling anxious about having to now return to the office after working remotely or remote workers feeling isolated and missing the in-person interactions with colleagues.

Unfortunately, feeling stressed and burned out not only bleeds into an employee's personal life — often resulting in trouble sleeping, feeling short-tempered, unhappiness, and unhealthy eating habits — but it also impacts their productivity in the workplace.

As noted earlier, employees with unresolved depression experience a 35 percent reduction in productivity, contributing to a loss to the U.S. economy of \$210.5 billion a year in absenteeism, reduced productivity, and medical costs, according to the American Psychiatric Association.⁵ Therefore, having a strong employee mental health program isn't simply a perk — it's a preventative, cost-saving measure that employers must not overlook.

And since the outbreak of the pandemic, employee mental health has only grown in importance for businesses. In fact, research found that depression rates in the United States not only tripled when the pandemic first hit, but persisted and even worsened.

According to the Boston University School of Public Health, depression among adults in the United States tripled in the early 2020 months of the pandemic — climbing from 8.5 percent before the pandemic to 27.8 percent. Furthermore, research reveals that the elevated rate of depression persisted into 2021, and even worsened, climbing to 32.8 percent and affecting 1-in-every-3 American adults.⁶

Unfortunately, when it comes to employers accommodating the mental health needs of associates, and the stigma associated with mental health issues, there remains much room for improvement.

According to an APA-sponsored online survey conducted in 2021, only 1-in-5 respondents said their employer has offered additional mental health services, down from 35 percent the prior year. Just over half of employees said they can talk openly about mental health with coworkers (56 percent) and supervisors (56 percent), down slightly from last year (65 percent and 62 percent, respectively).⁷

⁵ What Employers Need to Know About Mental Health in the Workplace." McLean Hospital, www.mcleanhospital.org/essential/what-employers-need-know-about-mental-health-workplace

⁶ McKoy, Jillian. "Depression Rates in US Tripled When the Pandemic First Hit—Now, They're Even Worse." Boston University, 7 Oct. 2021, www.bu.edu/articles/2021/depression-rates-tripled-when-pandemic-first-hit/

⁷ "As Americans Begin to Return to the Office, Views on Workplace Mental Health Are Mixed." American Psychiatric Association, 20 May 2021, psychiatry.org/news-room/news-releases/as-americans-begin-to-return-to-the-office-views-o

Talkspace research found that 66 percent of those who are considering quitting their job say that getting more mental health services could convince them to stay.

— Talkspace,
Employee Stress
Check Report 2022

Furthermore, APA research also found that only about 1-in-7 employees said their employer offers mental health apps or mental health training for supervisors and managers.⁸

What's also worrisome is that more than 4-in-10 employees surveyed said they are concerned about retaliation if they seek mental health care or take time off for their mental health.⁹

Agreeing with these findings, Dr. Varun Choudhary, Chief Medical Officer at Talkspace, said, "We've made a lot of progress in reducing stigma that's attached to mental treatment in this country, but it continues to be an issue,"¹⁰

The good news is that employers are not powerless. There are proactive measures businesses can take to help improve the mental wellbeing of associates while, in turn, improving employee productivity and engagement.

Developing a Mentally Healthy Workforce

As we've seen, addressing employee mental health is not only cost-effective for the employer but also beneficial for the employee. Fortunately, there are proactive steps that employers can take — that extend beyond just providing healthcare insurance with therapy and counseling services — to help foster a mentally healthy workplace.

"A prevention and intervention approach is going to be so differing depending on the company culture, if people work in shifts, if people are on Zoom meetings all the time, it really depends. But, I think, coming at it from a place of getting clear on your priorities, aligning with your boss on those, and making mental health benefits really widely available to employees and their dependents, and having regular check-ins on: 'How are your teams doing?' 'Do you have everything you need to do your jobs well?' 'Are there any barriers?'" said Talkspace therapist Kate Rosenblatt, MA, LPC, LMHC¹¹.

While, as Rosenblatt noted, there's no one-size-fits-all approach to creating a mentally healthy workplace, there are definitely some steps that employers should consider. Let's take a closer look.

Encourage that managers help employees prioritize their work by clarifying and defining goals and deadlines, and ensuring that both team members and managers are aligned on their respective priorities. When employees have a clear sense of their goals and priorities it can reduce feelings of being overwhelmed and help mitigate burn out.

⁸ "As Americans Begin to Return to the Office, Views on Workplace Mental Health Are Mixed." American Psychiatric Association, 20 May 2021, [psychiatry.org/news-room/news-releases/as-americans-begin-to-return-to-the-office-views-o](https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/news-releases/as-americans-begin-to-return-to-the-office-views-o)

⁹ "As Americans Begin to Return to the Office, Views on Workplace Mental Health Are Mixed." American Psychiatric Association, 20 May 2021, [psychiatry.org/news-room/news-releases/as-americans-begin-to-return-to-the-office-views-o](https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/news-releases/as-americans-begin-to-return-to-the-office-views-o)

¹⁰ Choudhary, Varun, phone interview, July 20, 2022

¹¹ Rosenblatt, Kate, phone interview, July 20, 2022



“It’s really important that employees feel that they can disconnect and recharge. This means employers need to be able to give employees space to do that while on PTO. If an organization expects an employee to be checking emails and still be on call while taking PTO that can minimize the effects of taking PTO and further lead to feelings of burnout.”

— **Laura Magnuson,**
MA, MS, LAMFT
VP of Clinical Engagement
Talkspace

Encourage managers to discuss individual career goals with team members. Is there room to grow within the company? How can that team member better work toward their career goal? Identifying and discussing the career opportunities that may be available within the company can help drive employee engagement and improve employee retention. Furthermore, employers may want to invest in management training so they’re better equipped to navigate difficult conversations, like an employee coming to them saying they’re quitting to accept a more attractive job offer.

Consider implementing regular check-ins or surveying employees to see how they’re doing. “We have seen some success in employers fostering a mentally healthy workplace by ... sending regularly scheduled, anonymous check-in surveys for teams to share how they’re feeling. To check-in on if they have everything they need to do their jobs to the best of their ability, and if there’s anything they need from management to help support them,” said Rosenblatt. “Those can be done quarterly or twice a year, for example, but if you do some of these surveys it’s really a best practice to collate the data, and follow-up with your teams on [the feedback], and share a plan with what you’re going to do about it so people feel heard.”¹²

Encourage staff to take advantage of wellness days, which often go underutilized. Research shows that, while workers desire more time off from their employer, less than half (39 percent) actually get and use most of their PTO.¹³ To further promote the importance of time off and help prevent burnout, companies may even want to consider implementing company-wide mental health days, which are days in which the entire office will close. Laura Magnuson, VP of Clinical Engagement at Talkspace shared, “It’s really important that employees feel that they can disconnect and recharge. This means employers need to be able to give employees space to do that while on PTO. If an organization expects an employee to be checking emails and still be on call while taking PTO that can minimize the effects of taking PTO and further lead to feelings of burnout. What we are seeing now with “quiet quitting” is employees saying that they are burned out and drawing boundaries as they feel like they cannot keep functioning the way that they have been and have good mental health. It’s important for employers to recognize this need from their staff and not dismiss it. Otherwise, low productivity, absenteeism and turnover will just continue.” If an employer cannot make changes that employees have suggested, transparency about the limitations is crucial employees can at least feel heard and validated.

¹² Rosenblatt, Kate, phone interview, July 20, 2022

¹³ Talkspace, 2022, Employee Stress Check 2022 Report, www.talkspace.com/research/stress-in-the-workplace

Invest in training that addresses both prevention and intervention. For instance, provide managers with mental health training so they are better equipped to identify the signs and symptoms of mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Employers may also want to consider providing employees and directors with training on how to avoid burnout, stress management, building resilience, etc. “Oftentimes managers and supervisors are not sure how to have a conversation with an employee who might be struggling. While they have the best intentions, this conversation might not go well or it could be swept under the rug because the supervisor isn’t equipped. It’s vital that employers are offering and allowing time for managers and supervisors to build skills not only the technical pieces of the job, but also in the emotional pieces. Offering Mental Health First Aid, Emotional Intelligence training, and Leading with Empathy courses will all help the workforce and the bottom dollar,” added Magnuson.

Companies should also ensure that employees have access to easy-to-use mental health benefits and be sure to market those accordingly. Your company may offer mental health benefits but how aware and informed are employees of those offerings?

Furthermore, the United Nations outlined a series of steps that managers and leaders can do to promote a healthy workplace. These include, but are not limited to¹⁴ :

- Raise awareness and knowledge among staff on what promotes well being and good mental health. For example, make sure there is information/posters available to associates on where to access help and what is available.
- Review your workplace for risks or vulnerabilities that may impact the mental health and wellbeing of employees. Consider even engaging staff in reviewing the workplace to identify issues and solutions.
- Establish some simple team routines or habits, or enhance existing ones. For instance, acknowledge success and achievements and; appoint champions for well-being or establish well-being buddies.
- Ensure managers are trained on how to notice if someone may need help or more support — red flags or possible indicators (i.e., irritability, increased absenteeism, lateness, not getting work done on time, changes in appearance, etc.)
- Ensure that managers have tips on how to start a conversation with a staff member they’re concerned about, or steps they can take if the person doesn’t want to talk. For instance, start with a friendly, “I’ve noticed you haven’t been yourself lately and I’m concerned. What is going on?” Then asking, “How could I support you with that?”

¹⁴ Creating a Mentally Healthy Workplace. United Nations, www.un.org/en/healthy-workforce/files/Creating%20a%20Mentally%20Healthy%20Workplace.pdf



“Measurement-based care is really vital to establish that what we do works and helps improve the lives of those who entrust us to care for them. ... I think that’s a significant factor that goes into our model of care.”

— Dr. Varun Choudhary,
Chief Medical Officer,
Talkspace

While there are various ways employers can foster a mentally healthy workforce, a common thread that runs throughout is to be proactive, open the doors of communication, and provide staff with the right tools and resources.

“It can be hard sometimes to notice certain red flags but, regardless, if some people are experiencing symptoms of burnout, or anxiety, or depression you don’t have to wait until these conditions worsen to see a therapist. You don’t have to wait for a crisis to see a therapist ... It just really breaks my heart that so many people, I think, still see therapy or mental health resources as sort of a last case resort when we know that early intervention is better when it comes to health care, in general, and mental health, in particular,” Rosenblatt said.¹⁵

Benefits of a Mentally Fit Workforce

In today’s challenging environment it is more important than ever for companies to invest in and foster a mentally fit workforce. Doing so can help employers attract and retain top talent, improve productivity, and boost employee engagement. The reality is that mental health benefits are no longer a nice-to-have benefit, they are expected as part of a well-balanced benefits package.

Attract and Retain Talent

Employers who invest in mental health resources for their employees can further differentiate themselves in today’s challenging job market as many businesses are struggling to attract and retain talent.

Doing so demonstrates to both current and prospective employees that the company cares about the well-being of its associates, understands the importance of a healthy work environment, and has invested in innovative tools and resources to help associates live happier lives.

As noted earlier, Talkspace research found that 66 percent of those who are considering quitting their job say that getting more mental health services could convince them to say.¹⁶ That’s significant.

It is especially important to point out that, according to Talkspace research, mental health services can help retain workers who are parents (68 percent). This is important because working parents are hit harder by the factors that contribute to work stress and burnout like having to juggle both work and familial responsibilities. In fact, balancing work and familial responsibilities proves difficult for well over half (60 percent) of all working parents and they are more susceptible to workplace stress compared with those who are not parents.¹⁷

¹⁵ Rosenblatt, Kate, phone interview, July 20, 2022

¹⁶ Talkspace, 2022, Employee Stress Check 2022 Report, www.talkspace.com/research/stress-in-the-workplace

¹⁷ Talkspace, 2022, Employee Stress Check 2022 Report, www.talkspace.com/research/stress-in-the-workplace

Boost Productivity, Engagement

Unresolved mental health issues can cost companies a lot of money. Absenteeism, a lack of productivity, and employee turnover can quickly mount to become a significant amount of money lost. Employee turnover, alone, is a big expense costing businesses approximately 30 percent of an employee's salary with each turnover.¹⁸ Therefore, it is critical to understand the strong connection between a mentally fit workforce and high productivity and engagement.

Consider, for instance, the findings of a "Workplace Symptom Improvement and Productivity" study on the effectiveness of text therapy. The study found that participants experienced such benefits as: Productivity at work increased by 36 percent, people missed 50 percent less hours of work, and the impact of symptoms on functioning outside of work decreased by 39 percent.¹⁹

Leverage Technology

So what more can HR professionals do? Ensure that their companies have implemented innovative mental health tools and resources to meet the needs of today's employees. This includes leveraging virtual therapy.

Virtual therapy is not an attempt to replace the in-person dynamics between therapists and clients; however, it can be a great solution for many people and a convenient and cost-effective health care benefit that employers can offer.

The reality is that there are several benefits to virtual therapy. The care is immediate, responsive and outcomes-focused to support diverse needs such as depression, anxiety and stress, productivity, and much more. Benefits include:

- **Accessibility:** This can be especially helpful for employees in more rural areas or those working in the hospitality, retail and manufacturing fields, in warehouses, etc.
- **Convenience:** Depending on their work schedules, etc., some employees may find it difficult to schedule an in-person counseling appointment. Having the flexibility to schedule an online appointment when it's best for their schedule is no doubt an added benefit.
- **More comfortable:** Some may find online therapy to be less intimidating than in-person therapy. Online therapy eliminates barriers to high-quality mental health support, and employees are provided with treatment that is safe, discreet and approachable.
- **Affordable:** Online therapy can be a more affordable option compared with traditional therapy.

¹⁸ "2020 Retention Report: Trends, Reasons, Costs & Recommendations." 2020 Retention Report: Trends, Reasons, Costs & Recommendations, info.workinstitute.com/en/retention-report-2020

¹⁹ DellaCrosse, Meghan, et al. "The Effect of Messaging Therapy for Depression and Anxiety on Employee Productivity - Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science." SpringerLink, 26 June 2018, link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41347-018-0064-4

“Quality matters and having a comprehensive, integrated model of care for behavioral health is extremely important. You can’t really separate physical health from mental health and so we really look at how to come across and approach things in a collaborative, comprehensive and integrated manner.”

— Dr. Varun Choudhary,
Chief Medical Officer,
Talkspace

Take, for example, Talkspace. Talkspace is a provider of virtual behavioral health services whose comprehensive virtual model of care is backed by years of research. All care is delivered through an easy-to-use and encrypted web and mobile platform, consistent with HIPAA and state regulatory requirements.

“Talkspace has the advantage of having been around for over a decade. So we’ve got over 10 years of experience and I think this has really given us the ability to create the highest quality, comprehensive virtual model of care. With that dedication to quality and to outcomes, we have a special product and we have a leadership team that is dedicated to that mission as well,” Dr. Choudhary explained.²⁰

Continued Dr. Choudhary, “We are very much aligned with feedback and informed care and really emphasizing looking at quality metrics and outcome measures as the most effective means to get there. Measurement-based care is really vital to establish that what we do works and helps improve the lives of those who entrust us to care for them. ... I think that’s a significant factor that goes into our model of care.”

As noted earlier, virtual therapy is not an attempt to replace the in-person dynamics between therapists and client. However, research shows that Talkspace online therapy can be a great fit for many people. Consider the findings²¹:

- 80 percent thought Talkspace was as effective or more effective than traditional therapy.
- 88 percent said Talkspace was more affordable than traditional therapy over a four-month period.
- 98 percent thought Talkspace to be more convenient than traditional therapy.

Furthermore, a separate Talkspace study of 10,000 participants suffering from depression and anxiety found that nearly 70 percent of participants using the Talkspace platform saw significant improvement in their symptoms, 53 percent of participants fully recovered from depression, and 48 percent recovered from anxiety, Dr. Choudhary noted.²²

“Quality matters and having a comprehensive, integrated model of care for behavioral health is extremely important,” Dr. Choudhary said. “You can’t really separate physical health from mental health and so we really look at how to come across and approach things in a collaborative, comprehensive and integrated manner.”²³

²⁰ Choudhary, Varun, phone interview, July 20, 2022

²¹ A Study of Asynchronous Mobile-Enabled SMS Text Psychotherapy ... www.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/tmj.2016.0114?journalCode=tmj

²² Choudhary, Varun, phone interview, July 20, 2022

²³ Choudhary, Varun, phone interview, July 20, 2022

Conclusion

As HR professionals are well aware, mental health is an important issue that must not be overlooked, especially in the workplace. But simply providing healthcare insurance with therapy and counseling services is not enough.

This is because some employees may not be fully aware of their own benefits. Therefore, it is important to ensure that employees have a clear understanding of all the services available to them.

Early intervention leads to a greater preventative measures and positive outcomes. It is essential that employers take a proactive approach to address mental wellness. This involves investing in company-wide training and leveraging innovative tools and resources, like virtual therapy, to help support employees. However, knowing where to start can be daunting. Turning to a solutions provider like Talkspace can help ensure that your company — and its employees — are on a path to success.