

Are your mental health benefits widely known and widely used?



The employee benefits buzz for the past two years has been — say it with us — mental health. And it’s the buzz for good reason. Mental health issues are shown to have widespread impacts on the American workforce:

- The majority of employees, **92%**, experience mental health challenges that impact their work.¹
- An estimated **200 million** workdays are lost each year due to mental health challenges.²
- Untreated mental illness costs the U.S. a staggering **\$3.7 trillion** each year.²
- Due to increased mental health issues, **42%** of employers said their benefits or claims costs increased last year.³

We’ve seen the growing consciousness of the need for mental health support, and you have too. In fact, many employers have stepped up. Nearly 80% of organizations currently offer workplace mental health resources or plan to within the next year.⁴ But even the most clearly defined strategies and carefully curated benefits won’t make a difference if they’re not widely known and used by employees when they need them.

The pieces won’t fall into place on their own

Of the nearly 53 million U.S. adults with a mental illness, only 46% have accessed mental health services.⁴ There could be numerous reasons for that — many stemming from lack of communication or understanding.

Fewer than 10% of employees feel their workplace is free of stigmas surrounding mental health, which makes them hesitant to ask for help.² And despite the increase in mental health resources, only 43% of employees are aware that such help is available to them.⁵ In fact, more than a third (37%) of employees say they delayed treatment for a mental health concern because they didn't know if it was covered by their health insurance plan.³



Unlock greater use of your mental health benefits

An employee benefits strategy that includes mental health support is start. To help ensure employees know about that support — and take advantage of it — businesses can consider two critical steps.

1. Openly prioritize mental health.

Mental health and mental illness can be sensitive, intimidating topics for employees. When employers prioritize mental health as part of the company culture, it helps remove stigma, build trust and create opportunities for meaningful engagement. There are lots of ways — big and small — to incorporate mental health into company culture, including:⁶

- Ensure leadership is actively and openly involved, and encourages employees to do the same.
- Host seminars or workshops that address mental health challenges, as well as how to alleviate stress through techniques such as mindfulness, breathing exercises and meditation.
- Foster employee engagement and growth, and provide education to help boost their mental health literacy.
- Provide purpose for employees by organizing volunteering events, social impact experiences, lunch and learns or group activities that support nonprofit organizations.
- Train managers to recognize signs and symptoms of mental health issues, along with how to support employees who are experiencing them.
- Keep the support fires burning by exhibiting, communicating and supporting mental health awareness throughout the year, not only during open enrollment or employee survey time.

2. Communicate (and then communicate a lot more).

Communicating regularly and in a variety of ways is a must for getting employees' attention around mental health and available support. Examples include:

- Newsletters
- Employee social channels
- Emails and mailers
- Videos
- Text messages
- Company intranet
- Pulse surveys
- All-employee and team meetings
- Digital signage
- Games and contests
- Open enrollment activities

Participation leads to better outcomes — which is better for everyone

When employees take advantage of mental health support, the impacts are far-reaching.

- Most HR professionals, **94%**, believe that by offering mental health resources, organizations can improve the overall health of employees, and **88%** believe it can help increase productivity.⁴
- The majority of HR professionals, **86%**, say offering mental health resources can help increase employee retention, and **72%** think it can help attract new talent.⁴
- For every **\$1** invested yearly in prevention and intervention programs to support mental health, employers can save **\$2-\$4** on other expenses.⁷

Significant time and effort go into developing employee benefits strategies that support both business objectives and employee health, well-being and productivity. When decisions are being made about the role mental health benefits can play in these strategies, don't forget the keys that can help unlock greater utilization and better outcomes.

Aflac's continued commitment to the ever-evolving emphasis on mental health

Mental health is on a spectrum, so your coverage should be too. Aflac is fully committed to being a part of the care you show employees while also tending to the well-being of your business. We look closely at our offerings to identify gaps and find places where we can fine-tune benefits—or add new ones—to help close them.

Ask your Aflac benefits representative about products and services that can support mental health and help enhance your clients' benefits strategies.

¹ Forbes. "CEO required reading: 2023 workplace mental health resolutions." Jan. 19, 2023. [Accessed 4.14.23.](#)

² National Council for Mental Illness. Mental Health First Aid. "How employers can create a healthier workforce in 2023." Feb. 23, 2023. [Accessed 4.13.23.](#)

³ Aflac. "Aflac Workforces Report: Workplace Benefits Trends employee well-being and mental health." Published Nov. 2023. [Accessed 4.11.23.](#)

⁴ SHRM Foundation. Otsuka. "Mental health in America - a 2022 workplace report." [Accessed 4.13.23.](#)

⁵ Employee Benefit News. Mental health benefits. "How to support employees who are struggling with their mental health." Nov. 17, 2022. [Accessed 4.13.23.](#)

⁶ LinkedIn. "Key ways to meaningfully support mental health in the workplace." Jan. 26, 2023. [Accessed 4.14.23.](#)

⁷ Calm Business. "2023 workplace mental health trends report: the future of work." [Accessed 4.12.23.](#)

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