

Investing in Mental Well-Being: A Guide for Employers

Marcos A. Iglesias, M.D.

Vice President

Chief Medical Director, Travelers



Mental health is no longer a topic to be avoided at work. It's a critical factor impacting employee well-being, productivity and overall business success. This white paper explores the importance of mental well-being in the workplace and introduces strategies employers can implement to help create a supportive and thriving environment.



Defining Mental Health

Mental health comprises the emotional, psychological and social well-being of an individual. It affects how we think, feel and act, influencing our ability to handle stress, interact with others and make choices. Mental health is not just the absence of mental illness. It also includes the presence of positive characteristics, such as the ability to manage stress, maintain fulfilling relationships and achieve personal goals.¹

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”²

– World Health Organization

Mental health is not a monolith; it exists on a continuum that can range from flourishing and thriving to struggling or experiencing crisis.³ On any given day, each one of us is somewhere along the spectrum. At one end, we may experience high levels of well-being, resilience and productivity. At the other end, we may face significant mental health challenges, such as symptoms of anxiety or depression or, if persistent and severe, even a diagnosable mental illness. Most people fall somewhere in between, experiencing fluctuations in their mental wellness over time.



Mental Health Is Health

For too long we have separated physical and mental health. It's time to change that. Mental and physical health are deeply interconnected. Poor mental wellness can lead to physical problems like heart disease, diabetes and chronic pain. Conversely, physical health issues can create anxiety and sleeplessness and may exacerbate mental health conditions.


Mental Health in Society and the Workplace

We are in a mental health crisis in this country today.

Statistics paint a troubling picture:

- **23%** of U.S. adults experienced symptoms that would meet criteria for a diagnosable mental disorder in 2022.⁴
- In 2022, **6%** of U.S. adults experienced serious mental illness resulting in functional impairment that substantially interfered with or limited one or more major life activities, such as family or work.⁵
- Suicide rates are rising and **over 49,000** deaths by suicide were recorded in 2022.⁶
- There were **107,941** drug overdose deaths recorded in 2022, primarily from synthetic opioids.⁷
- Drug misuse – opioids, marijuana and alcohol – is common (**17.3%** of individuals over the age of 11 had a substance use disorder in 2022).⁸

When it comes to the workplace, **83%** of U.S. workers report daily work-related stress¹⁰ and **2.7%** of working adults ages 18 to 64 experienced psychological distress in 2021, according to the National Health Interview Survey. This rate was **78%** higher for individuals working evening or night shifts and **100%** higher in those who anticipated losing their job in the next 12 months.¹¹



Mental health is estimated to cost the U.S. economy \$282 billion annually.⁹

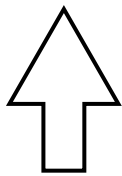
Why Should Employers Care?

The human toll is significant, not only for the sufferer but for their family, community and co-workers.

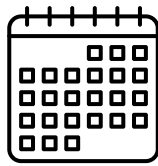
For an employer, these costs go beyond medical care.¹² Poor mental health is a key cause of absenteeism and presenteeism (employees who come to work but are not fully productive).¹³ It can also result in lost productivity,¹⁴ increased turnover,¹⁵ interpersonal conflicts and lowered employee morale.

Investing in employee mental health benefits both your employees and your business.

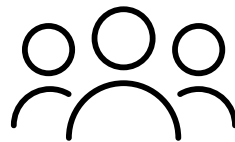
A supportive work environment can lead to:



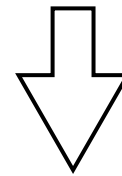
**Increased
productivity**



**Reduced
absenteeism and
presenteeism**



**Improved
employee morale
and retention**



**Lower
healthcare
costs**



A Culture of Caring

Traditionally, mental health has been a sensitive subject in the workplace. Although this is changing, stigma can still hinder conversations about well-being and prevent employees from getting the help they need.

Employers can play a crucial role in raising mental health awareness that dispels common myths and promotes open communication.

Building a culture of caring means providing a supportive and healthy work environment that promotes work-life balance, reasonable workloads and opportunities to mentally recharge, like quiet spaces and flexible work arrangements. It also means providing an environment in which employees feel safe, valued and respected, aligning both individual and organizational commitments to mental well-being.

Making a wide range of appropriate resources available is paramount. Because mental well-being is on a continuum, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. We need to tailor the solution to the individual.

An employee with a possible diagnosis of major depressive disorder requires a licensed mental health professional to diagnose their condition and manage it, usually with talk-therapy and possibly medications. Someone dealing with work stress may benefit from support that can be provided by a counselor, coach or even an app.

Resources may include:

- Information on how to access mental health professionals
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
- Wellness programs
- Counseling services
- Emotional support apps
- Raising awareness through training sessions, meetings and websites
- Mental health training for managers and employees
- Opportunities for social connection through Employee Resource Groups or company-sponsored events
- Well-being champion networks

Managers play a critical role in fostering a culture of mental well-being at work. They are often the first point of contact for employees experiencing stress, anxiety or other mental health challenges. Equipping managers with the knowledge and tools to support their teams is crucial.

Here are some actionable steps managers can take:

- **Open Communication:** Foster open communication about mental health. Normalize conversations about stress, burnout and seeking help. By letting others know that it's OK to not be OK, we create a supportive environment and make it more likely that an individual can get help.
- **Active Listening:** Practice active listening skills to create a safe space for employees to express their concerns.
- **Recognize Signs of Distress:** Train managers to recognize common signs of mental health struggles, such as changes in mood, productivity or behavior.
- **Regular Check-ins:** Schedule regular one-on-one meetings to discuss workload, goals and overall well-being.
- **Lead by Example:** Demonstrate healthy work habits by taking breaks, respecting boundaries and maintaining a positive attitude.

Conclusion

By prioritizing mental well-being, employers can foster a thriving and productive work environment. Investing in the mental health of employees is an investment in the future of the company. By taking steps to support employee well-being, organizations can create a happier, healthier and more productive workforce.

Additional Resources:

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline – 988lifeline.org
- National Alliance on Mental Illness – nami.org
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration – samhsa.gov
- National Institute of Mental Health – nimh.nih.gov
- American Psychological Association – apa.org

If you need emotional support, reach out to the national mental health hotline: 988.

About the Author



Marcos A. Iglesias, M.D.

Vice President
Chief Medical Director, Travelers

Dr. Iglesias is a seasoned physician executive and national speaker with over 35 years of experience in workers compensation and disability management, evaluation and insurance leadership. His professional interests include the prevention and mitigation of delayed recovery and disability.

His passion for helping workers live active, productive and fulfilling lives has led him to develop innovative comprehensive disability management solutions that focus on early identification of risk factors and appropriate early interventions to help employees in their functional recovery path. Dr. Iglesias leads Travelers' medical innovation and strategy team.

He is a graduate of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto, and the Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California.



About the Travelers Institute

Travelers established the Travelers Institute as a means of participating in the public policy dialogue on matters of interest to the property casualty insurance sector, as well as the financial services industry more broadly. The Travelers Institute draws upon the industry expertise of Travelers' senior management and the technical expertise of its risk professionals, and other experts to provide information, analysis and recommendations to public policymakers and regulators. Learn more at travelersinstitute.org.

About the Travelers Institute Forces at WorkSM Initiative

As the pace of change around us accelerates, organizations face new challenges and opportunities as they position themselves for the future. The Travelers Institute *Forces at Work* initiative is an educational platform to help today's leaders navigate the shifting dynamics of the modern workplace and prioritize employees and their well-being. Join us as we examine issues such as the labor market, talent development, stress management, worker mental well-being and insurance insights including workers compensation.

Sources:

- ¹ Comprehensive mental health action plan 2013–2030. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/345301/9789240031029-eng.pdf>
- ² *Ibid.*
- ³ Keyes CL. The mental health continuum: from languishing to flourishing in life. *J Health Soc Behav.* 2002 Jun; 43(2):207–22. Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine. Abstract: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12096700/>
- ⁴ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2023). Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2022 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. PEP23-07-01-006, NSDUH Series H-58). Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2022-nsduh-annual-national-report>
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Garnett MF, Curtin SC. Suicide mortality in the United States, 2002–2022. NCHS Data Brief, No. 509. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics; 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db509.pdf>
- ⁷ Spencer MR, Garnett MF, Miniño AM. Drug overdose deaths in the United States, 2002–2022. NCHS Data Brief, No. 491. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics; 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db491.pdf>
- ⁸ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2023).
- ⁹ Abramson B, Boerma J, Tsyvinski A. Macroeconomics of mental health. NBER Working Paper No. 32354, April 2024. © 2024 by Boaz Abramson, Job Boerma, and Aleh Tsyvinski. All rights reserved. https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w32354/w32354.pdf
- ¹⁰ <https://www.stress.org/workplace-stress/> © 2025 The American Institute of Stress | All Rights Reserved
- ¹¹ Mykyta L. Work conditions and serious psychological distress among working adults aged 18–64: United States, 2021. NCHS Data Brief, No. 467. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics; 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db467.pdf>
- ¹² <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20220207005186/en/Healthcare-Costs-Are-149-Higher-Among-Individuals-With-Un-recognized-Symptoms-of-Depression-New-Happify-Health-Analysis-Finds#:~:text=The%20Happify%20Health%20study%20found,-for%20people%20with%20unrecognized%20depression.>
- ¹³ Sanderson K, Tilse E, Nicholson J, Oldenburg B, Graves N. Which presenteeism measures are more sensitive to depression and anxiety? *J Affect Disord.* 2007 Aug; 101(1–3):65–74. Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine. Abstract inv <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17156851/>
- ¹⁴ Beck A, Crain AL, Solberg LI, et al. Severity of depression and magnitude of productivity loss. *Annals Fam Med.* 2011; 9(4):305–311. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3133577/pdf/0090305.pdf>
- ¹⁵ Lerner D, Adler DA, Chang H, et al. Unemployment, job retention, and productivity loss among employees with depression. *Psychiatr Serv.* 2004 Dec; 55(12):1371–1378. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4283817/pdf/nihms648083.pdf>

This content is provided for informational purposes only.

Information contained herein is not intended as, nor does it constitute, legal, medical or professional advice, nor is it an endorsement of any source cited or information provided.

In no event will Travelers or any of its subsidiaries and affiliates be liable in contract or in tort to anyone who has access to this presentation for the accuracy or completeness of the information relied upon in the preparation of this presentation or for the completeness of any recommendations from cited sources. Participants should consult source material for more detail.

Notes



travelersinstitute.org

The Travelers Institute, 700 13th Street NW, Suite 1180, Washington, DC 20005

© 2025 The Travelers Indemnity Company. All rights reserved. Travelers and the Travelers Umbrella logo are registered trademarks of The Travelers Indemnity Company in the U.S. and other countries. M-18684 New 1-25

TRAVELERS INSTITUTE®

