

Emotional Wellness & Mental Health in the Workplace

Strategies for HR Professionals to Build Thriving, Resilient Organizations

2026

Today's Agenda

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The Mental Health Crisis at Work

Scope, trends & the HR imperative

2



The Business Case

Cost of inaction, ROI, and medical claims impact

3



Building a Mentally Healthy Culture

Leadership, stigma, and psychological safety

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Benefits Design & EAP Strategy

Parity, access, and plan design essentials

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What Leading Employers Do

Real programs from Fortune 500 companies

6



Taking Action: Next Steps

Assess, plan, communicate, measure

Meet Marcus — a Real-Life Story



Marcus, 38

Senior Project Manager
Mid-size manufacturing firm
Married, two kids

"I kept telling myself everyone was this exhausted. I almost didn't ask for help."



THE PROBLEM

After a major project deadline, Marcus is working 60-hour weeks, sleeping 4 hours a night, snapping at his family. His manager notices missed deadlines and a withdrawn demeanor.



THE CONVERSATION

His manager — trained in Mental Health First Aid — uses a "safe to say" check-in script. No diagnosis, no pressure. Just: "I've noticed things seem hard lately. Our EAP can help — want me to share the info?"



THE SUPPORT

Marcus calls the EAP. Within 48 hours he's matched with a therapist via the digital platform. 8 free sessions, no paperwork, no insurance claim. His wife joins. His wife joins two sessions.



THE OUTCOME

3 months later: Marcus is sleeping, performance is strong, and he volunteers as a volunteer as a peer mental health resource. Total employer cost: \$0 beyond the beyond the existing EAP investment.

The Mental Health Crisis at Work

1 in 5

U.S. adults experience a mental health condition each year¹

\$1T

Lost annually in global productivity due to depression & anxiety²

76%

Of workers report at least one symptom of a mental health condition³

81%

Would consider leaving an employer who doesn't support mental health⁴

COVID-19 accelerated the mental health crisis by years — anxiety and depression surged 25% globally in the first year of the pandemic. Employees now expect employers to respond.⁵

1 NIMH, 2023. Mental Illness Statistics. [nimh.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov) | 2 WHO, 2022. Mental Health in the Workplace. [who.int](https://www.who.int) | 3 Mind Share Partners, 2021 Mental Health at Work Report | 4 APA, 2022 Work and Wellbeing Survey | 5 WHO, 2022. COVID-19 and Mental Health. [who.int](https://www.who.int)

The Business Case for Mental Health Investment

COST OF INACTION

\$225.8B Annual absenteeism cost to U.S. employers¹

7× Presenteeism is 7x more costly than absenteeism²

1.5–2× Turnover from burnout costs 1.5–2x annual salary³

30% Of all disability claims are mental health-driven⁴

35% Productivity loss from untreated depression⁵

ROI OF INVESTMENT

✓ **\$4:\$1** Return for every \$1 invested in treatment⁶

✓ **28%** Reduction in sick days with EAP utilization⁷

✓ **40%** Lower medical costs for treated vs. untreated conditions⁸

✓ **2.3×** Greater productivity in psychologically safe teams⁹

✓ **65%** Of employees more loyal when mental health is prioritized¹⁰

¹ Gallup, 2023 | ² IBI, 2023 | ³ Gallup, 2023 | ⁴ Unum, 2023 | ⁵ APA Center for Workplace Mental Health, 2023 | ⁶ WHO, 2022 | ⁷ SHRM, 2023 | ⁸ JOEM, 2022 | ⁹ McKinsey HI, 2022 | ¹⁰ APA, 2022

How Mental Health Ripples Through Your Top 5 Medical Cost Drivers

The CFO argument: Untreated depression & anxiety don't just cost money on the mental health line — they amplify the top medical claim categories your plan is already paying for.

CONDITION	IMPACT ON U.S. EMPLOYER EMPLOYER PLANS	WHEN MENTAL HEALTH IS UNTREATED	WHEN MENTAL HEALTH IS TREATED
Cardiovascular disease ¹	#1 medical cost driver for U.S. employers	▲ 2× the cardiac event rate; 40–60% higher readmission after MI	✔ Up to 48% lower cardiac mortality with treated depression
Diabetes ²	~\$327B annual U.S. direct & indirect cost	▲ 2× higher treatment non-adherence; worse HbA1c control	✔ Significantly improved glycemic control and medication adherence
Musculoskeletal / chronic pain ³	Top 3 driver of disability claims	▲ Higher opioid reliance; failed PT; longer claim duration	✔ Shorter recovery; reduced opioid use; fewer disability days
Cancer ⁴	Rapidly rising specialty-drug claim category	▲ ~25% have untreated depression; lower treatment completion	✔ Better treatment adherence and improved survival outcomes
Substance use disorder (SUD) ⁵	Fastest-growing behavioral health claim category	▲ ~50% have co-occurring MH condition; high relapse rates	✔ Integrated treatment reduces relapse and total medical spend

Bottom line for the CFO: Investing in mental health isn't an add-on — it's a lever on your top 5 medical cost categories. **The 40% medical cost reduction in treated vs. untreated conditions** shows up directly in your claims data.⁶

Building a Mentally Healthy Culture



Psychological safety¹

- Create space to speak up without fear of retaliation
- Leaders model vulnerability and openness
- Normalize conversations about stress and struggle



Reduce stigma²

- Anti-stigma campaigns and storytelling
- Leadership disclosure as a powerful signal
- Language matters: use 'mental health,' not 'mental illness'



Open communication³

- Regular manager check-ins with genuine inquiry
- Anonymous feedback channels and pulse surveys
- Mental health days — no justification required



Work design & balance⁴

- Workload sustainability and after-hours boundaries
- Flexible scheduling and hybrid work options
- Encourage full PTO use — lead from the top

¹ APA Work in America, 2024 — Psychological Safety | ² NAMI, 2021. StigmaFree Workplace. nami.org | ³ Deloitte, 2023. Mental Health & Employers Report | ⁴ Gallup, 2023. Wellbeing at Work

Benefits Design & EAP Strategy



Group health plan design

- ✓ MHPAEA compliance — non-quantitative treatment limits¹
- ✓ Low/no-cost therapy visits including telehealth parity²
- ✓ SUD coverage without prior authorization barriers³
- ✓ In-network behavioral health adequacy verification⁴
- ✓ HSA/FSA eligible mental wellness tools and apps
- ✓ Review SPD language for mental health access clarity



EAP: beyond the 800 number

- ✓ Average EAP utilization: only 3–6% — promotion is everything⁵
- ✓ Offer digital/text-based therapy (Lyra, Spring Health, Modern Health)
- ✓ Minimum 8–12 dedicated sessions per issue per year⁶
- ✓ Proactive outreach during high-stress events and transitions
- ✓ Manager referral protocols — warm handoffs, not cold numbers⁷
- ✓ Measure utilization quarterly; adjust strategy based on data

1 DOL/EBSA, 2023. MHPAEA Enforcement. [dol.gov](https://www.dol.gov/ebsa) | 2 KFF, 2023. Telehealth Parity Laws | 3 NCSL, 2023. Prior Auth & SUD Coverage | 4 SAMHSA, 2023. Behavioral Health Workforce | 5 EASNA, 2023. EAP Industry Utilization Report | 6 EAPA, 2022. EAP Standards | 7 SHRM, 2022. EAP Manager Referral Outcomes

What are Large Employers Doing?

Fortune 500 companies are investing heavily — here's what's actually working at scale:



WALMART

Center of Excellence Access¹

- ✓ 100% of mental health treatment costs covered at designated Centers of Excellence
- ✓ Live Better U: free therapy sessions for associates AND household members
- ✓ 200+ trained "Mental Health Champions" in stores to visibly reduce stigma



GOOGLE

Mental Health Days + EAP 2.0²

- ✓ Unlimited mental health days — no manager approval required
- ✓ EAP includes 20 free therapy sessions/year (vs. 6–8 industry average)
- ✓ On-site therapists and mindfulness coaches at major campuses



MICROSOFT

Digital Therapy + Manager Training³

- ✓ Spring Health partnership: AI-matched, personalized therapy for every employee
- ✓ "Manager Essentials" mental health training — now mandatory globally
- ✓ Four company-wide "Recharge Days" added annually since 2021



JPMORGAN CHASE

Behavioral Health Integration⁴

- ✓ Behavioral health nurses embedded directly in employee primary care clinics
- ✓ Psychiatry, therapy, and SUD treatment fully covered — no cost sharing
- ✓ 24/7 crisis text line and trained peer support network for all employees

¹ Walmart Newsroom, 2023. Live Better U & Centers of Excellence. corporate.walmart.com | ² Google re:Work + Fortune, 2022. Employee Wellbeing Programs | ³ Microsoft News Center, 2022. Spring Health Partnership & Manager Essentials | ⁴ JPMorgan Chase Health & Benefits, 2023. Behavioral Health Integration

Taking Action: Your 90-Day Roadmap



Days 1–30 Assess



Conduct employee wellbeing survey¹



Audit benefits for behavioral health parity²



Review EAP utilization and vendor contract



Benchmark against SHRM & industry standards³



Days 31–60 Plan



Engage leadership to champion mental health⁴



Design or refresh mental health benefit offerings



Develop manager training curriculum⁵



Draft updated mental health policy



Days 61–90 Activate



Launch anti-stigma communications communications campaign⁶



Train managers with real-world scenarios



Promote EAP with multi-channel outreach⁷



Establish metrics dashboard and review cadence

¹ SHRM, 2023. *Employee Benefits Survey Toolkit* | ² DOL/EBSA MHPAEA Self-Compliance Tool. [dol.gov](https://www.dol.gov/ebsa/healthcare/mhpaea-self-compliance-tool) | ³ NBGH Employer Benchmarking Survey, 2023 | ⁴ McKinsey, 2022. *Behavioral Health Challenge — Gen Z* | ⁵ Mental Health First Aid USA. mhfaua.org | ⁶ NAMI, 2023. *StigmaFree Employer Toolkit*. nami.org | ⁷ EASNA, 2023. *Best Practices in EAP Promotion*

Let's Talk — 5 Questions for the Room

Take 60 seconds to think about your answer before we discuss as a group.

1

What's working well at your organization when it comes to supporting employee wellbeing?

2

Where do you see the biggest opportunity for mental health support in your own organization?

3

How is your leadership team currently thinking about mental health as a business priority?

4

What's one resource or program you've seen work well — yours or someone else's?

5

What would you most want to take back to your leadership after today?

Mental health IS a business imperative — not a benefits benefits afterthought.

Organizations that invest in emotional wellness build more resilient cultures, retain top talent, reduce claims costs, and outperform their peers. As HR professionals, you have the opportunity — and the responsibility — to lead this change.

