

# Are your mental health benefits widely known and 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.<sup>1</sup>
- An estimated **200** million workdays are lost each year due to mental health challenges.<sup>2</sup>
- Untreated mental illness costs the U.S. a staggering **\$3.7** trillion each year.<sup>2</sup>
- Due to increased mental health issues, **46%** of employers said their benefits or claims costs increased last year.<sup>3</sup>

We've seen the growing consciousness of the need for mental health support, and you have too. 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. About 30% of U.S. workers don't know how to access their company employee assistance programs (EAP), and only 43% assert that their employer provides easily accessible mental health services. It appears EAPs need to be heavily and steadily promoted and thoroughly destigmatized by leaders.<sup>4</sup>

## The pieces won't fall into place on their own

Improving worker mental health starts with employee engagement. A recent survey conducted by Gallup found that employee engagement has been linked to many desirable organizational outcomes including profitability, productivity, customer services, retention, safety and overall wellbeing. Currently, only 32% of U.S. workers are classified as engaged.<sup>4</sup>

## Unlock greater use of your mental health benefits

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

### 1. Utilize the Top Five Pillars For Boosting Employee Mental Health.

Mental health and mental illness can be sensitive, intimidating topics for employees. Here are a few ways leaders can help improve employee mental health:

- Demonstrate a commitment to building the strengths of each employee and helping each do what they do best every day.<sup>4</sup>
- Manage employees in a way that motivates them to do outstanding work.<sup>4</sup>
- Genuinely care about your employees and demonstrate it by: providing easy access to fresh fruits and vegetables in the workplace, providing resources to help employees share their own ideas about boosting well-being, and include family members in well-being related programs and activities.<sup>4</sup>
- Build trust between employees and leadership.<sup>4</sup>
- Ensure employees feel connected to the organization's culture.<sup>4</sup>



## 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 — that's better for everyone

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

- Access to professional counseling provides a safe space for employees to discuss their problems without fear of judgment or work-related consequences.<sup>5</sup>
- Educate employees about common types of mental illness to foster understanding and empathy, and reduce the stigma attached to needing help. This also enables early symptom recognition and encourages people to seek help.<sup>5</sup>
- Flexible working hours can accommodate employees dealing with mental illness, ensuring they can attend appointments and engage in self-care without added stress.<sup>5</sup>

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 7.16.2024.](#)

2 National Council for Mental Illness. Mental Health First Aid. "How employers can create a healthier workforce in 2023." Feb. 23, 2023. [Accessed 7.16.2024.](#)

3 Aflac. "Aflac Workforces Report: Workplace Benefits Trends employee well-being and mental health." Published Nov. 2023. [Accessed 7.16.2024.](#)

4 Gallup. "The Best Management Secrets for Impacting Employee Mental Health." Published 12.16.22. [Accessed 7.16.2024.](#)

5 Everside Health. "The Effects of Mental Health on Productivity and Retention in the Workplace." Published Oct. 06, 2023. [Accessed 7.16.2024.](#)

Content within this article is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal, tax, accounting or medical advice regarding any specific situation. Aflac cannot anticipate all the facts that a particular employer will have to consider in their benefits decision-making process.

Individual coverage is underwritten by American Family Life Assurance Company of Columbus.

Group coverage is underwritten by Continental American Insurance Company (CAIC), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Aflac Incorporated. CAIC is not licensed to solicit business in New York, Guam, Puerto Rico, or the Virgin Islands. For groups situated in California, group coverage is underwritten by Continental American Life Insurance Company. For individual coverage in New York or coverage for groups situated in New York, coverage is underwritten by American Family Life Assurance Company of New York.

WWHQ | 1932 Wynnton Road | Columbus, GA 31999

Continental American Insurance Company | Columbia, SC

Aflac New York | 22 Corporate Woods Boulevard, Suite 2 | Albany, NY 12211