

Checklist for Mentally Healthy Workplaces

Mental Health Affects Productivity and the Economy

An estimated 1 in 5 adults experience a mental illness each year,¹ including nearly 20 million adults who also receive treatment for substance use disorders.² Research suggests that employees experience an average of 3.46 “poor mental health days” per month each year in the U.S., which negatively affects productivity and earnings.³

There is both a business case and a moral imperative for employers to take actions to help improve the mental wellbeing of their workforce. Just like a physically healthy employee, a mentally and emotionally healthy employee will be more productive, have fewer absences, incur fewer medical costs, and experience greater longevity on the job.⁴

Addressing Mental Health in the Workplace: The 4 A's Checklist

EARN has distilled leading mental wellness practices into four pillars, also known as the “4 A's”: Awareness, Accommodations, Assistance, and Access. Although this checklist is not exhaustive, it includes strategies that can lead to greater mental wellness at work.

AWARENESS

- Promote strategies to help employees increase their mental health and wellbeing.
- Offer employees stress management training to develop relaxation, mindfulness, and resiliency skills.
- Create a work environment that uses natural light, plants, etc., and provide a versatile, flexible range of spaces.
- Foster communication skills and emotional intelligence among managers and supervisors.
- Train managers and supervisors to recognize and respond to warning signs.
- Inform employees of available resources such as free relaxation APPs or the company Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- Develop and implement anti-bullying policies.
- Sponsor awareness-building and anti-stigma campaigns.

ACCOMMODATIONS

- Allow sick leave for reasons related to mental health, and flexible use of vacation time.
- Offer additional unpaid or administrative leave for treatment or recovery and/or leaves of absence.
- Allow use of brief, flexible leave (a few hours at a time) for therapy and other related appointments.

Provide breaks according to individual needs rather than a fixed schedule, more frequent breaks, and/or greater flexibility in scheduling breaks.

Permit beverages and/or food at workstations, if necessary, to mitigate the side effects of medications.

Welcome on-site job coaches.

ASSISTANCE

Provide mentoring, coaching, and peer support to your employees.

Make flexible work arrangements such as flex scheduling and telecommuting available to all employees, as a form of proactive accommodation.

Offer stress management training.

Provide access to mental wellness screening and treatment options.

Offer fitness programs to improve employees' physical health, which in turn promotes positive mental health.

ACCESS

Assess your health plan's coverage for mental health treatment, including inpatient treatment options and medication coverage.

Give employees easy access to mental health support and care, e.g., an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Encourage mental health and stress management through a comprehensive wellness and health promotions program.

Provide case management services to facilitate timely return to work for those who have experienced absences due to mental health concerns.

Comply with the [Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act](#).

For more information and strategies, visit [EARN's Mental Health Toolkit](#).

1 <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml>

2 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2018). Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2017 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. SMA 18-5068, NSUDH Series H-53). Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/cbhsq-reports/NSDUHFFR2017/NSDUHFFR2017.pdf>

3 Davlasheridze, M., Goetz, S. J., & Han, Y. (2018). The Effect of Mental Health on US County Economic Growth. *Review of Regional Studies*, 48(2), 155-171.

4 Partnership for Workplace Mental Health (nd). Investing in a mentally healthy workforce is good for business. <https://www.hhs.gov/programs/topic-sites/mental-health-parity/index.html>

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