



Supporting the mental wellbeing of staff post-pandemic

By Doug Hayes

There's no doubt that we're still feeling the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Even though many of us have adapted and transitioned to a very different working environment, uncertainty continues to put a significant strain on individual mental health. According to a 2021 survey of 1500 working adults by Harvard Business Review, 84% of respondents reported at least one workplace factor that negatively impacted their mental health, with younger workers and members of underrepresented groups more severely impacted." [It's a New Era for Mental Health at Work \(hbr.org\)](#)

Employees face a dynamic work environment.

Since the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, many companies have encouraged a return to the office, with many implementing flexible working policies. This increase in flexibility is generally seen to have had a positive impact on the world of work; however, it has brought about new stressors for employees, not all of which are directly work-related. Stressors include concern about income and job retention, fear of being exposed to the virus, visibility of staff largely based at home, and the reality of establishing a work-life balance to name but a few. Of course, this is not an exhaustive list and new concerns are emerging every day.

Mental health resources help employees address and mitigate concerns.

Companies are recognizing that support is necessary as employees juggle the demands of our dynamic work, home and social environment. Including mental health resources into employee benefits programs is one of the best ways companies can help their employees address and mitigate their concerns. Prior to the pandemic, mental health was generally not a top priority from an employee benefits perspective, with many companies often focusing on amenities aimed at physical well-being to encourage staff retention and recruitment.

Organizations looking to incorporate mental health support systems into their benefits packages in a more impactful manner should focus on confidential and customizable resources that offer in-the-moment support and expert guidance. Support can be in the form of self-help services or face-to-face counselling to cover a wide array of issues that can impact mental health, such as anxiety, depression, relationship problems, grief, substance abuse, anger management, work-related pressures and stress. Employers must also recognize that some employees may need long-term help, offering additional virtual or in-person counselling services on a continuing basis. Plans of this sort bring immeasurable benefits to employees and employers in the long term.

Offering help to those who need it is important, but that is not all. Educational resources that help managers and their teams recognize signs of mental health issues both in themselves and their colleagues allow for early detection, so that problems can be addressed before they become a crisis. Managers may feel nervous about broaching these topics, and strong support and training will enable them to step up and act with confidence. Some individuals and groups may feel more comfortable than others in asking for help, for a variety of reasons. Diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) factors should also be considered when incorporating, promoting and providing access to these services.



Employers who provide mental health benefits can gain an advantage.

Mental health and wellbeing concerns are arguably more widely acknowledged and discussed than ever. Many people have dealt with, and are still dealing with, issues they may never have faced before or have difficulty navigating. It is incredibly important that employers recognize this and work to establish and maintain appropriate support systems in their employee benefits plans, supporting employee wellness and productivity. Benefits should cover a wide variety of mental health and wellness issues, while also being tailorable to specific situations. Supporting employees by tackling these issues head-on will be essential not only for staff retention and morale, but also for maintaining an effective recruitment strategy as job seekers increasingly look for employers that view health maintenance beyond the physical. Companies that implement and maintain mental health support systems in a meaningful way will be at a significant advantage.