

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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