



MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE 2020: CHRO Insights Series



OCTOBER 2020

INTRODUCTION

In recent months, we have all been affected by COVID-19, and organizations from every sector are navigating the impact, including the impact on mental health. New data is emerging to validate the concerns shared by many that the sudden changes to the work environment, economic uncertainty and physical and social isolation and other factors may lead to a “second wave” of the global pandemic – unprecedented levels of depression, stress, anxiety and other mental health conditions. Employers are a key stakeholder in this global challenge, as an access point for support and services as well as leaders in eliminating stigma. We applaud those who have been working tirelessly to leverage this time of uncertainty into one of opportunity, demonstrated compassion, and prioritized the mental health needs of their workforce as the key to elevating each employee to their full potential.

This report includes two parts: The first part brings together emerging insights and data that can be used by employers to understand the new environment and the effect it is having on mental health. The second draws from the One Mind at Work network to highlight the diversity of approaches that employers are using to respond to the totally unprecedented circumstances that surround us. This includes specific steps that employers have taken to broaden their support of mental health, and a discussion of the unique needs of essential workers during this time.

Looking ahead, employers should strive to connect with, inform and support employees in new ways, deepening their approaches to mental health programs and services in ways that are thoughtful, proactive and relevant to the current environment. I would like to thank the outstanding organizations that contributed their insights to this effort and am grateful to be able to share these valuable examples of leadership in workplace mental health.

As we enter the final months of 2020, I hope that this report can be a source of guidance and inspiration during these unprecedented times.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Garen K. Staglin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Garen Staglin
Co-Founder, One Mind at Work

A MESSAGE FROM THE SOCIETY FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (SHRM) FOUNDATION

Recent SHRM research found that 41% of employees feel burnt out, drained, or exhausted at work. Additionally, nearly one in four employees report frequently feeling down, depressed, or hopeless – yet more than one in three employees reported having done nothing to cope with these feelings. Because of the tremendous strains linked to the impact of our ever-changing global landscape – work and school, unemployment concerns, social isolation, strained social justice issues, our political climate and the continued global pandemic many are facing mental health challenges at unprecedented levels. This will continue to be an incredibly challenging time for all of us.

Employers have a responsibility to care for their workers, whether they share a physical office or work remotely. HR professionals are leading the way – helping employees manage the significant mental toll nearly everyone is facing, to different degrees and for a myriad of reasons. We have an opportunity and an obligation to address mental health and wellness in the workplace by creating a culture of assistance and acceptance. As the nation and the world returns to a “new normal”, providing information, evidence-based resources and actionable tools will help HR professionals manage the significant tolls that the health crisis, an economic crisis, and a social crisis are taking on so many of us, while also ensuring their organizations’ most critical resource – their people, feel safe, secure and supported.

The SHRM Foundation empowers HR professionals to unlock human potential and lead positive social change in the workplace and beyond. We are grateful to be partnering with One Mind at Work in this important report, and encourage employer organizations of all types to join with us in improving workplace mental health as part of the One Mind at Work network.

Signed:



Wendi Safstrom
Executive Director, SHRM Foundation

PART ONE

THE GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

How Has 2020 Shaped Workplace Mental Health?

Stress and anxiety have peaked in 2020 in the United States and elsewhere due to the global coronavirus pandemic and other civil unrest. This year has brought a climate of overwhelming uncertainty – concerns about health and safety, anxiety about the economy and personal finances, anger over increasing racial tension and systemic oppression, grief over lost loved-ones as well as lost experiences or opportunities, stress, physical and social isolation, and disruption of routines and support structures have all created a state of emotional pressure unlike any we have ever encountered.

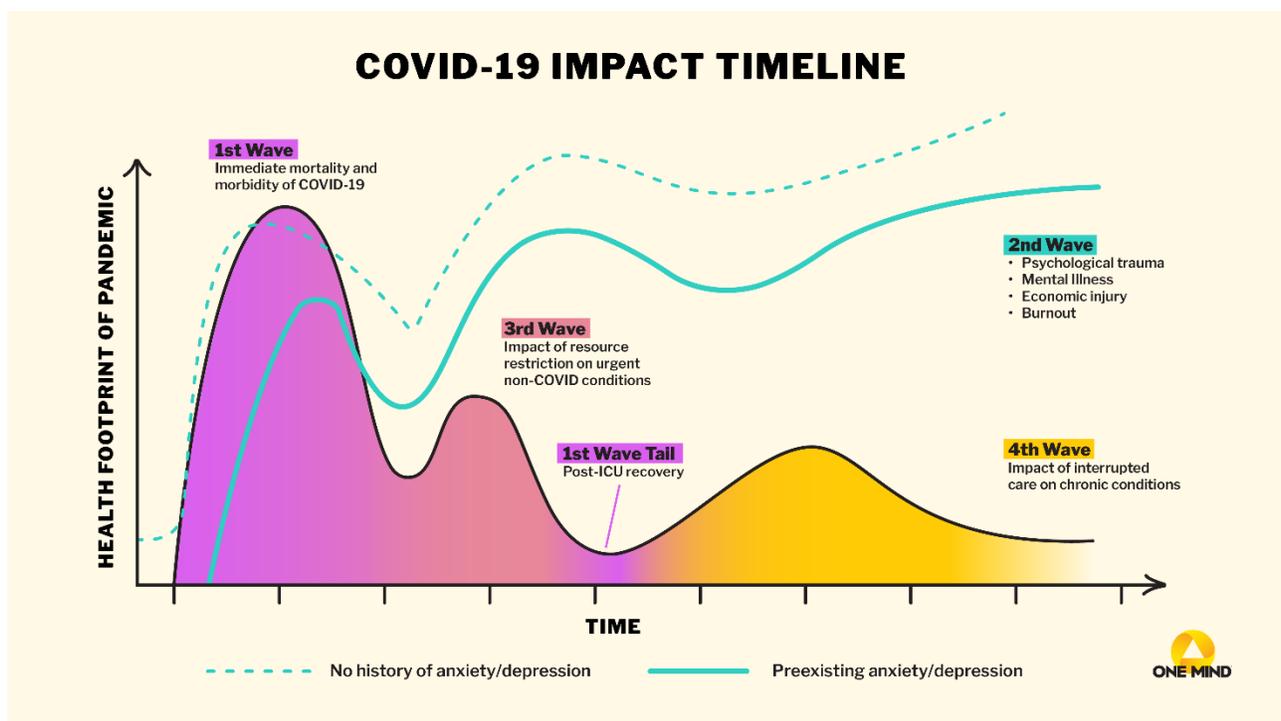
However, prior to the global COVID-19 pandemic, data regarding mental health treatment and support already showed significant challenges – including that of the one in five people who live with a mental health condition (an estimated 40 million Americans), 60% did not receive any mental health services in 2019. The reports of mental health challenges have only increased in the current environment

According to employee surveys, the sustained mental and emotional strain as a result of the current environment is causing feelings and perceptions to become more negative, with as many as 70% of employees calling this the “most stressful time in their entire professional career.” [Research](#) from the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) shows that 22-35% of employees report experiencing symptoms of depression often, and twice that are experiencing depressive symptoms at

least sometimes. Other research reports that 18% of people feel nervous or anxious most or all of the time.

One Mind at Work member company McKinsey and Company [gathered insights](#) demonstrating that 38% of employers were “very concerned” about employee mental health in the current environment, and the majority are taking action through investment, particularly in digital tools and telehealth services as well as expanded mental health benefits.

Employer concerns are valid – research is showing that the “second wave” of COVID-19 may be its impact on mental health. The model below shows how even with a drop in COVID-19 infections, mental health challenges continue to rise, including at a high rate among those with no history of anxiety or depression.



According to the [Mental Health Index: US Worker Edition](#), created in partnership between Total Brain, One Mind at Work and the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions, employees experienced a 38%

increase in feelings of stress and a 54% increase in anxiety between February and April of this year, corresponding with the rise of the initial COVID-19 outbreak and related social distancing measures. Following these findings, mental health data is raising new concerns about long-term mental stress. August data indicated people have experienced six consecutive months of higher-than-normal mental health issues. The rates of stress, anxiety, and depression have remained significantly higher than pre-COVID-19 levels across demographic groups. Some 38% of adults [have reported](#) symptoms of anxiety disorder or depressive disorder in the current environment, an increase of 27% since 2019.

The impacts of poor mental health on working are serious, and an area of intense focus for employers as businesses look ahead at the remainder of 2020 and beyond:

- Decision-making suffers under conditions of elevated stress, as do memory, focus and creativity. Thoughtful leadership, innovative solutions and careful planning are all more onerous under prolonged stress, creating an environment for mistakes and missteps.
- Productivity also drops – 22% of employees report that the current environment has caused them to regularly have trouble concentrating. Added to this are demands at home, including but not limited to caregiving responsibilities (both for children and older adults.) Similarly, MetLife’s [Employee Benefit Trends study](#) found 86% of employees who rate their mental health as good also state that they are productive, versus 60% of those who do not.
- Teamwork and team relationships can break down from less effective communication and individuals experiencing irritability or resentment as a result of stress and anxiety. The result can be detrimental to the work product as well as to professional relationships. [MetLife found](#) that 79% of employees who rate their

mental health as good claim also to be engaged in their work, versus 47% of those who do not.

- Physical health is more likely to be compromised, leading to higher health costs and potentially poor management of chronic conditions.

Concerningly, with all of the known negative effects of persistent mental health challenges, there is evidence that only a fraction of employees is seeking support. [SHRM research](#) reports that nearly 40% of employees surveyed have taken no action to cope with symptoms of depression, and it also indicates that people are exercising less, eating more unhealthy foods, and rarely getting enough sleep, all recommended steps to mitigate stress and improve mental health. MetLife's [Employee Benefit Trends study](#) found that more than one-third (37%) of employees feel there is a stigma associated with seeking mental health help, and almost one in 10 say they would worry about discrimination by managers and colleagues. According to the study for others, like parents with kids at home, burnout is a bigger problem – with the research revealing that nearly two-thirds (63%) of parents with kids under 18 saying they experienced burnout sometimes or often, rising to 70% for those with kids under 6.

Eventually, the threat of COVID-19 will pass, but impact that it has had on the global workforce will remain. According to [research conducted by Morneau Shepell](#) in their monthly Mental Health Index, half of people surveyed consider it unlikely that life will return to a “pre-pandemic” state. Employers are leveraging this moment in time to evaluate their mental health support and consider how they can be better prepared for another crisis situation in the future.

“As a national consultant in behavioral healthcare, I have noticed that employers have been struck by the statistics on just how many people with unmet mental health needs are in the workforce. Combined with estimates of the costs related to mental health conditions, this seems to also give them a better idea of the cost of inaction, in terms of supporting employees, and the resultant cost related to their dependents.”

*Kimberly Allen
Via Positiva*

“This year, more than ever before, employers see investments in health and well-being as an integral part of workforce strategy, increasing from 36% of large employers in 2019 to 45% in 2020 according to our research. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has unmasked the impact of social determinants of health across the globe, and large employers increasingly see a need to address social needs to improve employee health and well-being, reduce health disparities and position themselves as employers of choice.”

*LuAnn Heinen
Business Group on Health*

PART TWO

REPORTS FROM HR AND BENEFITS LEADERS AT MAJOR GLOBAL EMPLOYERS

Top Trends from Leading Employers

One Mind at Work has collected insights from a growing network of leading employers in 1:1 conversations, through forums and events, and through a confidential survey, to understand where they have focused resources in supporting mental health. Four main themes emerged from these conversations: fighting stigma, providing comprehensive support, integrating new metrics and addressing access barriers.

Fighting stigma

Employers see reducing stigma as a core priority, especially to drive utilization of mental health programs. Particularly in the current environment, where even employees without a pre-existing mental health condition may be experiencing increased stress, anxiety and negative effects from social isolation. The global experience of a “collective trauma” as brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to disrupt necessary support like childcare and furthered by social unrest related to racial disparities (in the U.S.) has exposed many people to a higher risk of mental health challenges. One of the [key elements](#) that supports help-seeking behaviors is self-identification – understanding that what you are experiencing is a mental health issue and that talking to a mental health professional could help to mitigate the effects – and so

employers are looking for tools to help remove the stigma that can be a barrier to recognizing one's mental health state. According to global experts, employers addressing stigma surrounding mental health mainly focus on the following activities:

Mental Health Anti-Stigma Campaigns

Whether they are internally-developed campaigns like EY's "r u ok?", or models developed by outside experts that can be branded and rolled out in organizations, employers have been making steady use of awareness-raising campaigns for mental health.

Employers are promoting the understanding that mental health conditions are common, and risk for them is even higher in the current environment, but that they can be addressed and treated. Stigma and shame can be a barrier to seeing support, so these campaigns focus on

"One of the most important steps we've taken in the current environment has been to deliberately roll-out an expanded set of initiatives focusing on wellbeing throughout the company to better integrate mental health awareness and physical health among employees."

Calvin E Beyer
CSDZ

"We have been struck by the willingness of people to open-up about mental health challenges once we started the dialogue."

Sarah Shaffer
Dolby Laboratories, Inc

"It has been important for us to recognize that one of the top conditions for mental health is substance abuse, specifically alcohol, and to overcome the stigma related to substance use disorder by providing support."

*Rachel Miegel
CSAA Insurance Group*

"Our entire HR department is going through mental health training before the end of the year."

*Tammy Fennessy
American Eagle
Outfitters, Inc.*

removing myths and stereotypes in favor of accurate information about symptoms and treatment.

Training for Managers

Managers benefit from knowing about the early warning signs of mental health conditions, how to talk with a co-worker or direct report about performance issues related to mental health, and what resources are available to provide support.

Management behaviors also contribute to a mentally healthy culture, particularly if managers have an understanding of the impacts of mental health on productivity and other essential skills. Employers are helping managers to understand that prioritizing mental health for their employees does not compete with other performance indicators, but actually support them in the short and long term. Topics like stress management, resiliency, and management approaches that benefit the mental health of all employees positively impact organizational culture, employee and team performance and the bottom line.

Leadership Presentations

Leadership within organizations is a driver of the adoption and improvement of practices and programs that support workplace mental health. Employers are demonstrating a strong commitment from leadership to workplace mental health through open and candid conversations. Employers report that in the current environment, it has been beneficial for leaders to share their struggles with work-life balance, anxiety and stress, and other issues because these experiences are relatable across all levels of the organization. One of the key aspects of these discussions has been to show that employees can experience mental health challenges and still be successful within the company. Additionally, leaders can show the benefits if utilizing available support and services and that there is no career penalty for doing so.

"We have coached our leaders on expressing vulnerability, sharing stories, and emphasizing the great importance we place on employee health and overall well-being, mind and body."

*Anonymous
Financial Services Sector*

Providing comprehensive support

Employers are attempting to smooth care transitions in their mental health programs services, from initial usage through sustained care. This includes taking a more holistic view of mental health support, such as helping employees through coaching, sleep habits, meditation and other tools. It has also meant reaching out to employees through new channels, such as integrating mental health into conversations surrounding diversity and inclusion. Finally, many employers are seeking ways to increase opportunities for human connection in a changed work environment, focusing on ways to make employees feel close to the organization and each other.

"We know that when employees build resilience and develop tools to respond to stress, their well-being stabilizes. That's why we've been focused on giving Googlers a range of mental health resources that they might need to invest in themselves during difficult times."

*Yu-Lin Gardner
Google*

Fostering connection

Employers recognize the impacts of COVID-19 on employee sense of connection to each other and to the organization due to the loss of personal interactions in a workplace setting. While many employees may feel isolated while working at home, they also may have anxiety related to returning to an office. They rely on technology for connection, but also

feel a sense of distance from others as a result. The remote environment also makes it difficult to maintain boundaries between work and life.

"We found that the things we used to do to foster connection – town hall meetings, team check-ins, etc. – were all feeling very similar in a virtual environment. We had to fundamentally rethink engagement, and in some cases that meant asking employees to step away from their screens. We had a "day of reflection" to encourage everyone to take a break from thinking about work. Organizations need to find the right mix of technical solutions and everyday adaptations to keep their workers healthy and connected – and then continually revisit and evolve those solutions as things change."

*Stephen Parker
Kearney*

Expanded Wellness Offerings

Employers have invested more resources in new forms of support, including digital tools and expanded EAPs, to reach employees in ways that are convenient and personalized. This may include sleep or meditation guide apps, global EAP programs and multi-site wellness programs that aim to provide resources to a larger percentage of employees than traditional approaches. Employers are utilizing resources like the [Digital Tools and Solutions for Mental Health Employer's Guide](#) by One Mind Psyberguide and the Northeast Business Group on Health to evaluate popular vendors and outline key questions for meeting the needs of diverse workforces.

"While we were able to move to remote working seamlessly, some employees reported experiencing a blurring of work/life boundaries. We see an increased demand for resources on how to balance personal and work demands in this new/fast changing environment"

*Stephanie Page
Heidrick & Struggles*

"We have seen the level of participation in digital health programs to be at an all-time high. The sheer number of participants was validation for us of the critical need for behavioral health services for our staff throughout the pandemic."

*Donald Parker
Hackensack Meridian Health Carrier Clinic*

Neurodiversity

Many employers are seeing an opportunity to promote “neurodiversity” in the workplace – based on the understanding that we all interpret, process and communication information differently. These differences can be more apparent for people with conditions like autism or a mood disorder in contrast to their more “neurotypical” colleagues. Companies like EY and Microsoft have long been leaders in this area, taking deliberate steps to review and improve how they recruit and retain employees to minimize barriers to people being able to meet their full potential because of their unique needs.

Just as an organization might promote other types of diversity in work settings and job functions because it adds valuable perspectives to teams, recognizing and supporting neurodiversity is a great way to address stigma and benefit the entire employee population. The MetLife program “Inclusion Begins with Me” promotes a corporate culture of valuing differences, addressing unconscious bias and micro messaging, promoting ownership and belonging, and demonstrating allyship, and is inclusive of neurodiversity.

“Our broader efforts to advance Diversity and Inclusion are aligned and complementary to our culture of wellbeing efforts, which support mental health and wellbeing for all employees. We leverage our EBRGs to increase awareness and ensure that support programs are well recognized and referred to as needed.”

*Cathryn Gunther
Merck & Co., Inc.*

Integrating New Metrics

Employers want to assess brain health cost impacts and the value of interventions, but have difficulty accessing and analyzing data. Information and data are key to understanding the impact of mental health conditions and demonstrating the impact of workplace mental health initiatives. Particularly in the current environment, employers are reframing employee assessment vehicles to include a greater focus on mental health as well as using new formats, like qualitative interviews, to uncover issues that employees are coping with that may affect their productivity.

“Since the start of the pandemic, we have had several surveys and mental health and wellbeing were a focus area. In response to what employees have told us, we communicate frequently through FAQs, emails, newsletters, and town hall meetings to share our services, access to services, and new services.”

*May L O’Neal
Varo Bank*

Pulse Surveys and Questionnaires

More employers are making mental health a larger part of employee surveys or creating surveys specifically for mental health as a result of the current environment. With the rapid change toward virtual working for many employers, there was a corresponding push to find ways to understand the impacts on productivity and employee attitudes. Frequently, employers have used this information to make comparisons with the same period in previous years, or to track the month-to-month changes in responses and using the findings to further refine and adjust communications strategies.

Self-Assessment Tools

Tools that allow employees to self-assess their mental health needs and be connected to appropriate resources have become an important part of employer-led support. These tools can help individual users gauge, monitor and manage their mental health through self-help or virtual therapy platforms, but in an anonymized way they may also provide insights to the employer through usage and engagement metrics as well as standardized information for measurement-based care.

"It appears that employees are more comfortable with the topic of emotional well-being than originally believed. We are able to share resources and see utilization increase as a result."

*Kari Jo Zika, IPMA-SCP
Dallas Fort Worth International Airport*

"Through qualitative interviews, we were able to uncover the extent that our employee population are experiencing fear and feelings of uncertainty related to COVID-19 and could respond accordingly."

*Shiv Kumar
Scala Computing, Inc*

Addressing Access Barriers

Employers express concern about systemic access barriers, particularly related to networks, capacity and providers. and many are leveraging their purchasing power to improve the quality and availability of mental health services.

Historically, EAP utilization among employees has been significantly lower than the number of people in the adult population estimated to be living with a mental health condition, so employers have been developing materials that promote the availability of the services as well as helping employees understand the process and the confidential nature of accessing it. Access to effective care is essential to ensure that employees get the help they need, when they need it, to effectively address or manage their mental health needs and return to working to their full potential.

"The implementation of a global EAP was critical for us in this environment so that we can ensure that our employees, wherever they are, have access to support."

*Stephanie Page
Heidrick & Struggles*

Equity for the Workforce

As the pandemic affected work operations around the world, many employers were motivated to investigate disparities that might exist for different parts of their workforce or employees located in different geographies with regard to the available mental health support. Creating equity, so that all employee types in every location can access a robust set of resources became a priority for many. These organizations launched global EAPs or expanded existing resources to fill gaps in services.

“One of our goals has been work with our suppliers to enhance representation of mental health providers and create equity in the user experience to accessing care.”

Yu-Lin Gardner
Google

“We made sure that our EAP offers counseling and various telephonic options for employees as well as their family members.”

Jennifer David
Codilis & Associates, PC

There has also been an effort by select employers to improve representation within their provider community so that more employees felt that they could find a mental health professional

Telehealth services

The move to telehealth has been a dramatic shift embraced by employers and patients alike in the current environment. Perceived to be a safe and effective alternative to in-person counseling, the popularity of telehealth has grown dramatically over the past year, partially as a result of the existing infrastructure and accelerated by rapid adoption.

Onsite services

In conjunction with telehealth services or expanded access to mental health service providers in the benefits network, employers are also implementing on-site behavioral health teams (this was particularly true among companies with essential workers who reported to a job site during the

pandemic.) These services offer employees the opportunity to access mental health support quickly and conveniently but require employers to consider ways to protect the privacy of users.

I was surprised to learn how little people are utilizing EAP services. We have launched a mental health training program, a global awareness program, and wellness information including working from home resources to bridge the gap.

*Laura DeCook
Expedia Group*

"We are implementing programs that will open up access to behavioral/mental health benefits to everyone, regardless of being enrolled in medical. For those enrolled in our insurance, we are having active discussions on how to integrate behavioral health into chronic care condition management."

*Tammy Fennessy
American Eagle Outfitters, Inc.*

Helping Front-Line and Essential Employees Impacted by COVID-19

For many, the COVID-19 global pandemic meant a dramatic shift to remote working. However a portion of workers around the world have job functions that required them to appear at a job site, often to interact with others in-person or in enclosed spaces, and particularly early on employers were forced to quickly implement measures to protect physical safety and help employees cope with a new source of stress and anxiety.

According to MetLife's [Employee Benefit Trends study](#) in mental health, 68% of essential workers reported concerns about going to work. Essential workers in the sectors like the retail and grocery industries, in low-wage positions, were especially concerned about being on the front lines or potentially losing their jobs and trying to balance health with financial concerns.

Like employers with workforces working remotely, employers with essential workers who were needed at work sites have taken a variety of steps to support mental health alongside measures to protect employees'

"In support of our teams in hospitals, we initiated a 24-hour hotline that is manned by behavioral health professionals, held critical stress debriefing sessions at the end of shifts, and facilitated in-person visits, among many other steps to provide virtual support and training, because we knew the impact of the pandemic would be felt acutely by our employees."

*Donald Parker
Hackensack Meridian Health
Carrier Clinic*

safety. These have included expanding telehealth and digital health services, adding resilience and stress management training or counseling sessions for important health needs like nutrition. Many have also added to the number of covered counseling sessions within their health plan and/or eliminated copays.

Additionally, employers have targeted support for essential workers by holding stress management sessions with employees while they are on-site and ensuring that professional mental health support is available for shift employees working nights and weekends. Others discussed setting expectations that managers take time for mental health check ins with their teams and be empowered to share available resources or to provide accommodation when appropriate.

Critically, many employers noted that while the circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic were unprecedented, the prospect of a global threat to the mental health of employees was now a phenomenon for which they would be actively planning.

THE GOLD STANDARD:

THE ONE MIND AT WORK CHARTER

- 1. Long-Term Commitment.** We will engage in values-driven organizational change toward mental health promotion, and mental illness and suicide prevention – with a commitment to continuous improvement.
- 2. Promote Mental Health.** We will support employee mental health and wellbeing through comprehensive policies, education, and resources, similar to physical health promotion efforts.
- 3. Eliminate Stigma, Social Prejudice, and Discrimination.** We will engage in shifting attitudes and changing behaviors through comprehensive efforts including contact education and policy review.
- 4. Adopt a Proactive Prevention Approach.** We will actively work to prevent harm to worker psychological health in a continuous improvement process that seeks to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors in how work is organized and how people are managed.
- 5. Provide a Coordinated Response.** We will play a vital role in creating improved access to seamless connections to mental health treatment, services, resources, and support.
- 6. Early and Effective Workplace Interventions.** We will ensure that performance, absence, and disability management systems intervene early and effectively through supportive conversations that engage the employee in collaborative solutions.
- 7. Explore Innovation, including Technology.** We will employ innovative practices, approaches, and concepts, including new technologies.
- 8. Continuous Evaluation.** We will measure all efforts to ensure quality, outcomes, accountability, and to contribute to the growing body of knowledge about workplace mental health as a field of study.

ABOUT ONE MIND AT WORK

One Mind at Work convenes leaders to transform approaches to mental health and addiction with the goal of delivering better mental health, wellness and economic outcomes globally. Working together with other influential leaders, we will effectively address mental health disparities, promote brain health and achieve a society and health care system in which mental health is treated the same as physical health.

One Mind at Work is a global coalition of leaders from diverse sectors including business, medicine, research, education, law enforcement, the military and civil society. These leaders have joined together with the goal of transforming approaches to mental health and addiction. Launched in 2017, One Mind at Work now has more than 50 global employer members, representing more than 7 million employees, and more than 25 research and content partners.

ABOUT THE SHRM FOUNDATION

The SHRM Foundation's mission is to mobilize the power of HR and activate the generosity of donors to lead positive social change impacting all things work. The Foundation is committed to elevating and empowering HR as a social force through its innovative solutions to workplace inclusion challenges, programming designed to inspire and empower the next generation of HR leaders, and awarding scholarships and professional development grants to educate and develop students and HR professionals.

We would like to thank **Otsuka Pharmaceutical** for their generous support of this project.

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