

September 10, 2019
3:30-5:30 pm PT

Harvest Inn, Napa Valley
Fountain View Room
1 Main St, St Helena, CA 94574

Learning Collaborative Summary

The Impacts of Trauma and
Prevalence Among Certain Sectors
and Employee Populations



About the Learning Collaborative

Many professions require employees to expose themselves to highly traumatic situations, defined in a variety of ways but often involving risk of injury, physical exertion, violence, or emotionally draining situations. Beyond professions that increase the risk of exposure, people from any line of work are exposed to trauma in their personal lives. Left unaddressed, employees exposed to traumatic situations can be extremely detrimental to an organization's workforce. Similarly, veterans working civilian jobs often carry a heavy burden of trauma but may feel uncomfortable raising the issue with their employer due to negative perception and stigma. An employer seeking to address how trauma impacts their workforce should first collect information and context on how employees perceive trauma; then define a strategy to communicate acceptance, understanding, and ultimately, pathways for treatment.

Session Summary

In order to address trauma in the workplace, organizations must first gather data on how people are communicating around trauma, what their basic assumptions are, and what expectations they have for treatments.

- **Social listening:** Organizations can leverage the de-identified data summarizing social media conversations to better understand trends, resource needs and other insights. Social listening can inform organizations on what primary stressors exist, the terms being used, and general attitudes toward trauma and mental health. These data are one element to building a “person-centered” response.
- **Establish a common language:** A common definition of trauma, and lexicon that surrounds the discussion of trauma, ensures that the employee and manager; patient and care provider; or counselor and peer supporter are effectively and efficiently communicating. At the same time, however, the various contexts within which people discuss trauma must also be considered.



Employers can challenge the assumptions of employees by communicating acceptance and understanding.

- **Promote acceptance:** Establishing that “it’s O.K. not to be O.K.” is a baseline step for addressing the needs of people with trauma. Rather than reinforcing a culture of unhealthy expectations for constant happiness, employers can acknowledge the daily challenge of dealing with trauma and the impact it has on the individual, co-workers, and loved ones.
- **Change perception:** Employers and care providers must also challenge the common misconception that trauma only derives from experiencing extreme violence like war or sexual assault. Trauma can also result from experiences like poverty, emotional neglect, or even prolonged exposure to other people with trauma.
- **Eliminate fear:** An employee suffering mentally and emotionally from trauma will not perform at full capacity; therefore, the primary responsibility of employers is to eliminate the stigma and fear of repercussions that prevent employees from seeking help.
 - This can be particularly challenging in fields like law enforcement, where officers fear that speaking up about the impact of trauma will eliminate their chances of being promoted or cause them to lose security clearance.

As employers work to promote acceptance and understanding of the impact of trauma on their employees, treatment options must be made clear and accessible.

- **Rebrand Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs):** Stigma around EAPs lingers, as historically the programs were designed for alcoholism in the workplace and had perceptions as being a “policeman”; for this and other reasons, current EAP utilization rate remains at single digit levels. Employers can “rebrand” EAP to reflect the changing mental health needs of the current workforce.
- **Establish a culture of prevention:** Particularly for organizations that operate in fields that expose employees to high risk of trauma, a system that prioritizes prevention by bringing care to employees before they seek it out can be highly effective.
 - Mandatory universal mental health screenings are an effective method because it applies to all employees; therefore, individuals are not singled out and stigmatized.



- **Peer support is key:** The most effective resource for treating people with trauma are people with similar lived experiences. Peer support can take the form of in-person affinity groups for people with various mental health conditions or lived experiences; alternatively, it can take place in online communities. Either way, peer support is an indispensable component of trauma care. However, employers should navigate with care, and ensure that those participating in peer support groups understand their limitations and know when to refer or escalate an individual to professional care. However, employers should navigate with care, and ensure that those participating in peer support groups are trained properly, understand their limitations and know when to refer or escalate an individual to professional care.

About One Mind at Work

Launched in 2017, One Mind At Work convenes leaders to transform approaches to brain health with the goal of addressing mental health disparities and working towards a society and health care system that acknowledge that there is no health without mental health. With financial support from founding sponsor Janssen Research & Development, LLC, one of the Janssen Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson & Johnson, One Mind At Work now has more than 70 global employers in diverse sectors including business, medicine, research, education, law enforcement, military, and civil society.

One Mind at Work is a program of One Mind, a 501c3 non-profit focused on accelerating brain health research, scaling implementation and impacting society. If you are not yet a member of One Mind at Work or would like to learn more, please contact **Connor McLaughlin** at connor.mclaughlin@onemind.org or visit www.onemindatwork.org. If you haven't already seen our Workplace Mental Health Assessment, please visit www.workplacementalhealthassessment.com for insights into your company's workplace mental health practices.

