Increased mental health services can help clients and their employees

Not so long ago, the general business culture was "work is work and home is home," and employees kept their personal issues to themselves.

Thankfully, the business world has begun to evolve beyond that view. Leaders have learned that providing mental health support isn't just the right thing to do — it's better for business.

Today's employers recognize the need to offer mental health support to their employees, with 78% offering or planning to offer workplace mental health resources within the next year. One reason? Eighty-six percent of human resource professionals indicate that offering mental health resources can increase employee retention.[1]

Additionally, research has shown that for every dollar invested in the mental health of employees, employers can save two to four dollars on other expenses such as health care costs.[2]

The real reason for mental health support

But the most important reason for clients to consider making mental health support a priority for their business is that their employees need it. According to a 2021 survey,[3] 76% of US workers reported at least one symptom of a mental health condition, such as anxiety or depression. And unfortunately, in many cases, the workplace itself is the source of employees' stress, with 84% of employees reporting at least one workplace factor having a negative impact on their mental health. So it's no surprise that 81% of workers stated they'll be looking for workplaces that support mental health in the future.

Employers feel the pain, too. A little more than half — 51% — of employers indicated that employee mental health has affected their organizations, with 46% of employees stating their mental health negatively impacted their job performance.[4]

A proactive approach to providing mental health services saves companies money in the long run by increasing productivity, reducing turnover and helping prevent chronic stress from costly, leading diseases such as heart disease and diabetes.

It's also a must-have for recruitment; increasingly, people are expecting better mental health coverage and more support from their employers. This is especially true of younger employees, including those in the millennial generation and Gen Z, who tend to be more open about their mental health challenges.

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Employers level up their mental health services

As with other types of employee benefits, the trend in mental health services is toward more choices and personalization.

Here's some of what the leading employers are offering:

- **Telehealth for mental health:** Many people who had never taken advantage of telemedicine before did so in 2020 to see their primary care doctors, specialists and mental health professionals, too. Telehealth improves access for mental health services because people don't have to choose a therapist in their immediate area, and it can be less intimidating for first-timers.
- **More generous EAPs:** Employee assistance programs give employees access to a set number of free appointments with a mental health professional. EAPs are widespread; with 93% of large businesses and 70% of smaller ones offering services.[1] And now, businesses are making an effort to expand their EAPs and support services to include more appointments and more types of help, such as financial counseling and services for dependents.[5]
- **Digital mental health solutions:** Employers can purchase a digital mental health platform that employees access on their phones or computers. Employees can text with a coach, complete exercises to strengthen coping skills or meet via video with a licensed mental health professional. Some employers provide free subscriptions to apps that help with sleep, relaxation or meditation.
- **On-site therapy:** Large companies sometimes find it cost-effective to offer medical care, including mental health services, on premises. It's also more convenient for employees and eliminates travel time to appointments.

Increased communication is a must

Employers can step up their game in offering more mental health support, but they must also be sure employees are aware of the services and feel comfortable using them. In a recent Gallup survey, just 43% of employees were aware that mental health services were available to them.[6]

Employers must make an increased effort to communicate to their employees that mental health is a priority. This can include holding workshops on topics such as resilience, training managers to spot signs of emotional distress and simply making employees more comfortable in being open about their mental health needs.

The mental health crisis is complex and not easily solved. Brokers can help clients support their employees in a holistic way and have a powerful impact on their businesses and the state of mental health in our communities.

[1] SHRM Foundation and Otsuka. "Mental health in America. A 2022 Workplace Report." Jan. 2022. Accessed 4.28.23.
[2] Benefits Pro. "67% of employees want their employer to provide mental health support." Feb. 09, 2023. Accessed 4.11.23.
[3] HHS.gov. "US Surgeon General release new framework for mental health and well-being in the workplace." Oct. 20, 2022. Accessed 4.11. 23.
[4] Aflac. "Aflac Workforces Report: Workplace Benefits Trends Executive Summary." Published Nov. 2023. Accessed 4.11.23.
[5] SHRM. "Employers identify workforce mental health priorities for 2022." Published Jan. 26, 2022. Accessed 4.6.2022.
[6] Employee Benefit News. "How to support employees who are struggling with their mental health." Nov. 17, 2022. Accessed 4.11.11.23.