



Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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Supporting Mental Health in the Workplace

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Work plays a significant role in workers' mental health. This impact is so substantial that managers impact workers' mental health more than doctors or therapists do, according to the Workforce Institute's Mental Health at Work study.

The U.S. Surgeon General even emphasizes the role of workplaces in shaping our mental and physical well-being, noting that the average full-time U.S. worker spends about half of their waking life at work. Employment arrangements, wages, and working conditions are powerful social determinants of health, including our mental health.

Mental health is a critical part of worker well-being and is central to overall health. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's (NIOSH) long-standing research program in work stress shows that mental health worsens with chronic exposure to occupational stress. Research also shows that workplace risk factors can contribute to health problems outside of work. Harmful physical and emotional responses can happen when job requirements do not match a workers' capabilities, resources, or needs.

Mental Health Matters To Workers

- The American Psychological Association's 2023 Work in America Survey found that 95% of workers said it is very or somewhat important to them to work for an organization that respects the boundaries between work and nonwork time. In addition, 92% said it is very or somewhat important to them to work for an organization that provides support for employee mental health and that values their emotional and psychological well-being.
- Workers want healthy work cultures, not self-care perks, according to Mind Share Partners' 2023 Mental Health at Work Report. The report found that workers rated healthy, supportive work cultures as more helpful than mental health treatment and self-care resources.
- The Mind the Workplace Report by Mental Health America, a NIOSH Total Worker Health® Affiliate, found that managerial support strongly correlates with positive employee mental health outcomes. The report found that workers with supportive managers report higher rates of psychological safety and are more comfortable asking for support and providing feedback to their managers.

Strategies To Support Workers

Employers have a unique opportunity to invest in workers' mental health and well-being. Addressing mental health in the workplace can help employers strengthen their organizations' success and reduce health care costs for their businesses and workers.

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Promote a safe and healthy workplace culture:

Employers and organizations can use the NIOSH Total Worker Health (TWH) approach to create and sustain safe and healthy workplace cultures. To align with the approach, workplace programs should address environmental determinants of health rather than focusing only or primarily on individual-level interventions. Programs should only use individual-level interventions after addressing organizational-level fixes. For example, a program to reduce work-related stress might:

- Implement organizational and management policies that eliminate root causes of stress and provide workers with increased flexibility and control over their work and schedules.
- Provide training for supervisors on successful approaches and strategies to reduce stressful working conditions.
- Provide training and interventions to build resiliency for stress management and reduction for all workers. Provide access to Employee Assistance Programs.

Prioritize efforts to advance workers' safety, health, and well-being using the Hierarchy of Controls Applied to NIOSH TWH. Identify initial steps to improve workforce safety, health, and well-being and measure your organization's progress using the Fundamentals of TWH Approaches workbook.

Build workplaces that are engines of well-being:

The U.S. Surgeon General's Framework for Mental Health & Well-Being in the Workplace outlines the foundational role that workplaces should play in promoting workers' health and well-being. The framework outlines five essentials to help organizations develop, institutionalize, and update policies, processes, and practices that best support workers. A new report from NIOSH also examines the impact of work-related psychosocial hazards and provides six crucial societal actions needed to address this pressing problem.

Implement supportive supervision:

Mental Health America's Workplace Mental Health Toolkit outlines ways to cultivate supportive managers.

Employers and organizations can also train leaders on improving workers' health and well-being. Examples include the online training course Understanding and Preventing Burnout among Public Health Workers: Guidance for Public Health Leaders, TWH Leadership Programs, and the Safety and Health Improvement Program toolkit. Promising supervisory strategies are also described in the on-demand webinar How Work Can Impact Mental Health and What Leaders Can Do.

Assess worker well-being:

Worker input is essential to developing workplace programs. Understand how your workforce is doing with the NIOSH Worker Well-Being Questionnaire (WellBQ). The NIOSH WellBQ is a 68-item, 15-minute survey tool that provides an integrated assessment of worker well-being. It can also help employers identify and prioritize interventions to improve worker well-being.

Address health worker mental health:

Health workers have historically faced challenging working conditions and recent research shows that these are worsening their mental health. The NIOSH Impact Wellbeing™ campaign gives hospital leaders evidence-informed solutions to reduce healthcare worker burnout, sustain wellbeing, and build a system where healthcare workers thrive. NIOSH also released an evidence-informed and actionable guide for the nation's hospital leaders to improve healthcare worker wellbeing – Impact Wellbeing™ Guide: Taking Action to Improve Healthcare Worker Wellbeing. This Guide provides a step-by-step process for hospitals to start making organizational-level changes that will impact and improve the mental health of their employees.

References:

<https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2024/04/15/workplace-mental-health-resources/>