

# MENTAL HEALTH

## Workplace Programs, Practices, and Policies

### OVERVIEW

Work is beneficial for mental health, providing meaning and purpose, a sense of accomplishment, self-efficacy and self-esteem, and recognition of an individual's contribution. However, aspects of work can also negatively impact health.

There is often a reluctance to discuss mental health issues, including substance use, in the workplace. This stigma can negatively impact worker well-being.

Workplace policies and practices demonstrate leadership support and provide a plan for action. It is important to move beyond individual solutions to address how the organization of work can impact mental health.

### DEFINITION OF GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

**“...a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”**

*-World Health Organization, 2014*

### BENEFITS OF ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH

Addressing mental health (e.g., anxiety and depression, substance use, psychotic disorders, work-related stress) can lead to **decreased absenteeism, lower turnover, increased productivity, reduced costs, and higher employee engagement.**

Treatment is cost-effective, over 80% of employees treated for mental illness report improved levels of work efficiency and satisfaction.<sup>1</sup>

### 1 OUT OF EVERY 5 ADULTS HAS A MENTAL ILLNESS

- Mental illness is common
- Mental illness is a treatable health condition
- Only 50-60% of adults with mental health conditions are getting the services they need
- Learning and talking openly helps reduce stigma
- Reducing stigma can save lives
- It's never too late and never too early to get help

### STIGMA KEEPS PEOPLE FROM GETTING TREATMENT

Does your workplace include access to:

- An Employee Assistance Program
- Referrals to community services
- Free or subsidized lifestyle coaching
- Counseling
- Behavioral health treatment
- Telepsychiatry
- Prescription drug therapy
- Inpatient or outpatient treatment



## STRONG MENTAL HEALTH POLICIES:

- **Communicate** support to employees who suffer from a mental illness
- **Address** the work environment, workload, and decision-making authority which impact mental health
- **Reduce** stigma
- **Provide** benefits, access to care, EAP, and recovery-friendly workplaces, paid time off
- **Identify** reasonable accommodations
- **Train** employees to recognize signs, learn what to say, and be aware of available resources
- **Protect** privacy and confidentiality
- **Demonstrate** leadership support

## RETURN-TO-WORK POLICIES

Return to work policies should support and accommodate employees after a mental health leave-of-absence including job accommodations, similar to when employees take leave for a physical health event.

### Workplace Accommodations:

- Flexible schedule for appointments
- More frequent breaks
- Use noise canceling headphones for anxiety
- More frequent reminders for those with concentration issues

## ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES THAT PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Engaged supervision
- Job security
- Realistic hours and expectations
- Work environment that increases retention
- Competitive/fair pay
- Positive employee culture without harassment
- Limit extended time away from family
- Clear communication by supervisors
- Well-defined roles and responsibilities

## PROVIDE SCREENING OPPORTUNITIES

**Confidential** screening helps people self-assess “how bad is it?” and answer the internal question, “can I fix this myself or should I see a doctor?”

**Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?** <sup>2, 3</sup>

- Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge
- Not being able to stop or control worrying
- Feeling down, depressed or hopeless
- Little interest or pleasure in doing things

The longer mental health problems and suicidal thoughts go unaddressed, the more catastrophic they can become. Companies can use screenings (e.g., HRAs, climate surveys) to understand what is going on at their organization.

<sup>1</sup>PacificCare Behavioral Health. Therapy in America. *Psychology Today*. 2004

<sup>2</sup>Kroenke K, Spitzer RL, Williams JB, Löwe B. An ultra-brief screening scale for anxiety and depression: the PHQ-4. *Psychosomatics*. 2009; 50(6):613-21. From Principles of Neuropathic Pain Assessment and Management, November 2011.

<sup>3</sup>[https://qxmd.com/calculator/calculator\\_476/patient-health-questionnaire-4-phq-4](https://qxmd.com/calculator/calculator_476/patient-health-questionnaire-4-phq-4)

