

# A Four-Pronged Plan to Improve Employee Emotional Well-being and Mental Health



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# It's Time to Be Bold

As signs of the pandemic's end emerge, the threat to employee physical safety is starting to subside. The threat to mental health, by contrast, continues to rise, despite employers' efforts to protect employee psyches. A year of unimaginable loss, upheaval and uncertainty has affected every person in some way, taking a massive toll on workforce well-being:

- [More than 40% of adults](#) reported feeling anxious or depressed in February 2021, up from 36% in August 2020.
- [Nearly half of employees](#) (48%) say they experienced high-to-extreme stress over the past year, and just the thought of returning to the office brings [some level of anxiety to 100% of employees](#).
- Some experts expect to see an increase in stress and trauma similar to the [21% rate of post-traumatic stress disorder](#) found among survivors of Hurricane Katrina a year later.

And as stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health challenges continue to escalate, employers face yet another challenge: winning over the trust of their workforce. Only [55% of employees](#) believe their employer truly cares about them.

But there is a silver lining for organizations, employees and the HR teams responsible for improving the health of both. The pandemic has not only injected new urgency in the effort to address employee mental health and well-being, it also has opened the door wide to bold new approaches that can drive greater impact.

With HR leading the way, in partnership with CEOs, now is the time to extend beyond incremental or short-term fixes to mental health benefits. It's time to:

1. Eliminate stigma and weave emotional and mental health into your company culture.
2. Expand beyond traditional employee assistance plans (EAPs) and embrace new digital experiences for mental health.
3. Address the distinct mental health needs of vulnerable populations.
4. Deliver care that respects the patient as a multi-dimensional person with emotional, mental, physical and financial health needs.

Investments in workforce well-being are not just the right thing to do for your people: they're investments in your bottom line. According to the American Heart Association, [untreated depression costs \\$9,450](#) per employee per year in lost productivity and absenteeism alone. Mental illness is the [number one cause](#) of worker disability in the U.S., and those left untreated for mental health conditions use [three times](#) more non psychiatric healthcare services than others.

For the health of your people and the health of your business, now is the time to go broad and deep with your mental health strategy, in the same way your organization mobilized for their physical safety a year ago.

## Elevate the Importance of Mental Health and Reduce Stigma

Our country's collective uncertainty about the future and trauma from current events have elevated mental health and well-being into the national discussion alongside physical health. A nationwide focus on the human psyche is paving the way for employers to elevate the mental health conversation in the workplace, and to eliminate the stigma of mental illness once and for all.

Stigma is one of the most significant obstacles standing in the way of employees taking steps to get mental health support at all. Even before the pandemic, one out of five U.S. adults experienced mental illness. Unfortunately, eight of 10 workers did not seek treatment due to shame and stigma.



## Recommendations

### Talk about mental health

Normalize the conversation about mental health in the workplace and do so in a manner that removes fear of retribution, creating psychologically safe places to discuss mental health.

- ✓ **Share stories of emotional or mental health experiences, starting at the top of the organization. By being open and vulnerable, company leaders can quickly take the air out of stigma and help employees feel safe seeking mental health support.**
  - [SAP and Microsoft leaders](#) are setting the pace and tone, sharing stories at all levels of the organization via in-person meetings, internal websites, YouTube channels and podcasts.
  - [Nearly 90% of employees](#) appreciate when company leaders share about their own mental health.
- ✓ **Establish and invest in an Employee Resource Group (ERG) dedicated to mental and emotional health.**
  - Enable employees to share experiences and ideas and recommendations with each other, HR and the leadership team.
  - Non-profit organization [Mind Share Partners](#) offers guidance on how to establish a mental health ERG.

## Model and Enable Healthy Behavior

- ✓ **Encourage all company leaders to intentionally model healthy behaviors and be vocal about them:**

- Taking a day off
- Using all available vacation time
- Scheduling therapy appointments
- Taking screen breaks and 20-minute power naps
- Working at optimal times for them, if flexibility is possible
- Getting physical exercise
- Connecting with nature
- Using available mental health apps and programs

- ✓ **Specify blocks of time during the week as “no-meeting” time for the entire company**

## Train Managers, Educate Everyone

- ✓ **Bring in expert speakers on mental health and well-being**
- ✓ **Train your leaders and managers about appropriate language to use when [talking about mental health](#).** For example, it's important to focus on the person, not their condition
- ✓ **Provide [manager mental health training](#) to help them better support employees**
  - Train managers to give employees the opportunity and resources they need to recognize signs of mental health issues within themselves and to find support.
  - Help managers learn what to say and not say to individuals and teams regarding mental health or someone facing challenges.

## Take Advantage of Trusted Industry Resources

- ✓ **Check out [free resources](#) at The Center for Workplace Mental Health,** a project of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) designed to help companies create a more supportive workplace environment for employees and advance mental health policies
  - Resources include The ICU Program developed by DuPont's Employee Assistance Program for each of their 70,000 employees. The ICU Program is an awareness campaign designed to reduce the stigma associated with mental health and foster a workplace culture that supports emotional health.
- ✓ **Consider signing up to become a [StigmaFree Company](#), an initiative of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**
  - NAMI's StigmaFree Company Welcome Kit provides the resources, assets and information you need to promote mental health awareness in the workplace and to encourage acceptance and understanding.

## Improve Care Access and Utilization

Even before the COVID crisis, the U.S. faced a worsening shortage of mental health providers, presenting another significant barrier to employees getting support when they need it. More than [75% of U.S. counties](#) don't have enough psychiatrists for the population, and the shortage is expected to reach nearly [100,000](#) mental health providers by 2025.

75%

of US counties  
don't have enough  
psychiatrists

5.5%

rate of Employee  
Assistance Programs  
(EAPs) have a median  
utilization

Studies also show that employer-sponsored insurance often fails to adequately cover mental health or addiction needs. For instance, employees and dependents are forced to turn to [out-of-network providers six times more often](#) for behavioral health care than for medical or surgical care.

In theory, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) resolves both the shortage of mental health providers and the need to go out-of-network for support. In practice, however, employee utilization of traditional EAPs is only about [5%](#). Many employees lack awareness of their company's EAP or view it as a 1-800 crisis-only line rather than a resource for ongoing struggles. Others worry about confidentiality, or whether using the company-sponsored EAP will hurt their standing in the organization.

Without access to mental health support they can trust, people often turn to the local emergency department (ED). More than [one in eight visits to the ED](#) is related to mental health or substance abuse.

Leading companies were already taking action to combat these challenges when COVID hit. [Three out of four employers](#) were planning to enhance their EAPs, for example, to better meet the needs of the workforce. [Nine out of 10](#) employers expected to offer telebehavioral health coverage by 2021.

The pandemic accelerated these plans, as employees rapidly embraced the use of digital mental healthcare: [nearly 50% of employees](#) are using virtual services for emotional or mental health in 2021, up from 29% in 2020.

## Recommendations

### Expand Virtual Mental Healthcare For Your Workforce



**If you invested in virtual mental healthcare during the pandemic, make it a permanent part of your employee benefit plan**

- Find out what new digital health programs — e.g., mindfulness, meditation, sleep, or telehealth therapy — are free to members through your health plan and specifically promote them to your workforce to build awareness and encourage utilization.
- [Expand beyond the provider network of your health plan](#), which is insufficient right now, according to NBGH.



**Look for solutions that provide 24/7/365 access to high-quality providers for any level of emotional or mental health need, clinical or subclinical**

- Evaluate the range of practitioners available, e.g., does the solution provide access to coaches, licensed therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists? Are they available by video and secure messaging? Is the solution available via mobile app and a secure online portal?
- Offer solutions with a variety of therapeutic approaches such as cognitive behavioral therapy, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, or integrative/ holistic therapy.
- Evaluate how rapidly employees and dependents can access a virtual provider. The best solutions offer access to licensed providers in minutes or hours, not days or weeks.
- Look for a solution that allows employees to access the same provider over time for care continuity.



**Eliminate the mental healthcare cost barrier for your employees and their dependents.**

- Lower or eliminate out-of-pocket costs for employees seeking mental health support, in the same way OOP costs were eliminated for “high-value” care such as cancer screenings.

- Partner with vendors that charge your company based on utilization of services rather than the size of your employee or member population.

## **Build Awareness and Understanding of Your Resources**



### **Communicate with employees regularly through all available channels.**

Annual enrollment is one touchpoint. Company-wide meetings, Slack channels, employee surveys, light-hearted quizzes, internal slide templates, and internal blogs and webpages are other opportunities and vehicles to highlight available mental health and well-being resources.



### **Explain the basics regarding your EAP and other resources:**

- How employees and dependents can benefit by using them
- The type of help offered
- Why the organization selected specific programs
- How to locate the resources they need
- How their privacy is protected
- How the costs are covered



### **Partner with your third-party providers on innovative communications campaigns that build awareness of your company's mental health initiatives and programs for employees**

- Webinars or podcasts with compelling guest speakers
- Employee story campaign, e.g., "profiles in courage"
- A "myths vs. facts" campaign about your EAP and other programs



## **Invest in Navigation or Advocacy to Guide Employees to Resources**



**Consolidate all your benefits and programs in one place**, making it easier for employees to find and access what they need

### **Look for solutions that add human advocacy and navigation**



- Compassionate care advocates engage with employees to understand who they are and what they need, and then guide them to the benefits, digital health resources and in-person care that can help them most.

## Support Vulnerable Populations

Events of the past year have been stressful for your entire workforce, but the toll has been significantly greater on vulnerable populations, including underrepresented racial groups, LGBTQ+ employees, and working mothers.

### Black Employees

Not only are Black Americans suffering disproportionately from the COVID pandemic, they are “[living a racism pandemic](#),” at the same time, according to the President of the American Psychological Association. The consequences of racism are grim, including rising anxiety, depression, PTSD, substance use disorders, as well as physical disease. [Research](#) shows that one third of Black working mothers, for example, are experiencing the highest level of burnout ([33%](#)) among all working parents.

## Recommendations

### **Partner with leadership to help your organization become anti-racist**



#### **Establish and implement a company-wide anti-racist plan**

- Lead from the top of the organization to demonstrate commitment
- Establish diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) metrics and track progress
- Audit existing policies, e.g., hiring policies and compensation, to ensure everyone is being treated fairly and equitably
- Hold structured, courageous conversations about anti-racism on a regular basis
- Establish an anti-racism task force representing all groups
- Provide anti-racism training for your entire workforce

### **Provide black employees a safe space**



#### **Give Black employees a safe space, e.g., an ERG, within the organization to come together based on a shared experience**

- Bring in mental health providers with [expertise in racial trauma](#) to help them work through their experience.

## Provide culturally humble mental health support



**Make sure your EAP or virtual mental health service offers *culturally-humble* care**

- Providers take the time to understand the unique life context of the person they're supporting and "meet them where they are."
- Providers should have a working understanding of racism, as well as the trauma it can inflict on Black mothers.



**Look for digital mental health services that offer diverse providers who can personally relate to and empathize with the experiences of employees who are Black, indigenous or people of color**

## LGBTQ+ Employees

Facing potential discrimination and harrassment in all aspects of their lives, LGBTQ+ adults are **twice as likely** as heterosexual adults to experience depression, anxiety or other mental health condition. Transgender individuals have **four times the risk** of a mental health condition compared to cis individuals. Addressing these challenges is also harder: not only must members of the LGBTQ+ community overcome mental health stigma, they also must overcome stigma and discrimination related to their gender identity and sexuality.

In addition to offering a safe space, e.g., an ERG, dedicated to the LGBTQ+ community, employee benefits represent a significant but sometimes overlooked opportunity to support LGBTQ+ individuals and couples.

## Recommendations

### Support LGBTQ+ aspiring parents



**Expand your fertility benefits to help LGBTQ+ couples (and aspiring single parents by choice) afford building a family**

- Work with your health insurance plan to eliminate the requirement of an infertility diagnosis to qualify for benefits.
- Help fund surrogacy or adoption services on par with coverage for fertility treatment such as intrauterine insemination (IUI) or in vitro fertilization (IVF).

### **Provide 24/7/365 access to virtual advocacy and specialty care to help LGBTQ+ employees evaluate options, make decisions and overcome obstacles in the family-building journey**

- Provide access to reproductive care, adoption and surrogacy coaching, egg donor consulting, mental health care, and pediatric care.
- Provide on-demand access to mental health providers who are members of the LGBTQ+ community and can understand their experience.

- ✓ Offer **paid parental leave** for same-sex couples and adoptive parents

### **Intentionally support LGBTQ+ member needs in your DEI and mental health initiatives**

- ✓ Ensure your hiring practices help attract members of the LGBTQ+ community
- ✓ Incorporate LGBTQ+ mental health into your manager and workforce mental health training

## **Working Parents, Especially Mothers**

After a year of complete disruption to daily routines for the entire family, working parents are struggling with exhaustion, and mothers have a **28%** greater chance of experiencing burnout than working fathers. If your organization is like most, you're prioritizing the health and well-being of parents but still searching for strategies that work. **Less than 40%** of employers believe their programs for working parents are effective.

## **Recommendations**

Beyond childcare support, expanded parental leave and flexible work arrangements, Maven Parenting Coach Mercedes Samudio, LCSW, shares some recommendations for supporting the mental health and well-being of working mothers and fathers.

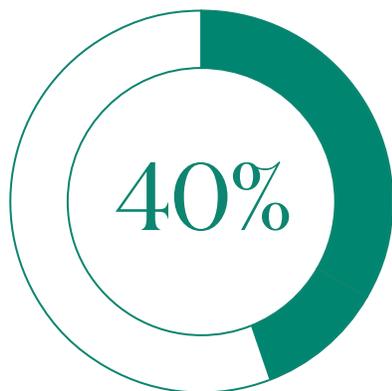
- ✓ **Listen first**  
The pandemic has elevated the importance of transparency and dialogue. Opening the lines of communication with parents and giving them a safe space to share how they're feeling is critical.
- ✓ **Focus on impact over hours**  
Emphasizing results and outcomes over process, hours, or facetime allows businesses to help parents without compromising results.

- 
**Provide a suite of solutions**  
 Think in terms of a suite of solutions, rather than a one-size-fits-all offering — no two parents are dealing with the same set of challenges. We all wish there was one magic solution that could help working parents, but the reality is that we need to think in terms of a menu of options to meet parents where they are.
  
- 
**Innovate in your mental health solutions**  
 Outside of offering more concrete mental health benefits, companies can do things like offer a mental health day for employees to use at their discretion, host group meditation or mindfulness sessions.
  
- 
**Engage non-parents**  
 Create a culture of cooperation between parents and non-parents, especially around issues such as meeting times, deadlines and work loads. Fairness and flexibility should be watchwords to help working parents manage professional and caregiving duties.

## Aspiring Parents Facing Infertility

Starting or expanding a family is a profound experience in life, and when things don't go as planned, it can be devastating. Research has shown that women with infertility suffer from the [same level of anxiety and depression as those with cancer or heart disease](#). People undergoing fertility treatment commonly feel anger, shame, depression, anxiety and isolation, which can worsen with every unsuccessful treatment.

Black women face additional barriers and challenges in the fertility journey, including nearly [double the rate of miscarriage](#) in the first IVF cycle than white women. Furthermore, the [lack of supply of Black donor eggs and sperm](#) can deepen a sense of isolation.



of women with infertility suffer from a psychiatric disorder  
(AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION)

*“Having a mental health provider who specializes in fertility is an amazing benefit. It has been wonderful to be able to rely on mental health support whenever I needed it, and to have somebody provide support that’s specific to fertility, and the struggles and challenges this entails—because it’s a very specific type of trauma to go through.”*

MAVEN FERTILITY MEMBER

# Recommendations



**Extend beyond reimbursement for your fertility benefits. Ensure your fertility benefits offer:**

- Preconception care
- 24/7 access to care advocacy, fertility coaches, reproductive endocrinologists, and mental health providers
- Navigation to high-quality fertility clinics with discounts
- Care matching to Black providers
- Educational content
- Community via online forums



**Continue to support aspiring parents throughout pregnancy and into early parenthood**

## Integrate Mental and Physical Health

96%

of employees say that mental health is just as important as physical health

5%

of adults are less likely to be screened for depression in primary care settings

The [fragmentation of care](#) — treating the mind and body separately — is a major factor behind our country's growing mental health crisis. Integrating care, by contrast, can make a significant positive impact on health and financial outcomes.

Studies have shown, for example, that [Collaborative Care](#) — a model that integrates mental health care and primary care in a holistic model — is more effective than usual care for depression, anxiety and comorbid medical conditions, improving patient and provider satisfaction. Unfortunately, holistic approaches like Collaborative Care remain rare. Less [than 5%](#) of adults are screened for depression in primary care settings, for instance.

## Recommendations

### ✓ Adopt solutions that break down silos

**Target high-cost healthcare conditions associated with high prevalence of mental health conditions, e.g:**

- Diabetes
- Low back pain
- Pregnancy and postpartum care, which accounts for \$1 of every \$5 spent by large employers on healthcare

# 1 in 5

experience postpartum  
depression or anxiety

# 1 in 3

members use Maven  
for emotional support

## Adopt solutions that support the pillars of collaborative care



### Patient-centered and team oriented

- Extended care teams collaborate and coordinate care for the patient.
- Teams are made up of medical doctors and mental health providers:
  - For example, OB-GYNs, reproductive endocrinologists, care advocates, coaches, therapists, and psychiatric nurse practitioners



### Population-based

- A group of patients are identified and tracked
  - For example, OB-GYNs, reproductive endocrinologists, care advocates, coaches, therapists, and psychiatric nurse practitioners
- Mental health specialists provide consultation in an organized way



### Evidence-based

- Patients are offered treatment with credible research evidence to support their efficacy (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy).
- Evidence-based tools like the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) depression screening are used to monitor progress towards goals.



### Outcomes-focused

- Look for solutions that charge based on utilization and outcomes, not just number of employees or members.
  - For example, look for maternal care solutions with fees based on program enrollment and outcomes like reduced C-section rates and shorter NICU stays

# Conclusion

As the country begins to move past the COVID crisis, struggles with mental health will persist. Employers have both the mandate and the opportunity to do more to support the emotional well-being and mental health of the workforce. The time is now to reduce mental health stigma, improve access to high-quality mental health care, support vulnerable populations, and integrate mental and physical health.

## About Maven

Maven is the world's largest virtual clinic for women's and family health. Our unique care model enables employers and health plans to improve maternal health outcomes and lower costs, while empowering parents to grow their families while growing their careers. Our platform is global, includes personalized programs across fertility, maternity, and parenting/pediatrics, and offers 24/7 access to Maven's proprietary telemedicine network, the largest in women's health.

Maven's mental health programs provide critical emotional support for every stage of planning, starting and raising a family. We pay equal attention to physical health, mental health and career planning to build one holistic experience.



Learn more at [mavenclinic.com](https://mavenclinic.com)

