

MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM GUIDELINES FOR EMPLOYERS

IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

Can we all agree that the pandemic has been challenging? It's no wonder that employers are reporting increased employee burnout and turnover. Employees are stressed, which can negatively impact one's mental health. Yet, mental health is not always a priority in the workplace. This oversight can perpetuate or lead to stigma, which is a barrier to initiating, accessing, and retaining mental health services.



COST OF MENTAL HEALTH DISTRESS

Employee mental distress – defined as periods of intense nervousness, hopelessness, restlessness, depression, or feeling down – presents a financial impact on Idaho employers. For example, an Idaho organization with 50 employees might see an estimated \$28,698 in lost time, \$34,398 in job turnover and retraining, and \$32,264 in health care costs. This same organization can anticipate around 11 employees experiencing depression, 7 employees experiencing anxiety, and 9 employees experiencing suicidal ideation. To see the impact mental health distress may have on your organization, check out the National Safety Council's [Mental Health Employer Cost Calculator](#).



HOW EMPLOYERS RESPONDED

To address the mental health challenges presented during the pandemic, some employers expanded health benefits for employees. The [Employer Health Benefits Survey 2021](#) noted that 39% of employers with 50 or more employees reported either increasing coverage for out-of-network mental health or substance abuse services, waived or reduced cost-sharing for these services, expanded the number of providers in-network, developed new resources, and expanded ways in which employees can access services, such as telemedicine. These changes to benefits occurred since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO

To support mental health in the workplace, consider developing a Mental Health Program. Here are a few things to consider when developing a program:

Start with leadership. Leaders are encouraged to normalize the conversation about mental health. Some ways to accomplish this is to talk openly about mental health and the relationship to personal health, share personal stories, and listen to employees. Leaders can create a workplace culture based on open communication, where managers regularly check in with staff, where stress, burnout, and mental health is evaluated on a regular basis, and mental health resources (or links to resources) are readily available.

Embed mental health protections into organizational policies. Clearly state the organization's commitment to a proactive solution to mental health issues. Look at insurance packages that cover mental health services, as well as internal policies relating to reporting and responding to a mental health crisis. Develop policies that prevent employee distress, such as anti-retaliation or flexible work hours. Policy templates are available online, such as the Employer Mental Health Policy Template.

Promote an anti-stigma campaign across the entire organization. Empower Idaho celebrates Mental Health Month annually each May. In effort to reduce stigma and spread awareness, Empower Idaho develops and distributes a campaign which includes a mental health toolkit filled with resources for Idahoans.

Consider implementing a peer mentorship program. A peer mentorship program links a person with lived experience (a peer mentor) to another person or group of people, for the purpose of providing support and sharing resources. For peer mentor programs focusing on mental health or substance use disorders, it is recommended the mentor be comfortable in their own recovery journey. These peer mentors are trusted co-workers that provide ongoing support by listening, validating experiences, and talking through stressful situations. For more information on peer supports, check out the Peers for Progress Program Development Guide.

Provide training to employees. Trainings such as Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR), Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), and Psychological First Aid provide employees with a foundation in recognizing warning signs and responding to a crisis.

Connect employees to resources. Make certain resource information is current. If available in your organization, promote information on an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). You can find additional information on mental health resources in Empower Idaho's Mental Health toolkit.

