

# Creating a healthy workplace for mental well-being

Work is good for our mental health, but a negative working environment can lead to physical and mental health problems. Common workplace issues such as high amounts of stress, harassment, and bullying create a negative work environment that carries over into off-duty hours. This can lead to depression and anxiety, which have a significant economic impact through lost productivity and increased absenteeism. Employers can help prevent these issues by removing the stigma around mental health and making helpful resources available to employees.

Only one in three people who need help get it, according to the American Psychiatric Association. They say this is often due to stigma, fear of losing one's job, or inability to obtain care due to a lack of money or access. Employee assistance programs, often available through employers, offer free, confidential services but usually have extremely low use (between 3-5% nationally). This suggests that more

should be done to foster workplaces that encourage people to ask for help when needed and create environments where emotional and mental health is a priority.

Here are some suggestions from the Working Well toolkit:

## Stop the stigma

When mental health is stigmatized, employees are more likely to stay silent. That means that work may be impacted, but more importantly, those who need help will not seek it.

Overcome stigma by fostering an environment where mental health issues can be discussed. When people feel they can express these concerns without repercussion, they are more likely to access resources.

Some ideas for stopping stigma:

- Train everyone, especially leaders, on recognizing emotional stress.
- Consider work/life balance and pay attention to workload.
- Ensure management demonstrates work/life balance.
- Include language about emotional well-being in regular meetings.
- Offer training on coping strategies for all employees.



## Know the consequences

Look at direct and indirect costs when employees are not at their best. These include employer health care costs as well as presenteeism, absenteeism, or overtime. Other indirect costs include company morale and employee engagement.

## Provide affordable access

Look at your health plan and your employee assistance program to make sure they include services your employees can afford. This removes an important financial barrier and allows employees to get help if they need it.

## Support well-being through your culture

Here are some ideas for building a well-being culture:

- Address workplace health and safety hazards.
- Find your workplace stressors and work to reduce them.
- Ask your workers some of the following questions and use the answers to identify potential barriers to a well-being culture:
  - What is most stressful? Tasks? Workday?
  - How do they feel about negative feedback?
  - How do they feel about job expectations? Are they too high?
  - What is the quality of work relationships?

## Other ideas to promote well-being

- Provide a worksite physical activity program.
- Make healthy food options available.
- Encourage preventive care, such as well-being checks and health screenings.
- Involve employees in decisions—it improves buy-in and participation in company initiatives.
- Offer career development programs for employees.
- Regularly recognize and reward employees for their contributions.
- Encourage social connections with co-workers and community.

Ready to start? Look below for more resources to help you build a well-being culture.

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## More resources

- American Psychiatric Association's site has numerous resources to help employers create a psychologically healthy workplace ([bit.ly/4cjDLyk](https://bit.ly/4cjDLyk))
- Right Direction provides employers and employees with information about depression. ([www.rightdirectionforme.com](https://www.rightdirectionforme.com))
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mental Health in the Workplace ([bit.ly/4acZy67](https://bit.ly/4acZy67))
- stigmafrees: Change the way the world sees mental health, by NAMI ([bit.ly/3VebnS](https://bit.ly/3VebnS))