

MENTAL HEALTH  
IN THE WORKPLACE:  
PERSPECTIVES OF HR  
AND BENEFITS LEADERS

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SEPTEMBER 2017

**ONE MIND  
INITIATIVE<sup>TM</sup>**  
**at work**

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## INTRODUCTION

*Mental Health in the Workplace: Perspectives of HR and Benefits Leaders* provides key insights from the One Mind Initiative at Work's conversations with HR and benefits leaders at major US employers about workplace mental health. We feel these conversations produced valuable lessons that can guide efforts in this field, and which will serve as a foundation for future initiatives.

The One Mind Initiative at Work is a global coalition of leading employers dedicated to collaborating across sectors, industries, and national boundaries to transform workplace approaches to mental health. One Mind – a leading mental health non-profit organization – launched the Initiative in 2016. It seeks to develop a set of evidence-based principles in workplace mental health, and then build consensus within and between businesses to bridge the implementation gap and drive widespread adoption.

Achieving this goal requires a detailed understanding of the current environment for workplace mental health programs, especially the perceptions and efforts of the senior leaders directing them. These HR and benefits leaders are vital partners for any effort to build a robust employer response in mental health. They provide the impetus for adopting and improving mental health programs, collaborating to create a multi-stakeholder response, and addressing key challenges to implementation and utilization.

To reach these individuals, the One Mind Initiative at Work led a series of conversations with HR and benefits leaders at thirteen major US employers in 2016 and 2017. The conversations covered HR and benefits leaders' overall perceptions of the mental health field, current approaches and best practices in mental health promotion, and the most significant challenges in the area. This paper summarizes key findings from these conversations, including common themes, current policies and best practices, case studies, and the resulting Pillars for a Workplace Mental Health Gold Standard.

I would like to thank all of the individuals and companies who participated in the interviews for sharing their expertise and time with the Initiative's team. And I look forward to future collaborations with these and other businesses to continue advancing a robust employer response in mental health.

Signed:

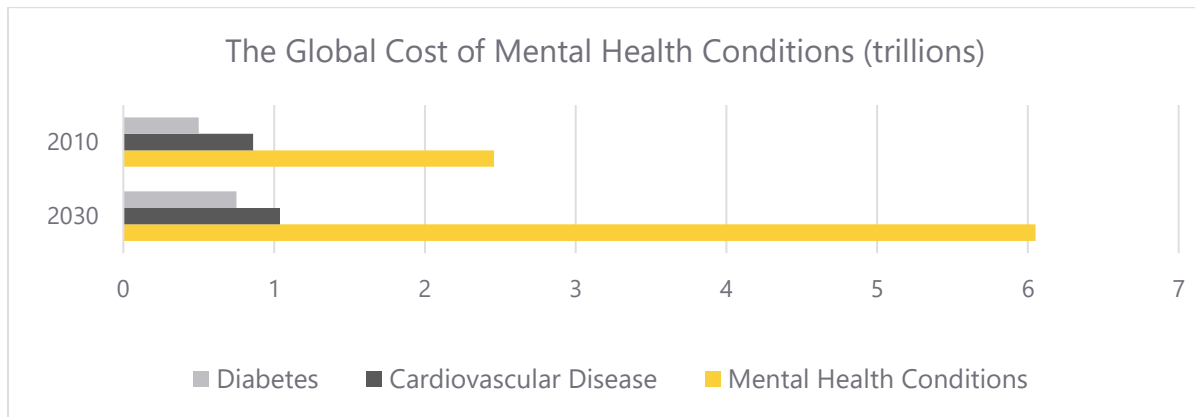


Garen Staglin  
Co-Founder, One Mind Institute  
Founder, One Mind Initiative at Work

## CURRENT LANDSCAPE: THE GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

The One Mind Initiative at Work is a private-sector response to the immense burden of mental illness around the world. This encompasses a wide range of conditions, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and schizophrenia.

Mental illness is a rapidly growing global crisis. Together, these diseases affect one-in-four people worldwide and cost the global economy roughly \$2.5 trillion in annual costs.<sup>1</sup> That’s roughly equivalent to the combined cost of cardiovascular disease and diabetes – doubled.<sup>2</sup> And these costs are projected to grow to \$6 trillion by 2030.<sup>3</sup>



Despite this staggering social and economic burden, mental health conditions remain largely under-recognized and under-treated. Stigma and discrimination prevent many from seeking help. Government responses are uneven, and often lack sufficient resources or sustained urgency.

As a result, affected individuals continue to suffer, productivity and healthcare costs mount, and economic growth remains constrained.

### ***Impact on Employees and Businesses***

Beyond the human toll, mental illness is disastrous for employers, national workforces, and the private sector. Overall, it’s projected that mental illness will contribute to \$16 trillion in lost output by 2030.<sup>4</sup>

1 Bloom et al. The Global Economic Burden of Non-communicable Diseases. World Economic Forum and Harvard School of Public Health. 2011. Available at:

[http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Harvard\\_HE\\_GlobalEconomicBurdenNonCommunicableDiseases\\_2011.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Harvard_HE_GlobalEconomicBurdenNonCommunicableDiseases_2011.pdf)

2 Bloom et al. The Global Economic Burden of Non-communicable Diseases.

3 Bloom et al. The Global Economic Burden of Non-communicable Diseases.

4 Bloom et al. The Global Economic Burden of Non-communicable Diseases.

For employers, these conditions:

- drain productivity,
- cause high levels of absenteeism,
- raise health and benefits spending,
- increase the risk and costs for other physical conditions, like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and stroke, and
- generate potential liability and discrimination concerns.

## CURRENT LANDSCAPE:

### THE POTENTIAL FOR EMPLOYER-BASED SOLUTIONS VERSUS THE IMPLEMENTATION GAP

Employers are primed to lead a global response to the mental health crisis. Businesses have strong economic incentives to address mental health, and the workplace is an ideal center for policies and resources to overcome stigma, promote awareness and diagnosis, and support effective care.

Critically, addressing mental health makes business sense – it has been projected that companies receive a return of as much as \$5 for every \$1 invested in mental health promotion.<sup>5</sup> Cost savings can include increased productivity, reduced medical and disability costs, and lower rates of turnover.

Recognizing this potential, multiple advocacy organizations, business groups, and academic institutions have developed and validated evidence-based workplace best practices for mental health. US leaders in the field include the American Psychiatric Association, the Kennedy Forum, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the National Business Group on Health, and the Northeast Business Group on Health. And across the globe, organizations like Arogya World, City Mental Health Alliance, Mental Health Canada, and the World Economic Forum are tackling this issue.



<sup>5</sup> Creating a mentally healthy workplace: Return on investment analysis. PwC, beyondblue, Australian Government National Mental Health Commission, and The Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance. 2014. Available at: [https://www.headsup.org.au/docs/default-source/resources/beyondblue\\_workplaceroi\\_finalreport\\_may-2014.pdf](https://www.headsup.org.au/docs/default-source/resources/beyondblue_workplaceroi_finalreport_may-2014.pdf)

***The Implementation Gap***

But despite the existence of proven programs and the best intentions among employers, business leaders generally agree that the private sector is not addressing this issue comprehensively. Adoption of best practices remains low, and businesses are often unsure where to start.

A variety of factors contribute to this implementation gap. It can be difficult to find mental health programs and chart a roadmap for implementation. Further, the savings from these practices are often buried in complicated benefits data, making it difficult to build consensus among C-Suite leaders. And external, systemic factors such as privacy concerns, network issues, and provider shortages also slow adoption.

The resulting implementation gap causes widespread – but often invisible – impacts: mental health efforts stall, long-standing stigma persists, employees struggle silently, and employers experience direct and indirect losses.

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## OUR WORK:

### INTERVIEWS WITH HR AND BENEFITS LEADERS AT MAJOR US EMPLOYERS

The goal of the One Mind Initiative at Work is to understand best practices in employer-based mental health, as well as the root causes of the implementation gap, and then bring employers together to drive progress in the area.

A nuanced understanding of the current mental health landscape is essential for this goal. Therefore, the Initiative's team spoke about mental health with HR and benefits leaders at thirteen major employers in the US, across a diverse range of industries, including financial services, manufacturing, healthcare, logistics, and retail. Those interviewed included industry leaders such as Cigna, The Dow Chemical Company, Levi's, Northwell Health, Silicon Valley Bank, Steelcase, and Sutter Health.

- **Average size:** 70,000 employees
  
- **Typical position within company:**
  - Chief Human Resources Officer
  - Senior Vice President of Benefits
  - Vice President of Human Resources
  - Director of Global Health
  
- **Industries:**
  - Consulting
  - Insurance
  - Financial services
  - Hospitals/healthcare
  - Logistics
  - Manufacturing
  - Retail

## OUR FINDINGS:

### KEY INSIGHTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH HR AND BENEFITS LEADERS

These conversations revealed a set of key themes – summarized below. These are the insights, concerns, and priorities that are shared across many or all of the interviewed employers.

#### **KEY INSIGHTS: Current Practices, Growing Interest**

HR and benefits leaders are working to develop, improve, and adopt effective mental health programs – recognizing this as a growing focus area for leading employers.

- **Employers see mental health as a growing concern for businesses and the HR and benefits field.** HR and benefits leaders perceive mental health programs as increasingly common among large, forward-looking employers. Many are aware that more sophisticated services and providers are becoming available in this area. In particular, some leaders indicate that mental health is an emerging focus area for the benefits field.
- **Employers have a range of policies to support mental health, including wellness, EAP, benefits, and surveys.** For all interviewed employers, the fundamental building blocks of mental health promotion include: wellness programs, to provide daily stress management tools; EAP, for short-term needs; medical benefits, for longer term care; and some degree of employee surveying related to mental health, well-being, and stress. The most robust offerings feature additional methods to ensure these core programs are utilized, as well as innovative models to address gaps.
- **Employers are interested in proven mental health best practices and resources.** HR and benefits leaders are searching for specific resources related to workplace mental health, such as proven best practices, evidence that links mental health to benefits spending, and pre-existing strategies and campaigns. Those interviewed are aware that these resources exist, and many had already searched for them through business groups, HR professional associations, or benefits consultants.
- **Employers want to collaborate with others to refine mental health responses.** HR and benefits leaders would like to participate in working groups and collaborations to address shared problems related to mental health. Common problems include stigma, provider shortages, low EAP utilization, and network issues. Multiple HR and benefits leaders are already raising these issues with coalitions of local employers and regional business groups.

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**KEY INSIGHTS: System Barriers, Emerging Solutions**

HR and benefits leaders are concerned about and proactively addressing barriers to effective mental health promotion, including stigma, network gaps, and provider shortages.

- **Employers view reducing stigma as a core priority.** A common frustration among HR and benefits leaders is that stigma prevents many or most employees from accessing available mental health benefits. This leads to low levels of EAP utilization and difficulty transferring care between providers. Several HR and benefits leaders say that a prepared and proven anti-stigma communications campaign would be a highly valued resource.
- **Employers want to assess mental health cost impacts, but have difficulty accessing and analyzing data.** HR and benefits leaders feel that they must deploy their limited resources to deliver evidence of benefits savings, but have difficulty analyzing the costs of mental health. Many professionals encounter barriers when they attempt to analyze these costs, which they feel are often indirect, buried in complex benefits data, and shielded by privacy laws. This lack of quantitative, company-specific evidence can limit employers' efforts in mental health.
- **Employers are attempting to smooth care transitions in their mental health services.** HR and benefits leaders say that employees often stop seeking mental health services when they encounter a care transition, such as initial EAP usage, moving from an on-site counselor to EAP, or from a counselor or EAP to longer-term care. Stigma, network access barriers, and a lack of coordination between providers compound this challenge. Some employers are addressing these gaps by exploring the potential role of a "care navigator" to help employees find and maintain care for mental health conditions.
- **Employers are concerned about systemic access barriers.** HR and benefits leaders are concerned that their company's mental health efforts are sometimes constrained by external, systemic access issues such as provider shortages. In response, some employers are encouraging service providers to coordinate services, reaching out directly to nearby mental health provider communities, and exploring collaborations with universities and healthcare systems.



## EMPLOYER EFFORTS:

### MENTAL HEALTH POLICIES, BEST PRACTICES, AND INNOVATIONS

The employer interviews also covered companies' policies, best practices, and innovations in mental health promotion. These are summarized in the below topline findings for those employers who agreed to identify their programs: Cigna, The Dow Chemical Company, Levi's, Northwell Health, Silicon Valley Bank, Steelcase, and Sutter Health. The mental health programs of employers that requested to remain anonymous are also summarized, without identifying the company.



#### ***Cigna***

- Developing universal quality measures for behavioral care
- Experimenting with new model that coordinates primary care physicians and psychiatric specialists to address provider shortages



#### ***The Dow Chemical Company***

- Applies a continuum approach to mental health, including: stress reduction programs, resiliency training, care interventions, and case management
- Built a workplace and management culture that encourages EAP usage
- Launching a program to train service providers to recognize mental illness



**Levi's**

- Leading global rollout of integrated EAP and wellness programs
- Built the business case for mental health programs with hard data
- Addressing network barriers by pushing PPA to broaden networks, encouraging providers to coordinate, and considering coverage for out-of-network care and telemedicine



**Northwell Health**

- Provides multiple well-being, mental health education, and stress relief programs for employees
- Creating an interactive app to help employees identify and address possible mental health needs
- Planning to expand case management for costly, chronic conditions to include mental illness



**Silicon Valley Bank**

- Offers award-winning benefits package that includes robust mental health services
- Provides EAP services that complement general benefits package



**Steelcase**

- Creates workspaces that boost employee engagement and support well-being
- Shapes culture and leadership development to foster mental health promotion
- Created "wellness hubs" and "wellness navigators" to drive EAP usage
- Exploring collaboration with other employers, academics, and physicians to address a regional shortage of mental healthcare providers

***Sutter Health***

- Created a long-term strategic commitment to address the mental health and psychological health and safety for all who work and practice within the Sutter Health network
- Built a systemwide Workplace Mental Health Advisory Council and hired a subject matter expert as staff lead, focusing on supporting the organization's strategic commitment to addressing workplace mental health. The work includes:
  - Developing, testing, and implementing leading-edge and best practice resources and trainings for all who work within Sutter Health. Then making these programs available to other employers, at no cost
  - Creating comprehensive and integrated toolkits for use at Sutter and by other employers, with best practices in workplace mental health, psychological health and safety in the workplace, contact education for social prejudice reduction, and suicide prevention
  - Nurturing a culture of continuous change and improvement at Sutter
- Provides employee wellness programs, EAP-led manager trainings, and other services to connect employees to EAP for counseling and mental health benefits
- Performs analyses of self-insured claims data to more deeply understand the broad impact of mental health on employees and identify ways to improve access to care and services

***Other Employers***

- Leverages internal employee resources groups
- Organizing external business community to increase awareness and share solutions
- Selected leading-edge wellness program provider
- Implemented measures to address substance abuse and ensure workplace safety
- Incorporates employee sentiment surveys and resiliency techniques into talent management and productivity programs
- Launched pilots to better understand employee stress and possible wellness tools
- Includes stress reduction techniques and training in wellness programs
- Considering integrating mental health and physical health under same provider
- Includes stress reduction training in wellness programs
- Working with regional coalition of employers to improve mental health benefits

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## CHARTER TO TRANSFORM MENTAL HEALTH:

### A PRIVATE SECTOR RESPONSE TO THE GROWING IMPACT OF MENTAL ILLNESS AT WORK

After reviewing the key themes and best practices from the interviews, we combined these insights with existing research in the field to develop the Pillars for a Workplace Mental Health Gold Standard.

This Gold Standard builds on research from organizations like the American Psychiatric Association, the Kennedy Forum, NAMI, and national and regional business groups on health. It also includes input from our global network, especially our partners in Europe, Asia, and Canada.

We see these 8 pillars as a framework for employers who want to design and deploy effective mental health policies:

- 1. Long-Term Commitment.** We will engage in values-driven organizational change toward mental health promotion, and mental illness and suicide prevention – with a commitment to continuous improvement.
- 2. Promote Mental Health.** We will support employee mental health and wellbeing through comprehensive policies, education, and resources, similar to physical health promotion efforts.
- 3. Eliminate Stigma, Social Prejudice, and Discrimination.** We will engage in shifting attitudes and changing behaviors through comprehensive efforts including contact education and policy review.
- 4. Adopt a Proactive Prevention Approach.** We will actively work to prevent harm to worker psychological health in a continuous improvement process that seeks to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors in how work is organized and how people are managed.
- 5. Provide a Coordinated Response.** We will play a vital role in creating improved access to seamless connections to mental health treatment, services, resources, and support.
- 6. Early and Effective Workplace Interventions.** We will ensure that performance, absence, and disability management systems intervene early and effectively through supportive conversations that engage the employee in collaborative solutions.
- 7. Explore Innovation, including Technology.** We will employ innovative practices, approaches, and concepts, including new technologies.
- 8. Continuous Evaluation.** We will measure all efforts to ensure quality, outcomes, accountability, and to contribute to the growing body of knowledge about workplace mental health as a field of study.

**ABOUT ONE MIND INSTITUTE**

One Mind Institute is a nonprofit organization committed to improving lives globally by raising awareness, supporting innovative services, and funding open science to find preventions and cures for all brain illnesses. Contributions to One Mind Institute and its affiliate, One Mind, have resulted in over \$280 million for research, changed thousands of lives, and funded stunning discoveries for better therapies now and tomorrow. <https://www.onemindinstitute.org/> and [www.onemind.org](http://www.onemind.org)

**Contact**

Garen Staglin  
PO Box 680 Rutherford, CA 94573  
1570 Bella Oaks Lane Rutherford, CA 94573  
707.963.1749  
Garen.Staglin@onemind.org  
[www.onemindinitiative.org](http://www.onemindinitiative.org)

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