



Workplace changes and their impact on behavioral health.

**THIS IS
HOW™**

As employees continue facing mental health challenges brought on by a shifting workplace landscape, employers need to think big and small when it comes to creating solutions that can help their workforce get the support they need.

9 IN 10

**employees report
that their workplace
stress affects their
mental health.¹**

Implementing new strategies to help improve the full health of your employees.

The COVID-19 pandemic, now in its second year, has redefined “workday” for millions of Americans. Many employers have switched to remote offices to protect their workforce’s physical health and have implemented new policies to safeguard those whose jobs cannot be performed remotely. Even before the pandemic, four in 10 employees stated that they struggle to navigate the demands that come with today’s more flexible, “always on,” work-life world.² Now, it’s no surprise that the new normal is leading to increased behavioral health challenges for employees. Longer workdays, blurring of boundaries between work and personal life, greater caregiving responsibilities, fear of job loss and social isolation are contributing to a mental health crisis that was on the rise even before the pandemic. Add to that the stress over safety for those who are physically at work or transitioning back. All of this leads to the rise of one particularly worrisome mental health challenge—burnout.

However, there is some good news. Although changes in the workplace during the pandemic have caused new challenges, they’ve also created opportunities. The door has been opened to more dialogue around behavioral health and highlighted the value—for employees and businesses—of a more flexible, supportive workplace. So, what can you do to best support the health of your employees? We’ll recommend actions you can take—in the short- and long-term—to build a new workplace culture of full health.

Big changes lead to bigger challenges—burnout.

Burnout is defined as chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.³ It's no surprise that the workplace changes previously mentioned can lead to burnout. What may surprise you is how prevalent the problem has become. A full 75 percent of employees said they have experienced burnout at work, with 40 percent saying they've experienced burnout specifically during the pandemic.⁴

4 IN 5 EMPLOYEES FEEL EMOTIONALLY DRAINED FROM THEIR WORK, AN EARLY SIGN OF BURNOUT.⁵

There are six main reasons burnout happens: unsustainable workload, perceived lack of control, insufficient rewards for effort, lack of a supportive community, lack of fairness, and mismatched values and skills.⁶ When it comes to your company, burnout can have a major impact on productivity if not managed successfully.

Added burden: Burnout hitting caregivers hard.

Since the pandemic, unpaid caregivers continue to be hit hard by behavioral health challenges, on a massive scale.

- 57% of caregivers report experiencing clinically significant levels of stress, anxiety or depression.⁷
- 2/3 of caregivers are reporting at least one adverse mental or behavioral health symptom.⁸
- 1 in 4 unpaid caregivers are feeling more stress trying to balance work and family due to COVID-19.⁹

Think organizationally.

While self-care is important, the real opportunity to address burnout is at the organization level, implementing changes to the way your organization works, rewards, and interacts with one another to foster a true culture of health. For a few do's and don'ts on battling burnout, see our [latest infographic](#).

And this goes beyond burnout. Addressing the various behavioral health challenges your workforce is facing requires fresh thinking and a top-down effort aimed at both long- and short-term strategies.

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

Reward hard work, not overwork.

Now is the time to begin changing not just the workplace, but work culture as well. An 80-hour workweek isn't a badge of honor, it's a recipe for burnout—which will undoubtedly lower work quality. Making sure your employees have manageable workloads starts by clearly defining priorities.¹⁰ When employees better understand what's expected of them, they're better able to manage work-life integration. According to Dr. James Polo, executive medical director at Regence BlueCross BlueShield

of Oregon, "Most companies have a mission. And, if our most valuable asset is our people, then taking care of our people allows them to take care of the mission."

Train empathetic leaders.

Improving workforce health may require employers to change how they manage people. Three in five employees are not receiving adequate support from supervisors to help manage stress.¹¹ It's essential that leaders and managers learn how to listen and respond effectively—and share their own behavioral health struggles so employees feel they're not alone.

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES

Educate your workforce.

There are many things you can begin to shift right now. Don't assume everyone understands burnout and its repercussions. Educate managers about how to spot and mitigate it. Drive employee awareness through educational campaigns, safe-space discussions and a mental health resource page. Unbundle your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) resources to help make them easier to find.

Offer more flexibility and support.

Start looking for immediate ways to help your workforce navigate workplace stress and to support their mental well-being. Consider increasing PTO, accommodating different remote-work arrangements, encouraging employees to take time off and implementing flexible schedules—even PTO days for mental health.^{12,13}

Care for the caregivers.

More than half of unpaid caregivers don't self-identify, which prevents them from seeking support while amplifying stress and isolation.¹⁴ By talking about and celebrating caregivers, employers can help employees take the first step toward recognizing their status as unpaid caregivers. These actions can help normalize caregiving, and reduce the stigma associated with it.

For more resources, visit smarterbetterhealthcare.com.

1, 5, 11 Taylor Adams, Madeline Reinert, Danielle Fritze, and Theresa Nguyen, *Mind the Workplace 2021*, Mental Health America, 2021.

2 MetLife, *Navigating Together: Supporting Employee Well-Being in Uncertain Times, MetLife's 18th Annual US Employee Benefit Trends Study 2020*.

3 World Health Organization, "Burn-out an 'Occupational Phenomenon': International Classification of Diseases," May 28, 2019.

4, 13 Brie Weiler Reynolds, "FlexJobs, Mental Health America Survey: Mental Health in the Workplace," FlexJobs Blog, Aug. 21, 2020.

6, 10, 12 Jennifer Moss, "Beyond Burned Out," *Harvard Business Review*, Feb. 10, 2021.

7 2020 ARCHANGELS National Caregiver Survey.

8 M. E. Czeisler, R. I. Lane, E. Petrosky, et al., "Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic—United States, June 24–30, 2020," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, CDC, vol. 69, no. 32, Aug. 14, 2020, pp. 1049–1057.

9 BCBSA COVID-19 National Pulse Survey, May 2020.

14 ARCHANGELS Caregiver Intensity Index Research 2019.