

ChatGPT's Top 5 Trends Impacting Employee Benefits: **Mental Health** (Part 1 of 5)



We asked ChatGPT to identify five important trends that will impact employee benefits in the United States over the next ten years, and the results reflected many of the strategies that clients discuss with us daily. In this five-part series, we will discuss each of these trends and how our consulting teams work with HR leaders and executives to address each of them.

The first trend is a greater focus on employee mental health. Mental health includes social, emotional, and psychological well-being, and it affects how we act, feel, think, and handle stress.

According to *IMA Whole Health*, an estimated **43.8 million American adults** experience a mental illness a given year.

This means that one in five American workers are affected, and less than half of those with a mental illness receive treatment. According to IMA People Analytics, the **True Cost of Mental Health** goes beyond just medical costs but includes additional costs related to underdiagnosis, comorbidities with physical illnesses, and absenteeism and presenteeism.

These statistics, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic shining a spotlight on the prevalence of depression and anxiety due to the significant disruption to the social and financial lives of many, have caused mental health and mental well-being to become topics of increased focus and awareness. The greater focus on employee mental health is leading many employers to expand their mental health benefits to include counseling, therapy, and other services to meet the evolving needs of their workers.

Every organization is different and has its own issues that may contribute to poor mental health in the workplace. The IMA Whole Health strategy was created to help employers develop mental health strategies, benefits, and education custom-tailored to their organization.

The Whole Health Strategy starts with the IMA Mental Health Toolkit – outlining a spectrum of solutions for employers to create a supportive and inclusive work environment where employees feel safe, supported, and understood.



Here are the eight key elements of the toolkit:

BUILD A SUPPORTIVE CULTURE

“Culture” is shared values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that characterize members of an organization and define its nature. Company culture is an essential component in any business’s ultimate success or failure. The first step to creating a mental health-friendly workplace is building a culture supporting mental well-being.

EVALUATE YOUR BENEFITS OFFERINGS

Before considering new initiatives to support mental well-being at your organization, you should look at the benefits you currently offer to ensure they support mental health. From there, your company can implement simple perks, such as financial planning assistance (financial stress often contributes to poor mental health) and employee discount programs where employees can receive gym memberships, stress-reducing massages, or acupuncture at a lower cost.

In addition, evaluate your benefits plans to ensure adequate access to mental health care. In a **2019 study from Milliman**, mental health care is accessed out-of-network at a rate four to five times higher than physical care, putting a financial burden and deterrent to accessing care. Covering all mental health care at in-network cost-sharing rates, and incentivizing easy-to-access telehealth with low or no copayments can help reduce the burdens of receiving care.

REMOVE STIGMA

Stigmas come from misguided views that individuals with mental health issues are “different” from everyone else, which may lead to caution, fear, and discrimination. To combat mental health stigmas in your company, make mental well-being a priority by checking in with employees, incorporating mental health days into PTO benefits, and communicating the importance of mental well-being.

TACKLE WORKPLACE STRESS

Work-related stress is more strongly associated with illness and health complications than financial or familial stress. Common job stressors include a heavy workload, intense pressure to perform at high levels, job insecurity, long work hours, excessive travel, office politics, and conflicts with co-workers. While it may not be possible to eliminate job stress entirely for your employees, you can help manage work-related stress by ensuring appropriate workloads, regularly meeting with employees, celebrating team successes, and not tolerating bullying or discrimination.

MINIMIZE EMPLOYEE BURNOUT

For some employees, the negative effects of burnout extend beyond their work life and into their home and social lives. Moreover, burnout can increase an employee’s risk of getting sick or developing a chronic condition. Since burnout results from prolonged and chronic workplace stress, employers must learn to recognize the signs of stress and develop mitigation strategies before stress turns into burnout.



ADDRESS WORKPLACE FATIGUE

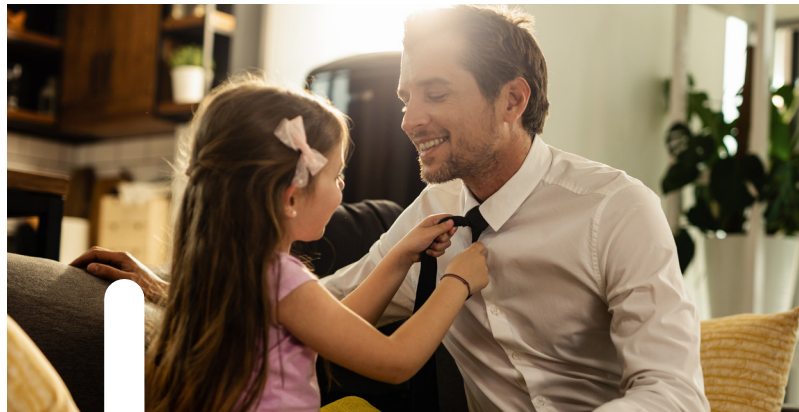
Workers who are fatigued in the workplace are less productive, less focused, experience more health problems, and are more likely to be involved in a job-related safety incident. In addition, fatigue causes more absences from work, both from tiredness and accompanying medical problems. You can help alleviate the mental health ramifications that result from fatigue by training management to watch for weary or sleepy employees. Other noticeable signs of fatigue include irritability, reduced concentration, and lack of motivation.

PREVENT WORKPLACE BULLYING

Workplace bullying can take many forms. Bullying is typically described as negative behavior targeted at specific individuals or related to certain work activities persistently over time. Bullying can cause psychological health problems, such as depression, and physical health problems, such as sleep difficulties or stomach pains. In general, targets of bullying feel a sense of isolation. In some cases, workplace bullying can leave the victim so traumatized that they feel powerless, disoriented, confused, and helpless.

PROVIDE CAREGIVING BENEFITS TO CAREGIVERS AND WORKING PARENTS

It's common for employees to be "closet caregivers" who don't let on that they're working parents or provide care for a loved one who is ill or has a disability because they fear their boss or organization will think they're not committed to their job. This stressor, along with the stressors associated with caring for an ill, elderly, or disabled loved one, can lead to detrimental health effects on employees. Implementing caregiving benefits can help you establish a culture that **supports working parents** and caregivers and provides employees with the tools they need to effectively manage their dual responsibilities.



The IMA Mental Health Toolkit helps businesses understand the considerations needed to create holistic well-being in their organization. By applying the IMA Whole Health principles, your team can create a mental health-friendly workplace where employees feel resilient, happy, and balanced.

WRITTEN BY:



ADAM MORET

Whole Health Practice Lead
adam.moret@imacorp.com



JORDAN PAULUS

VP, Director, People Analytics
jordan.paulus@imacorp.com