

Lyra

2024

State of Workforce Mental Health Report

“Employers have made great progress in curbing stigma around depression, anxiety, and stress. Severe conditions, however, are still heavily stigmatized and can be hiding in plain sight.”

*-Dr. Joe Grasso, PhD, vice president, Workforce Transformation
Lyra Health*

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One Sunday afternoon, a construction worker named John was spending time at home with his children when he realized he couldn't breathe. "It felt like someone was sitting on my chest," he recalled. "I looked over at my wife; I was panting. I couldn't catch my breath and I finally got out, 'I'm having an anxiety attack.' It was one of the worst things I ever went through."

In the construction industry, John said, you learn that you're not supposed to show emotions at work, except for maybe anger. "It can be extremely stressful, and I think really, it impacts your mental health," he said.

John's story is not unique. In 2023, the vast majority of workers across industries (87%) experienced at least one mental health issue, and most employees in the United States (65%) tell us their mental health interfered with their ability to work. The most common mental health conditions—depression and anxiety—continue to affect huge swaths of the workforce. And while fewer employees this year cited issues like stress and burnout among their top mental health challenges, more workers are experiencing severe, complex issues such as eating-related problems, substance use disorders, and suicidal ideation.

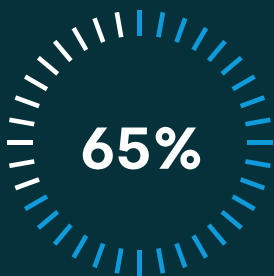
"The epidemiological data after large events like a global pandemic show that the true impact in terms of serious mental health issues is not during but usually a couple of years after, when we start to see people really experience a significant mental health impact," said Alethea Varra, PhD, senior vice president of clinical care at Lyra Health.



Nearly four years after COVID-19, employees are left to navigate the collective trauma from the pandemic while still coping with work and personal lives that have been forever changed. The sheer volume of stressors on the typical worker—salaries outpaced by inflation, mass layoffs, and a feeling of helplessness amid international wars and climate-related disasters—makes it tough, if not impossible, to manage them without support.

Meanwhile, employees' expectations of employer-provided mental health support continue to rise year over year, alongside growing distrust of large corporations and demands for better working conditions, especially among younger workers.

We established the State of Workforce Mental Health Report four years ago to gain a better understanding of the real well-being challenges faced by organizations, business leaders, and workers. We want to highlight the tools and opportunities today's leaders have to make positive change.



of U.S. workers said their mental health challenges interfered with their ability to work.

Our survey responses from HR and employee benefits leaders show that most organizations strive to provide workers with the appropriate mental health resources. For example, John's employer, JE Dunn, offers comprehensive mental health benefits to its employees. The benefits fully cover his visits with a therapist who helps him manage the anxiety and depression that led to his panic attack.

This year's research findings also suggest that companies' workforce mental health strategies do not necessarily address the full spectrum of needs. And the data indicate that some well-intended employers are relying on outdated tools that fall short of creating the cultural change needed to prevent work-related mental health problems.

Organizations must confront these issues head-on and shift their focus from individual workers with mental illness to a holistic approach that includes both access to effective care and the intentional and strategic building of healthy companies and cultures. We'll suggest ways employers can do this in the second half of this report.

For the fourth consecutive year, we talked to 250 HR and benefits leaders with global workforces and over 3,400 employees around the world from multiple industries to better understand their experiences, views, and plans regarding mental health in the workplace. For the first time, we expanded our research's scope to include hundreds of employees in countries around the world for a clearer glimpse into workforce mental health across the globe.

We do this research because we believe that mental well-being is the single biggest catalyst to individual, team, and organizational success. And for every company that adopts a wellness-first approach, there are hundreds, thousands, or even millions of people who gain access to life-changing mental health care.

In this report, we will explore the key research findings and our interpretation of how they intersect with workforce mental health today. We will also offer actionable ways for employers to address these realities, with insights from mental health clinicians and advocates, labor experts, HR leaders, and members of Lyra's Workforce Transformation team.



Key learnings for 2024

- 1** People are facing a post-pandemic surge in serious and complex mental health conditions
- 2** Work is a top social determinant of mental health
- 3** Over half of U.S. workers are supporting a child with mental health challenges
- 4** Access to care is improving, but finding effective care is still challenging
- 5** Employers and employees have divergent perspectives on workforce mental health needs
- 6** Managers feel the pressure of supporting team mental health

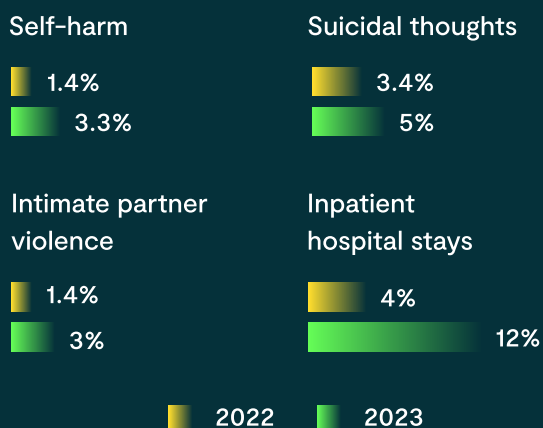
1

People are facing a post-pandemic surge in serious and complex mental health conditions

Four years after the pandemic began, people worldwide are feeling the effects of collective trauma and grief. The immediate impact is typically mild-to-moderate mental health challenges. But we're seeing the fallout of the pandemic now in the form of more severe mental health issues.

A growing number of employees told us they're struggling with serious conditions such as severe or chronic depression and/or anxiety.

Serious mental health issues are on the rise



U.S. workers this year were less likely to cite common mental health issues like stress (40% said this was a top challenge, down from 51% the previous year) and burnout (20% said this was a top challenge, down from 30% the year before) compared to the past several years. Meanwhile, a growing number of employees told us they're struggling with serious conditions such as severe or chronic depression and/or anxiety (11%, compared to 10% in 2022 and 6% in 2021), substance use disorders (5%, compared to 3% in 2022 and 2% in 2021), self-harm (3%, up from 1% in 2022 and 2021), and suicidal thoughts (5%, up from 3% in 2022 and 1% in 2021).

These findings align with a [new report](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showing rates of suicide in the U.S. at record highs not seen since the 1940s. This is also consistent with historical evidence showing how the aftereffects of global traumatic events can take months or years to fully manifest. “From a chronological perspective, we’re in the window where we should start to see that happening,” said Varra.

“

It goes from being ‘I’m burned out and stressed’ to ‘I’m really worried about my family and I’m worried about myself. And I may be coping with that in ways that are not helpful, like drinking more, or using substances, or feeling more hopeless about my future.’”

—Alethea Varra, PhD, senior vice president of clinical care at Lyra Health

The longer-term effects are now clearer, including delayed trauma, unhealthy coping mechanisms developed during the crisis, and issues related to a lack of mental health care both during and post-pandemic. This may be why we are seeing a rise in severe mental health issues in a smaller subset of the population. To support these employees, leaders will be on the front lines to notice and respond to signs of distress. That includes reaching employees with complex mental health diagnoses including substance use disorders, chronic depression and/or anxiety, suicidal ideation, or self-harm.


1 in 4

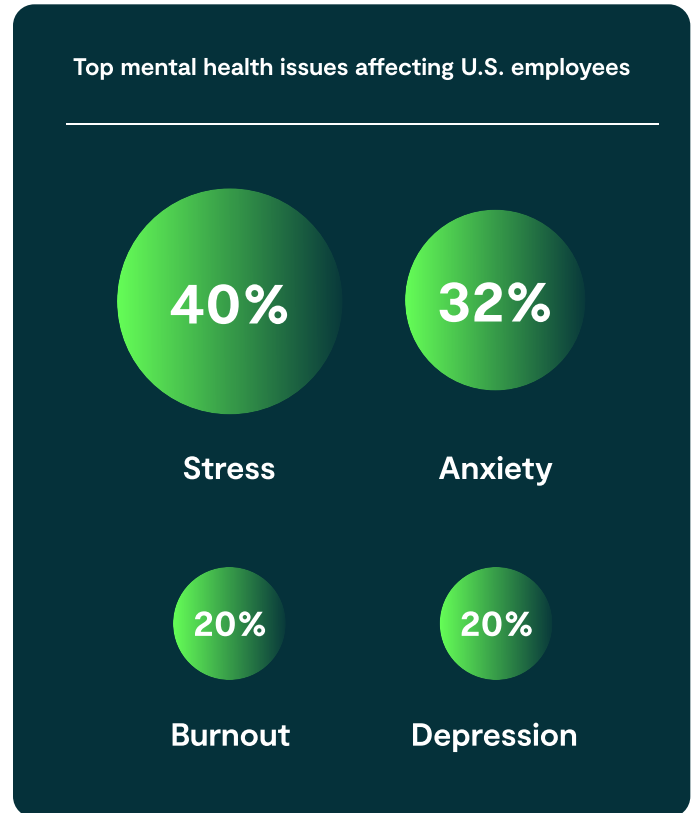
U.S. employees (26%) said their mental health declined in 2023, while just over half (52%) said it remained unchanged.

“It’s not surprising that, in the current environment, stress and burnout might start to get replaced by concerns that feel more acute,” Varra said.

Many employers may only see these issues happening indirectly. But effective response requires organizations to take action to reach these employees before a crisis point.

Employees need support for issues like suicidal ideation and self-harm not only to thrive but simply to survive. “We need educational campaigns that promote the idea that these severe crisis moments can occur,” said Joe Grasso, PhD, senior director of Lyra’s Workforce Transformation team. “It’s time to say these words out loud in the workplace—it’s time to talk about them.”

Although current programs are yielding some results, a more proactive approach (with suggestions on implementation in the second part of our report) will mean organizations can help address employees’ risk of severe mental health conditions.



The anxiety and depression caused by the pandemic have not eased. We’re not far enough past COVID to lose sight of how bad it has been for all of us. Sure, the virus part is subdued; but the mental health part is still extremely prevalent.

—Sean Egan, deputy director of Michigan’s Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity

2

Work is a top social determinant of mental health

People don't leave their mental health issues at the door when they come to work, and the ways we work can have a major impact on our mental health. In 2023, 65% of U.S. workers reported that their mental health affected their ability to do their jobs, up from 60% in 2022. And the number of employees reporting a severe impact nearly doubled, from 4% in 2022 to 7% in 2023.

Our research also found that “work-related stress and burnout” is the second-biggest factor contributing to employees' mental health concerns—28% of workers listed it as a top concern over the past year, second only to financial stress, which was cited by 33% of employees.

Employees said their mental health challenges make them feel less focused (46%), less engaged (42%), and less productive (36%) at work. And 1 in 5 say they're considering leaving their company due to their mental health's impact on their ability to do their job.

“The main work factors that employees said are affecting their mental health are things like perceived lack of appreciation and fair and equitable treatment,” said Grasso. “The perception that those things aren't there is only heightened when your employer is saying, ‘We're willing for you to leave if you don't like the way we're running the company.’”



90% of HR and benefits leaders want their mental health benefits to address the way work negatively affects well-being.

Employers have both a direct opportunity and responsibility to proactively make changes that improve workforce mental health. Worldwide, many employers are following directives from the World Health Organization (WHO), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and other organizations to implement mental health initiatives that tackle common psychosocial risk factors. These risk factors include heavy workloads, low job control, exposure to workplace trauma or violence, bullying or harassment, and lack of managerial support.

“There is a kind of paradigm shift,” said Grasso, adding that an increasing number of companies realize “this should be the norm. There is an international standard now—and global employers should be looking at how they can align with it.”

In India, for example, 70% of employees in our survey said their company has prioritized creating a mentally healthy work culture over the past year. Respondents in Brazil (60%) and the UK (53%) shared a similar sentiment.

Up or down?

A look at workforce mental health around the world

We asked workers whether their mental health improved, stayed the same, or declined in 2023 compared to the year before.



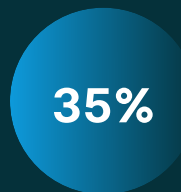
Greatest improvement in mental health from the previous year



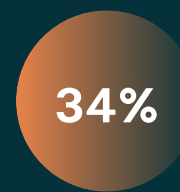
India



Steepest decline in mental health from the previous year



UK



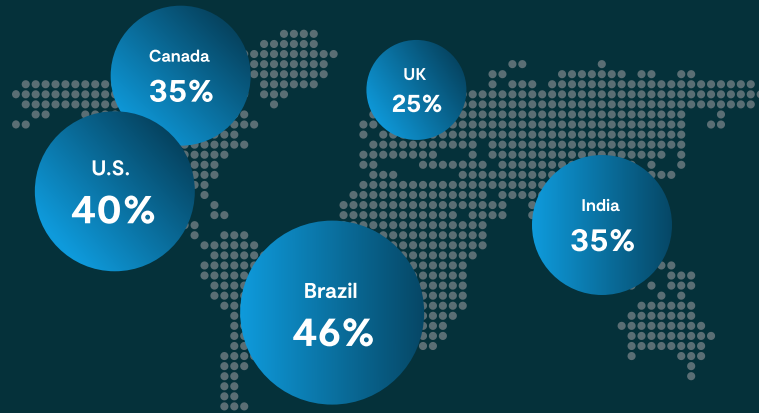
Canada

Who's got stress?

Mental health has no borders



Workers who say "Stress is my top mental health concern"

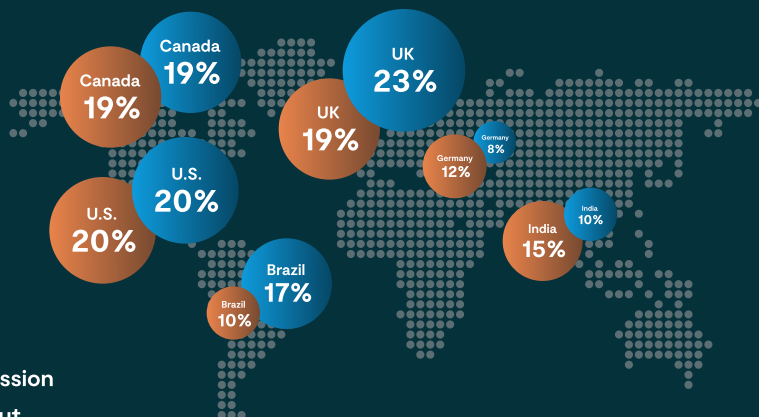


Key differences in burnout and depression



Percent of respondents reporting issues of burnout and depression

- Depression
- Burnout

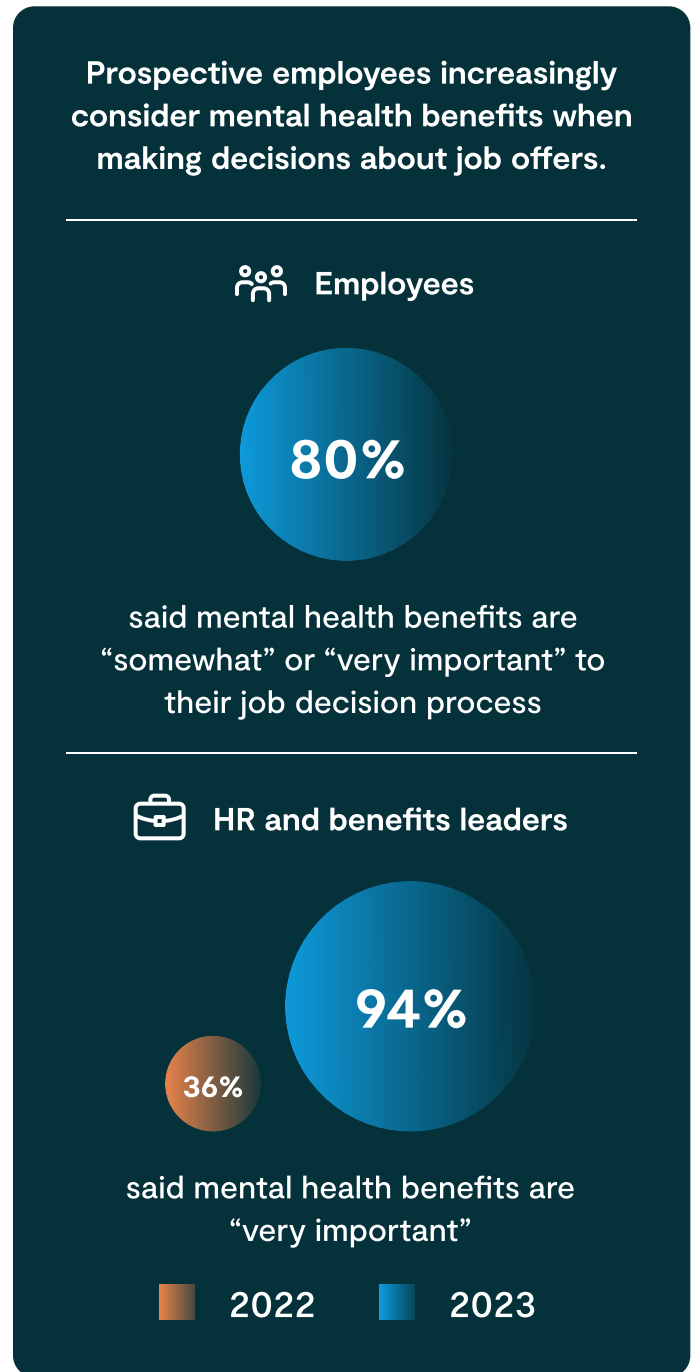


To address the impacts of poor mental health on worker well-being and job effectiveness, an overwhelming majority of benefits and HR leaders surveyed (90%) want their mental health benefits to include additional employer-sponsored support that addresses the underlying ways the work environment itself can negatively impact well-being.

The potential payoff for these measures is tremendous. Employees who feel heard are more likely to be satisfied with their job, more productive, and loyal to an employer. At the same time, organizations see tangible business benefits through higher talent recruitment and retention, according to Gallup.



Emphasis on work design is one way to achieve this; other strategies, which we'll review in the second part of this report, include ensuring a fair workload for employees while stressing the importance of autonomy, recognition, and role clarity to managers.



3

Over half of U.S. workers are supporting a child with mental health challenges

Over the past year, 55% of U.S. employees surveyed said they “supported a child in [their] care under 18 who struggled with their mental health.” This is more than double the percentage of workers who said the same the year prior (19%). This shift underscores the weight of the children’s mental health crisis on working parents and the need for employers to rethink their approach to supporting them.

“As a parent, the list of things today just goes on and on—school shootings, sheltering in place, on top of the stuff that normally affects kids, like whether they’re going to eat or not, or whether they’re being bullied,” said Stephanie Mitchell Hughes, assistant director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in Franklin County, Ohio. “If you have resources, you can get greater access to [support], which is limited. And that’s definitely true in the area of mental health, where there’s a dearth of providers out there. Employers need to prioritize this.”

While 1 in 4 U.S. workers reported a decline in their mental health in the past year, that number jumped to 1 in 3 for those with children facing mental health issues. Moreover, 1 in 3 employees in this group said their mental health issues had a “significant” or “severe” impact on their ability to do their jobs over the past year—over twice as many as workers not supporting a child with a mental health condition.



“My job allows the flexibility I need to care for my child’s mental health issues.”

85%

HR and benefits leaders

63%

Employees

Our research also shows that worker confidence in employer-provided resources for their kids’ mental health is lagging behind companies’ investments in this area. While 85% of HR and benefits leaders reported that their organization’s mental health benefits would help any employee’s child with a mental health condition, just 57% of U.S. workers agreed. While employers have made huge strides in discussing workforce mental health, these differences shine a light on the need to tackle the persistent stigma around child and family mental health challenges.

For HR and benefits teams, the clear first step is ensuring that your current benefits program includes access to comprehensive mental health care for kids. But outreach is vitally important, too: Adding support such as employee resource groups (ERGs) for parents of children with mental health needs, community programs and coaching specifically designed for parents, and flexible work hours are all meaningful ways to improve working parents’ mental health while reducing the impact of employee mental health issues on business.



“There’s no question that dealing with their child’s mental health condition is creating stress for the employee. And that’s coming into the workplace.”

—Sean Egan, deputy director of Michigan’s Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity

Access to care is improving, but finding effective care is still challenging

In the U.S., just over 40% of workers surveyed received mental health care in 2023, a 24% hike from 2022. Still, many people with acute mental health needs are struggling to find appropriate support. Fewer than half of those who got care (49%) stayed with the same provider, and 12% switched three or more times. Each time an employee changes providers through their health insurance, it adds to health care costs for employers. Most importantly, it often results in delays in recovery.

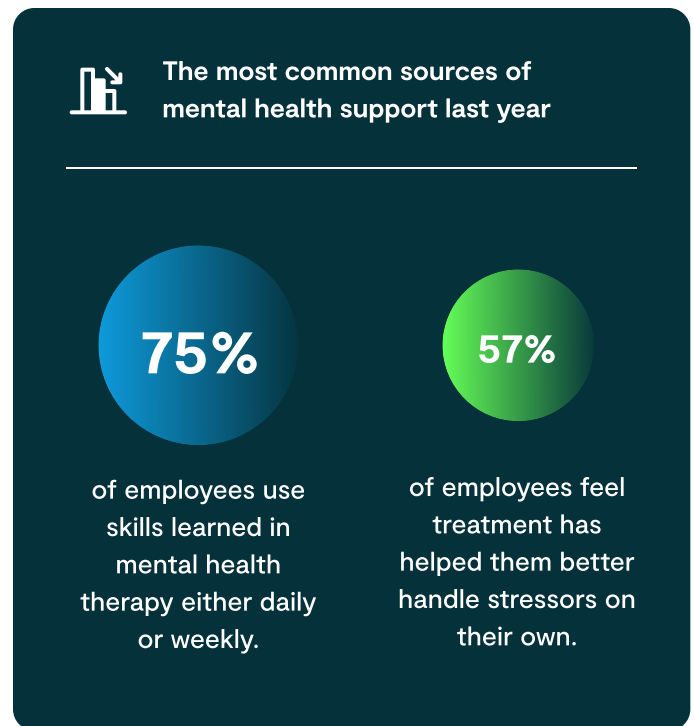
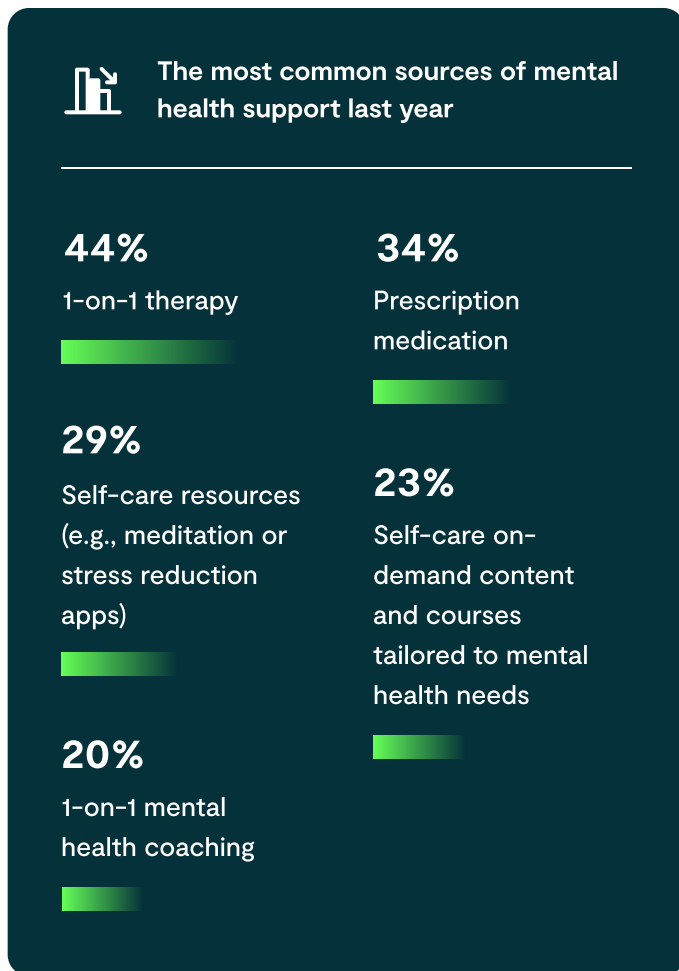
A mental health provider may be a mismatch due to their specializations, training, therapeutic style, or understanding of the client's cultural identity, among other reasons. "Most people don't know that much about therapy or therapists. And so when they come into care, it's like, how do you choose? It can feel like you're just picking someone at random versus if you have some reassurance that a provider has been chosen specifically for you," said Varra.



73%
of U.S. workers said they'd like
help from a trusted resource
to identify the right mental
health provider.

Our findings show that workers need help connecting with the appropriate care, with 73% saying they'd like help from a trusted resource to identify the right mental health provider. Employers can start by providing an effective search platform and network, with

information on qualifications to look for, such as education and certifications, as well as providers' demographics, such as racial or gender identity. Our survey found that 63% of people prefer a provider who shares similar characteristics.



Employers and employees have divergent perspectives on workforce mental health needs

In 2024, employers are increasingly pledging support for workers' mental health. But more than half of U.S. employees (55%) said they're unsure or disagree that their company's leadership team understands their mental health needs—a sentiment consistent with our previous years' research.



Whose responsibility is it?

83%

of HR and benefits leaders said it's the company's responsibility to create work conditions that prevent employees from developing work-related mental health problems.

41%

of employees were unsure or did not believe their employer cared about their mental well-being.

A gap also exists between employees and benefits and HR leaders around the perception of prioritizing mental health. While 84% of HR and benefits leaders told us that creating a mentally healthy work culture had become a higher priority for their company over the past year, only 47% of employees believed this to be true. Similarly, 95% of HR and benefits leaders said mental health support for individual employees had become a higher priority, while only 46% of employees believed that to be true.

The good news is that most workers globally believe their employer cares about their mental health. Forty-two percent of employees said that their company's commitment to mental health and well-being had positively affected both engagement and productivity. At the same time, people understand that their workplace experience is a significant contributor to their personal mental health.

Over half of workers (64%) agreed that, if their employer took actions to improve the work conditions that negatively impacted their mental health, it would boost their job satisfaction. People and teams want preventive solutions to burnout and workplace stress through job stability, recognition/reward, and flexibility, but not every employer is meeting those needs.



“Contributing to this sense of disconnect,” said Grasso, “may be a growing distrust in employers and corporations, which coincides with a rise in attitudes that are more pro-union and more critical of capitalism, especially among younger generations.”

These findings signal an important opportunity for employers to reframe their approach to mental health benefits. Many

organizations assume they know what employees want and need, leading to a disconnect between leaders’ and workers’ perceptions. Instead, benefits teams should consult with workers at every level of the organization throughout the year to ensure the company is providing the right support. They can then focus efforts on organizational structural supports instead of individual benefits.

“

Today you see a lot of conversations about not being able to trust that your company cares about you, so you shouldn’t care about them or go above and beyond. That’s something that organizations should pay attention to. This sentiment is out there and has been growing.”

—Alethea Varra, PhD, senior vice president of clinical care at Lyra

Managers feel the pressure of supporting team mental health

It's a popular belief that people quit bosses, not jobs. In reality, good managers create positive work environments for their teams, and 66% of U.S. supervisors surveyed acknowledged that factors like role clarity and peer recognition can positively affect team members' performance. But many managers lack the resources needed to create healthy working conditions.

"Managers are caught between their teams demanding a more transformational leadership style that prevents burnout and promotes meaning at work, and a lack of training and workplace resources to help them follow through," said Grasso.

Grasso said many managers aren't trained in work design, a human-centric approach that can help prevent burnout and workplace distress. Without resources to create a process for project prioritization, for example, or guidance on how to set workload standards, managers and their teams end up

feeling like they have to meet multiple business demands without having clarity on how.



Managers are under pressure

84%

of benefits and HR leaders said their managers have the autonomy they need to make changes to support their employees.

52%

of managers said they have the autonomy they need to make changes to support their employees.

“Managers who practice key skills, such as managing workload capacity, fostering career growth, and providing greater job control, can improve well-being, job effectiveness, and engagement across the team,” said Grasso. “These are all learnable skills, but first managers need to be motivated. That often starts with seeing that work design is prioritized by the leadership team and valued by the organization.”



of managers said their mental health had a significant or severe impact on their ability to do their job in 2023, up from 18% in 2022.



Employees embrace open dialogue on mental health with managers

We’re increasingly seeing workers discuss their mental health in the workplace, with 48% of U.S. employees talking about their mental health at work in 2023 and 41% saying they feel comfortable doing so with their manager—a 15% increase since 2020.

However, our survey data suggested that many managers have limited resources for providing the frontline mental health support their team members need. We learned that 40% of U.S. managers didn’t feel confident that they could support an employee experiencing mental health challenges. This sentiment is at odds with 86% of benefits and HR leaders who believed they were equipping managers with dedicated resources and training to support their teams’ mental health.

6 steps for employers to advance workforce mental health in 2024 and beyond

- 1 **Make sure your mental health strategy embraces the full spectrum of needs**
- 2 **Expand mental health support for working parents and children**
- 3 **Build trust with actions that support worker well-being**
- 4 **When it comes to workforce mental health, think systemic vs. individual change**
- 5 **Give managers the resources to lead mentally healthy, engaged teams**
- 6 **Prioritize access to quality mental health care across global workforces**

What's clear from this year's research findings is that the tools companies used a decade ago to address mental health challenges no longer work.

This is partly because the cultural underpinnings employers have long depended on to promote organizational well-being are no longer viable. Workers today are increasingly remote, something most employees we surveyed value highly and a trend that's underscored by fierce resistance to companies' return-to-office mandates. So it's no wonder that workforce well-being strategies revolving around in-person culture and perks are falling flat.

To address these realities, organizations need a two-fold approach. The first part is providing full-spectrum support for mental health care, meaning support for all employees and families—even (and especially) those with severe or complex conditions. Mental health benefits must be accessible and supportive for employees regardless of where in the world they live. The second component is building trust with employees by establishing a healthy work experience that treats mental health hazards just as seriously as physical ones.

Based on our findings, these are six key actions employers can take to improve workforce mental health in 2024 and beyond.



1

Make sure your mental health strategy embraces the full spectrum of needs

Offering robust mental health benefits for your employees is a great place to start. But it's just that—a starting point. People need help for a wide range of mental health challenges, from milder issues like stress and relationship challenges to more serious conditions such as severe depression, bipolar disorder, substance use disorders, and suicidal ideation. This is even more true as people are still grappling with the pandemic's mental health repercussions.

The companies in the best shape to weather the pandemic's aftermath are those that had already proactively established a culture of mental health awareness. AT&T, for example, implemented mental well-being programs before COVID-19 that have served it well. "We know employees need to first take care of themselves before they can worry about what's happening at work," said Julianne Galloway, vice president of global benefits at AT&T. "Even before the pandemic, AT&T shifted its focus to making sure our employees were supported not just mentally, but from a holistic well-being standpoint."

"Employers have made great progress in curbing stigma around depression, anxiety, and stress. The next step is to bring greater attention to severe conditions that are still heavily stigmatized and can be hiding in plain sight. Employees who are struggling with these conditions can present as if they're doing pretty well," said Grasso. "You can't make assumptions about the challenges someone might be facing. That's why organizations need to broaden their mental health care offerings and anti-stigma campaigns to more directly address serious mental illness."

“

We know employees need to first take care of themselves before they can worry about what's happening at work.”

—Julianne Galloway, vice president of global benefits at AT&T

These efforts can result in significant health care cost savings for companies, too. Untreated or undertreated mental health disorders can have indirect financial impacts on employers' medical plans, such as last-resort care in emergency rooms, greater need for inpatient treatment, and degradation of physical health. For example, professional services firm Aon's Lyra Health Cost Efficiency Analysis report shows that offering comprehensive mental health benefits yields measurable reductions in health plan claims for employers across industries.

As an HR or benefits team, how can you verify whether your company's current mental health benefits provide access for every mental health need? You can start by checking for gaps in care, especially for serious conditions. Can all of your employees easily find care that meets their specific needs? Most importantly, look for care outcomes data to make sure people are getting better with treatment.

Next, review your mental health provider network. Do the providers practice evidence-based treatments, and are there available providers who specialize in treating different mental health conditions? Your employees are more likely to see results with practitioners who have experience treating their specific conditions and use clinically proven treatments. Providers should be well trained and closely monitored to see the best mental health outcomes.



Having access to specialized mental health care is extremely predictive of outcomes. If you're working with somebody who's a specialist, they're going to be using an evidence-based treatment for the issue you brought to them. This kind of care is much more effective in terms of clinical outcomes.”

—Alethea Varra, PhD, senior vice president of clinical care at Lyra

Here are four best practices to use when evaluating a mental health benefit program for effectiveness:

Ask whether the network’s providers practice evidence-based treatments (EBTs). EBTs have been rigorously tested in randomized controlled trials or a series of case studies and proven to yield effective outcomes. Some providers may have been trained in EBTs but don’t always practice the methods as intended, a phenomenon known as therapeutic drift. Employers need to ensure providers in their networks are committed to exclusively practicing EBTs. To find the most effective providers, ask your benefits partner these questions:

- How do you ensure all providers are using evidence-based practices?
- What quality assurance processes are in place?
- How much ongoing training do providers receive?

Look at the results.

Base your benefits decisions on clinical outcomes that are meaningful, significant, and show durable symptom improvement. These questions can help with your assessment:

- How many employees utilizing the benefit are getting better?
- How much better are they getting?
- How long are they staying better?

Review the research.

The best mental health benefits providers are regularly engaged in research focused on advancing care practices. Look for peer-reviewed research studies that measure effectiveness of treatment and the study of new approaches to care.

Offer access to the right providers.

The key to the right care for your employees starts with a provider network that can address your diverse employee population’s spectrum of mental health needs.



Expand mental health support for working parents and children

As this year's research highlights, a growing number of working parents bear the weight of their children's mental health challenges.



Mental health issues impact a growing number of kids and parents



of U.S. workers in our survey reported caring for a child under 18 with a mental health issue.

“

Having a child with an untreated mental health issue is going to take parents out of the workplace. Their mind and energy will be elsewhere.”

—Kendall Browne, PhD, senior program manager of Workforce Transformation at Lyra

“There's no question this creates stress for the employee and they're bringing that into the workplace,” said Egan, of Michigan's Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity. With mental health disorders among kids and teens increasingly prevalent, employers must give workers support to find their care, but a lack of qualified providers has created a tough situation, leading a growing number of families to seek emergency care just to access treatment.

Our research shows that parents in this situation are not only experiencing more mental health impacts on the job compared to their peers, but are also more likely to say they're thinking about leaving their jobs.

More than half (54%) of U.S. employees supporting a child with mental health challenges said they're actively considering changing employers over the next year, versus 42% of workers without a child who has mental health challenges.

Employers' actions can make a big difference for these parents and their kids. "A mental health benefit that parents can use to access care for their children saves parents time and energy, and it can help make sure children get the care they need," said Browne.

AT&T's Galloway echoed this sentiment. "To support the idea of total well-being, we expanded our mental health support with Lyra and launched caregiver time off, virtual primary care, and other wraparound support that extends beyond traditional benefits," she said.

Here are three impactful ways organizations can support parents' and kids' mental health:

- **Launch ERGs.** By starting an employee resource group (ERG) for working parents, employers can provide a level of support that's tough to accomplish in a company all-hands meeting. In addition to sharing information and resources, peer advice is invaluable, offering parents a sense of mutual support and validation. "ERGs give you a sense of community or feeling like you can share ideas and get support from people with a shared identity or who are in a similar position," said Grasso.
- **Empower managers to offer flexibility.** Parents juggling their own or their child's mental health needs typically need time during the workday for doctor appointments and school meetings. Employers can show their support without adding additional stress with options such as remote work and flexible hours. "There may be something about the corporate culture that doesn't let the manager trust that they can offer that kind of flexibility," said Varra. "So there needs to be modeling from leaders about what it looks like to extend this flexibility and give managers the permission to do it."
- **Provide personalized matching to experts.** Finding the right mental health provider or specialized treatment for a child can be daunting and time-consuming. Parents may not have experience with mental health care and don't know which providers have training for their child's specific needs. By providing benefits with data-driven, personalized provider matching, companies can unblock the path to the right provider.

Build trust with actions that support worker well-being

Employee trust is at the heart of job satisfaction, engagement, and, ultimately, business goals. After a year when many industries saw mass layoffs, the topic of trust is a tricky one. Our research found that, while most HR and benefits leaders consider their workforce's well-being a major company priority, many workers are unsure or disbelieve that's the case. Solving this disconnect requires action.

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If you're saying, 'Our company values mental health,' but when I need to start seeing a counselor, I'm going to get dinged if I have to leave work early, then that doesn't work."

—Stephanie Mitchell Hughes, assistant director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in Franklin County, Ohio

Our research shows how a lack of employee trust can impact turnover. U.S. workers who don't believe their employer cares about their mental health are more likely (50%) to be considering changing jobs over the next year than those who believe their employer cares about mental health (42%). Similarly, a 2019 Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) study found that companies with toxic workplaces see 50% higher turnover than those with healthier workplace cultures. Turnover linked to work culture ended up costing companies \$223 billion over five years, the study found.

"The costs of productivity and retention are meaningful," said Rahab Hammad, senior benefits manager at Snap, Inc. "There are high costs associated with replacing an employee who doesn't get the resources they need related to mental health care, which is why we spend so much time talking to people about Lyra."

Fostering trust with employees starts by taking actions that elevate workforce mental health as a company value. For example, employers can prioritize recognizing employees and managers who actively improve the work experience and support team mental health. Next, encourage company leaders to discuss mental health openly, which helps normalize the topic and shows commitment. Leaders should speak directly about the types of mental health conditions that can be addressed with available benefits, and how to access those resources.



It's also vital for managers to model prioritizing mental health, such as taking time off and avoiding work after hours. Finally, consider setting up a mental health portal for employees to access ongoing mental health education, including training sessions, workshops, and on-demand videos.

“Team members look up to their managers and leaders, so having them onboard to promote the importance of investing time in caring for their mental health is so crucial,” Hammad said.

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To regain trust, leadership must listen to what employees say they need the company to do to protect their mental health in the workplace. Seeing action happen as a result of employee feedback is what builds trust.”

—Joe Grasso, PhD, vice president of Lyra's Workforce Transformation team

When it comes to workforce mental health, think systemic vs. individual change

A person's job can either help or harm mental health issues, as [the WHO](#) has noted. Toxic, unforgiving workplaces can worsen existing mental health issues or prompt new ones. On the other hand, a supportive work environment where workers feel they're being treated fairly can positively impact worker engagement, job satisfaction, and retention.

Our research confirms that a realistic workload, recognition for a job well done, and fair and equitable treatment can all make a difference in employees' mental health.

These were the top three factors U.S. employees cited as having the biggest impact on their well-being. And nearly two-thirds (64%) agreed that "If my employer took action to improve the work conditions that negatively impact my mental health, it would increase my job satisfaction."

These are all factors within employers' control. Organizations can address work-related stress and burnout by proactively creating working conditions that are more conducive to mental well-being. This practice, known as [work design](#), is meant to protect against [psychosocial hazards](#) such as excessive workload, poor managerial support, discrimination, bullying, or harassment.

"Things that improve worker stress also improve engagement and productivity," said Grasso, citing job control, recognition, role clarity, and manager support as integral to employee well-being and [retention](#). Rather than trying to eliminate all stress, he added, employers should concentrate on identifying work stress that continues at excessive levels for repeated or extended periods. "It's this lack of systematic attention paid to these factors that leads employers to drift from fulfilling the needs of their workforce," he said.

5

Give managers the resources to lead mentally healthy, engaged teams

Managers can only support their teams if they understand how to facilitate a healthy workplace. By using data tools, managers learn how work impacts employee mental health and engagement. When managers are given these tools alongside training and resources, they know how to improve these areas of work.

To that end, employers must provide managers with training and resources. Work design-related training can teach managers skills to create a mentally healthy work environment. Meanwhile, organizations that equip managers with data from internal surveys illustrating the impact of issues such as workload, job clarity, and recognition on mental well-being, productivity, and engagement will see better outcomes in both organizational performance and individual health.

Companies should include managers in creating a psychosocial risk management program. This type of initiative addresses systemic issues through management practices, company policies, training priorities, measuring exposure to psychosocial risks/hazards, and other occupational health and safety initiatives. Where workplace wellness programs attempt to put a bandage on worker distress, psychosocial risk management programs offer concrete measures that can foster a mentally healthy work environment.

To launch this type of program, start by gathering employees' input on workplace stressors. Next, evaluate those stressors to identify training opportunities, where action plans are needed, and ways to fix broken systems or ineffective processes. Then, partner with learning-and-development teams or consultants to put the solutions in place. Finally, collect data to assess the effectiveness of your solutions and make changes as needed.

6

Prioritize access to quality mental health care across global workforces

When evaluating mental health benefits, it's crucial that employers with global workforces provide access to effective, culturally responsive care. A lack of access to this care creates needless suffering for workers and their families, plus enormous economic strain—globally, mental health disorders cost businesses an estimated \$1.6 trillion in 2019.

Andrew Davies, Head of Lyra International, noted that people in different parts of the world have different societal perspectives on mental health that are embedded in their norms and even their language. For example, some languages have no words for “depression” or “anxiety.” People from these cultures often describe their mental health concerns using physical symptoms, such as fatigue or headaches, and may not recognize the underlying psychological causes.



These are a few key points to consider when evaluating mental health benefits for a global workforce:

- **Use specific messaging to combat stigma.** Many countries with low- and middle-income populations lack funding for mental health, mainly delivering care through psychiatric institutions, which can fuel stigma. Focus on using language carefully with employees, creating ongoing campaigns, discussing mental health during company calls, and encouraging leaders to share their own experiences with mental health challenges.

- **Prioritize diversity and cultural competency.** Employers can mitigate work-related mental health issues by designing a work environment where all members—especially leaders and managers—communicate effectively, understand and honor cultural norms, and nurture relationships with team members in other parts of the world.
- **Be flexible.** Global organizations should support different workplace norms and values based on culture. For example, American and Japanese cultures tend to normalize longer hours, while workers in European countries expect more independence. A flexible approach allows employees to be seen as individuals with unique needs.
- **Offer comprehensive mental health benefits to employees worldwide.** Workers deserve the right care and support regardless of where they live. Look for a mental health benefits partner that includes culturally responsive care practices and provides educational materials that can be adapted to specific cultures. Partner with providers who have diverse linguistic capabilities and are specially trained to address race and other social identities, and use technology to make care widely accessible in a variety of ways.

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Some languages have no words for ‘depression’ or ‘anxiety.’ People from these cultures often describe their mental health concerns using physical symptoms, such as fatigue or headaches, and may not recognize the underlying psychological causes.”

—Andrew Davies, CEO of Lyra Wellbeing



Organizational planning for mental health

Our study's findings paint a complex picture of mental health in today's workplace. More HR and benefits leaders than ever cited workforce mental health as a top priority, and a growing number of workers are accessing resources to help them manage and overcome their mental health challenges. But crucial gaps remain in accessing care for the full spectrum of needs and in creating supportive work cultures that promote well-being for all employees.

It's important to remember that supporting worker well-being isn't just right thing to do; it also helps businesses meet their goals by bolstering retention, attracting top talent, and boosting productivity. "The business case for mental health benefits doesn't just hinge on quantitative data. It also has to include qualitative factors related to the impact on employee experience," said Kembre Roberts, PhD, senior vice president at Aon. "The case for a benefit is a two-part story, and I don't think you can leave one part out and really deliver an effective solution."

The goal of workforce mental health programs is not to eliminate all possible stress for employees. But it is incumbent on employers to reduce risks to a reasonable level and provide support that helps employees cope with the mental health challenges that disrupt their lives.

For John, the construction employee who suffered from anxiety and panic attacks last year, getting the right mental health care has been life-changing. "I realized, I just feel better talking about it," he said. "I'm happier, I'm more motivated to just go to work. On the other side, it's a lot brighter."

Lyra equips organizations with high-quality mental health benefits that meet the needs of today's workforce, along with training and tools to create a mentally healthy work environment.

[Get a free consultation](#)



Methodology

To better understand the experiences and attitudes of employees and HR and benefits leaders related to workforce mental health, Lyra Health conducted a survey of individuals via online surveys from PureSpectrum between August 18 and September 29, 2023.

Of the 250 HR and benefits leaders surveyed, all respondents were at least 18 years of age and living in the U.S. when the survey was completed. All respondents self-identified as working for companies with global workforces and that provide health care benefits. All respondents also self-identified as being manager-level or above, working in their organization's employee benefits or HR departments at companies with 1,000 or more employees.

Of the 1,910 employees surveyed in the U.S., all respondents were at least 18 years of age. All respondents self-identified as full-time employees working for organizations with at least 1,000 employees and that provide health care benefits for which they are eligible.

Of the 1,552 employees surveyed outside of the U.S. (285 in Brazil, 253 in Canada, 253 in Germany, 253 in India, 254 in Japan, and 254 in the UK), all respondents were at least 18 years of age. All respondents self-identified as full-time employees working for organizations with at least 1,000 employees and that provide an employee assistance program (EAP).

PureSpectrum partners with the top online sample providers to supply a network of diverse, quality respondents to their client base. The survey data come from traditional, actively managed, double-opt-in market research panels.



About Lyra Health

Lyra Health helps leading companies improve access to effective, high-quality mental health care for their employees and their families. With Lyra's innovative digital care platform and global provider network, members receive the best care and get better faster.

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