

Workplace Wellbeing Hub

Working With Benefits Providers: Mental Health Issues Checklist



Overview

Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of your employees is essential for maintaining a safe and productive workplace. Mental health concerns such as stress, anxiety, depression and/or substance use can affect focus, decision-making, and overall job performance. Higher stress levels are linked to increased substance use and a greater risk of relapse.

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a valuable resource to help address these challenges. EAPs can provide confidential counseling, referrals and other support services to employees and their families. Partnering with your health insurance vendors can further expand the range of available services.

While many of these issues are traditionally addressed by HR teams, safety professionals also play a critical role. In some organizations, safety leaders wear both the safety and HR hats. Even where responsibilities are separate, collaboration between safety and HR is essential to ensure employees receive the right support. Safety professionals are encouraged to share this checklist with HR colleagues and reinforce that protecting mental wellbeing is directly tied to reducing safety risks on the job. The National Safety Council provides the following checklist of what you and/or HR can ask your EAP and health insurance vendors to do to help employees and their families access the support they need and navigate mental health concerns safely:

- ☐ Ask your EAP to be very active in promoting their counseling services. Your EAP should push out information and assure employees that they can get help for any kind of problem.
- ☐ Ask your health plans to actively promote mental health and substance use services. Your providers should be proactive with encouraging utilization of their services through frequent and creative formats.
- ☐ Check with your EAP to see if your plan requires full time status for eligibility. If so, ask for your plan to be amended to be free for laid off or furloughed workers.
- ☐ Ask how your EAP is prepared to respond to a major increase in calls.

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- ☐ Inform managers that they can get help from the EAP in dealing with stressful issues within their work teams as well as support from HR.
- ☐ Make sure your EAP and health plans provide telehealth options, such as crisis and mental health counseling by phone and other forms of electronic communication. These services should be available 24/7 and should be repeatedly publicized to your workers.
- ☐ Check to see that your EAP and health plans offer support groups for employees who have other behavioral health concerns. [Substance use](#) and [mental health support groups](#) should be easily accessible and their availability frequently publicized.
- ☐ Medications to treat mental and substance use problems must be accessible. Ask your health plans to confirm that drugs to treat substance use and mental illness are available at the same levels as other illnesses.
- ☐ Be sure your EAP and health plans publicize the availability of guidance on selfcare to reduce stress and distress e.g., walks, gardening, meditation, yoga, Zoom meetings, checking in on friends and neighbors, etc.
- ☐ Work with your EAP and health plans to make sure they report back to you weekly on the number and types of presenting problems they are seeing, especially depression, alcohol and drug use, family violence and suicide.
- ☐ Track weekly the volume and types (e.g. telehealth, telephone, email, video, in-person, etc.) of services provided. EAP direct service rates are usually in the 3% to 5% range annually.
- ☐ Ask your EAP and health plans to provide the number of low-touch services provided, such as views of online materials and downloads of materials.

We understand that not all employers have these options, and that not all EAPs provide these services. Remember, any action you take helps you and your employees. You are an essential link in helping your workers access the support they need during challenging times.

Communicate Frequently

Once you find the answers to the items above, remember to communicate the available services to your workers and their families often, and how they can access them. It is not enough to post benefit information on your company website or the websites of your health plans or EAP. You and your benefit providers should reinforce messaging several times, when appropriate, about how to get help for any mental distress, stress, or anxiety they may be experiencing at any given time. Acknowledging that your organization understands the stress your workers are going through will make a world of difference. Providing them with free services can help with mental health issues, reduce risk for increased substance use and prevent relapse in those with current issues.