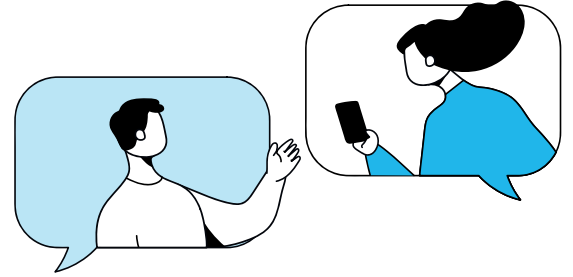


What now?

Proactive steps for a culture of wellbeing

The following is a summary of the U.S. LifeWorks Employers Connect Mental Health Summit, held on February 2, 2022.



Johns Hopkins Healthcare is well known for its innovation, including the development of renal dialysis and as the first major medical school to admit women. But when the coronavirus pandemic hit, the venerable institution needed to draw on its innovative ways again to protect the mental health of its workforce.

Along with convenience and cost, some employees reported “they just don’t believe mental health care will make a difference for them,” explains Susan Carr, Director of Quality, Outcomes and Faculty Engagement at Johns Hopkins Healthcare Solutions. “Before the pandemic, we had developed a program designed to lower those barriers and make mental healthcare easier to access and to raise the awareness level of everyone about what their mental health risks are.”

Like other leading employers, the organization is also innovating around workplace flexibility, promoting self-care and helping managers look after their mental wellbeing and that of their teams.

Presenting the latest LifeWorks research about employee mental health, Paula Allen, Global Leader and Senior Vice President, Research and Total Wellbeing, highlighted the increasing overlap between work and personal lives that are driving a new organizational focus on the experience of work, at the same time as the mental health of the American workforce remains fragile.

“The employee-employer relationship is more complex”, Paula notes. Yet the collective and individual trauma of two years of uncertainty and isolation creates headwinds when it comes to innovating organizational practices. “The longer we are in any kind of strain, the longer and more complicated it is for us to get out of that mindset,” she explains.

The research also showed that isolation is particularly problematic for younger workers who are just entering the workforce. “Isolation is a major factor in mental health but also in physical health such as cardiovascular issues and immune concerns. The sense of isolation we’ve seen in the population overall is much more acute in our younger workers,” Paula says.

Parents are also struggling, as are many managers who are also dealing with declining mental health among their team members. In fact, 80% report having to deal directly with employee mental wellness issues. The research shows that managers and senior leaders

are particularly affected by the stress of the pandemic. As Paula notes, “senior leaders have been under tremendous strain but feel they don’t have the permission to reach out for support.”

Another key trend is a new focus among investors in how organizations manage mental health. “There is this recognition that for organizations to differentiate, they need to invest in the mental health and wellbeing of their people. That’s what supports the innovation that is so critical”, Paula points out. Chief executive officers are taking note, with 98% saying they plan to prioritize mental health after the pandemic.

Confronting barriers

With focus and investment, organizations are working to improve access to mental healthcare by better understanding the complexity of employees’ wellness journeys. At Johns Hopkins, an important insight is that employees will often take care of their physical health or financial concerns before addressing their mental health. As Susan explains, these are often intertwined and require a more holistic approach. “We’re learning that when you lower the barriers to care, and raise awareness, everyone finds out what their mental health risks are.” Taking a holistic approach allows her organization to offer multiple channels of care.

At computer maker, Lenovo, Global Benefits Manager Janna Maxey, finds a multi-channel approach to be effective. “When we’re struggling, we just need a bit of help and if the program has multiple ways to get

help, employees can reach out using a mobile app, a computer or the phone. LifeWorks helps us deliver these multiple points of entry to the system," she says.

One therapy that is showing great results, particularly for younger men is internet based cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which Paula calls "extraordinarily effective" for this traditionally treatment-averse population. Another group that is often under-served when it comes to mental wellness is older adults.

Finding flexibility

LifeWorks research finds that employer flexibility makes the biggest difference in workers' ability to cope, and about one-fifth of employees believe their organizations will allow them to choose their work location after the pandemic.

Implementing flexibility in the workplace is sometimes easier said than done. Susan points out that while innovation is welcome in most organizations, there can be a bottleneck when it comes to launching a program. "When you bring them something that's completely new, completely different it turns the system upside down. They don't know where to put that into their infrastructure or their budget, and that's particularly true for mental health. It takes a very innovative, creative employer to figure out how to get that started."

Supporting self-care

Stress and burnout are persistent challenges in the healthcare industry, and Susan suggests a culture change is needed to protect mental health as rigorously as physical health. "Everyone should be checking in on their mental health at least once a year with a professional assessment tool to monitor changes. Where you are one day may be very different in just six months. You have to actively check in on your own emotional wellbeing."

At Lenovo, gratitude is a key pillar of self-care. For a month starting in mid-November last year, the company did a global gratitude activity. "Every day we had a different focus on gratitude, such as writing a note to coworkers saying thanks," Janna explains. "It helped people focus on things that were positive; looking back at the year and what had gone well and what we can be thankful for during this crazy time."

ow where to put that into their infrastructure or their budget, and that's particularly true for mental health. It takes a very innovative, creative employer to figure out how to get that started."

Leading wellness

Building a culture of mental wellness at Lenovo also draws on connection, purpose and personal prosperity, Janna explains. "We want people to know that their purpose in life can fit into the Lenovo world and that we will support what they need to prosper – not necessarily financially – but as a person."

Innovative employers are positioning managers and executives as the driving forces of mental wellness, but leaders need to have the resources to support their mental health as well as looking after their teams. For example, LifeWorks articles and other resources can help managers model and support mental wellness.

At Lenovo, the timing of their global platform launch could not have been better. "We implemented our LifeWorks Global EFAP in 2018, and how fortunate we were," Janna recalls. "Managers with global teams now had resources for all their employees. That made such a difference in us getting through the last two years."

As U.S. employers begin to design the post-pandemic workplace, Paula says it will be important to include choice, connection and belonging as part of the innovation supporting mental health. The LifeWorks research finds that a sense of belonging is key to retaining workers in the long term.

The pandemic's impact on organizations of all types will reverberate for years, but Paula points out that a positive outcome is the prioritization of mental health among senior executives. "In my entire career, I've never seen or heard so many CEOs empathizing around people's mental health, making sure that it's a priority for their organizations. I think it's one of these things you take for granted until a crisis hits, and then you realize what's important," she says.

LifeWorks' trusted, comprehensive solutions make a positive impact on your organization and your people.

Visit lifeworks.com to learn more and get started today.