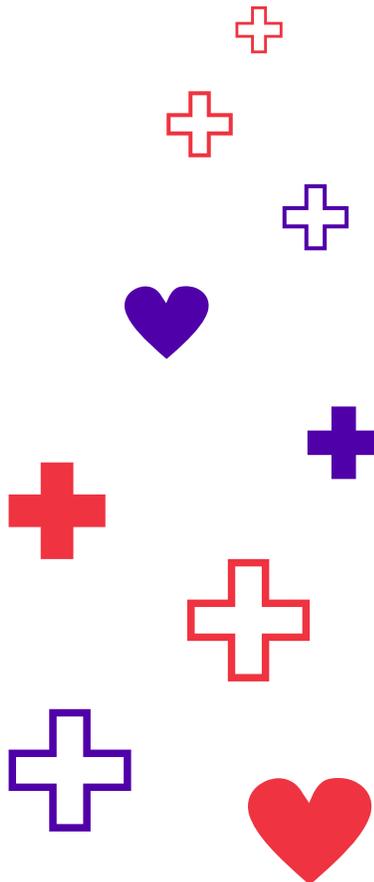


EBOOK

The HR director's guide to mental health in the workplace



According to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#), one in five adults in the U.S. personally experiences mental illness in a year.

To better understand the magnitude of this issue, it's essential to first understand what defines mental illness. The [American Psychiatric Association](#) clarifies: “[Mental illness] refers collectively to all diagnosable mental disorders—health conditions involving significant changes in thinking, emotions, and/or behavior [that cause] distress and/or problems functioning in social, work, or family activities.” With one in 25 adults facing mental illness so severe it impacts their ability to participate in regular activities, mental health cannot be ignored by employers.

It's no longer uncommon to hear about organizations offering initiatives to improve the mental health of their workforce. Beyond providing support to employees who need it, companies can benefit from [reduced absenteeism and increased productivity](#) that would otherwise be lost due to symptoms of mental illness.

You may be wondering: What can my business do to create a healthier, more inclusive environment for those who might be struggling with mental health issues? While it's not the role of human resources to serve as mental health counselors (in fact, this would be inappropriate), there are many actions HR professionals can take to help employees with mental illness feel more welcome and supported.

In this guide, you'll learn immediate steps you can take, as well as some longer-term, large-scale efforts you might consider tackling. You'll also get an inside look at how we address mental health here at The Predictive Index®.

Redefine sick days.

Organizations provide employees with sick days both to keep the work environment germ-free and to allow employees time to recover and come back to work as their best selves. Some companies require doctor's notes for sick days or have managers who demand to know what illness their employees have to determine if a sick day is required. Don't be that company.

Sick days can be an important tool to promote mental wellness in the workplace. Include language in your sick day policy to make it clear that **sick days are for both physical and mental illness**. This step shows employees you view mental illness as a legitimate illness (which it is!) and encourages people to take care of themselves.

In many workplaces, those with mental illnesses are in a precarious position when they find themselves unwell or in need of a doctor's appointment: Should they pretend to have a physical illness, or ignore how they're feeling altogether and go into work feeling anything less than 100%? By making it as clear as possible to employees that sick days are for mental healing, too, you're legitimizing mental illness in your workplace and showing employees that you're invested in their well-being.

At The Predictive Index®, employees are granted unlimited paid time off—and they're actually encouraged to use it as they see fit. If an employee needs a recharge day or is struggling with their health—in whatever manner that may manifest itself—there's a “no questions asked” policy that employees should take care of themselves, first and foremost.



Use inclusive language.

The language you use every day, even casually, can help to boost a climate of inclusivity around mental health. It's not uncommon for someone to say, "I'm feeling so bipolar today," "You're being really psycho," or "That's making me depressed." While innocent in intent, this language can be really harmful and belittling to individuals who actually have to deal with these afflictions day in and day out.

These phrases—and others, such as calling someone "crazy" or "insane"—may have become commonplace, but they represent a hard reality for many people. In the same way one wouldn't make a joke or speak lightly about having a serious physical illness, the same should be the case for mental illness.

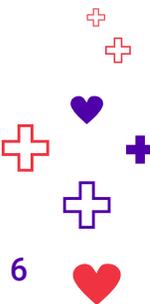
Make a personal pledge to avoid using such language, and work to educate those around you to be mindful of their own language. It's easy to start an initiative to limit the use of stigmatizing language. For example, announce the intention to limit this language at a company meeting, or use printed signs around the office to serve as a subtle "nudge." Those employees who may have previously been hurt by such language will appreciate the effort.



Provide resources.

Just as every fall and winter, many companies provide resources to employees about getting a flu shot or how to sneeze without infecting anyone else, so can you provide resources relating to mental health.

The American Psychological Association's [Center for Workplace Mental Health](#) provides numerous resources for HR and employees, such as videos, flyers, and webinars, to ensure a workplace that promotes mental health and shows employees how to engage with others in a healthy, respectful manner. They also offer a number of calculators showing the impact that mental illnesses, such as depression and addiction, can have on a company's bottom line. These numbers may help you make the business case for some of the programs mentioned in the next section.



While small, immediate actions can have a big impact, larger initiatives can go a long way in promoting an inclusive workplace.

The options below are by no means exhaustive, but are commonly accepted and can make substantial strides in your workplace.

Reconsider your benefits package.

While numerous organizations offer comprehensive healthcare benefits to their employees, many programs neglect to include mental health benefits or only include such benefits on a limited basis (e.g., certain providers, a limited number of sessions, referral required, etc.). All too often, people don't seek out the care they need because of high cost and/or inconvenience.

Consider providing subsidized mental health care to your employees, including psychotherapy and psychiatric care, and publicize these benefits so employees know what's available to them. Additionally, **consider offering an employee assistance program (EAP)**. EAPs are virtual or in-person services providing employees with support for a range of personal issues, including addiction, trauma, and mental health struggles. Importantly, EAPs come at no cost to employees, making them an extremely valuable benefit to employees who need them. It's also easier to offer support to employees in need when you can simply refer them to an EAP—it takes the challenging guess-work and aggravation out of the process of finding a mental health professional.



Offer training to managers.

It bears repeating that it's not the role of human resources, nor an employee's manager, to serve as mental health counselors. Given the prevalence of mental health struggles in the workplace, however, aiding an employee through a crisis is becoming an increasingly realistic requirement for managers and HR. Consider implementing a training program for first-time and experienced managers about how to best address burnout among employees, how to react if an employee shares a traumatic experience, and what to do if they think someone is struggling but doesn't know how to ask for help. Such training should also address when and how it's appropriate to respond to mental health needs, reducing uncomfortable incidents that would later make their way to HR.

Implement a wellness program.

In addition to EAPs, wellness programs provide employees with the opportunity to take ownership over their total health, even when they're at work. Such programs can include incentives for getting medical checkups which are beneficial in more ways than one, as **mental and physical health are closely linked**. These programs might also include subsidized access to local gyms or fitness studios and on-site classes about nutrition or exercise. Some companies are implementing meditation, mindfulness, and resiliency classes as part of wellness programs to remind their employees that mental health is important to overall health. These sessions also serve as a "recharge" for employees in the middle of their hectic daily schedules.

At The Predictive Index®, we have a homegrown wellness program designed to promote employee health. You can receive a cash bonus for getting an annual physical, which encourages employees to take care of themselves. There's a monthly newsletter with wellness tips and tricks and classes around such topics as healthy cooking and meditation. There's also a recharge room for when an employee might need to step away and take a few minutes for themselves to rebalance. Taken together, these efforts result in a workforce that works smarter—not harder—and takes the time to take care of themselves.

The mental health and well-being of your workforce is a serious matter that demands the care and attention that would be afforded and provided to concerns of physical health. Whether taking large actions or smaller steps, there are many things you can do to promote an inclusive workplace that respects the importance of mental health.