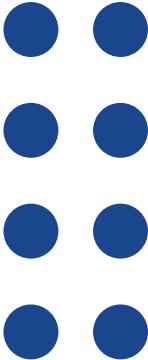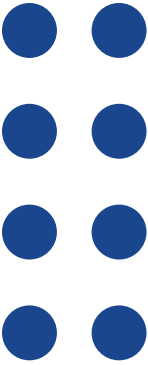# MENTAL HEALTH
WORKS GUIDE

AMERICAN
PSYCHIATRIC
ASSOCIATION
FOUNDATION

CENTER FOR
**WORKPLACE
MENTAL HEALTH**

January 2025

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH

The Center for Workplace Mental Health, a program of the American Psychiatric Association Foundation (APAF), provides employers with the tools, resources and information needed to promote and support the mental health of employees and their families.

Our team works with employers, business groups on health, health-focused coalitions, and other strategic partners to solve challenges, highlight innovative approaches to improving workplace mental health, and make workplace mental health a higher organizational priority.

The Center engages employers and our other partners in eliminating stigma, reducing barriers to care, raising broader mental health awareness, improving/ implementing mental health programs, and designing benefits that improve employee mental health. This work is done through turn-key programs, toolkits, employer case studies, topical resources, publications and more.

Better workplace mental health policies and practices improve employee productivity and quality of life for all—not just those affected by mental health conditions.

workplacementalhealth.org

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Introduction

Employers play a key role in the health and well-being of their employees. Mental health is a key component of overall health. Positively impacting employee mental health and well-being improves productivity and performance, attracts and retains top performers, lowers overall health care costs, and creates a safe and inclusive work culture. The opportunity to improve workplace mental health exists at the organizational and employee levels.

This guide provides employers with a comprehensive approach to improving workplace mental health.

Mental health conditions are common, impacting 1 in 5 adults (close to 59 million individuals).[1] In addition, close to 49 million people 12 and older have a substance use disorder (including alcohol use disorder).[1] Treatment works, yet less than half of people who need help get it.[2] Employers have the resources to help, and employees, co-workers and leaders can make a positive difference.

Fear and misunderstanding often prevents people from seeking help.[3] Myths and stereotypes persist, so raising awareness and sharing mental health information and personal stories helps set the record straight and creates a safe environment for seeking help.

LEADERSHIP

WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES

Raising Awareness and Breaking the Silence

Creating Mentally Healthy Culture

Improving Access to Services and Supports

KEYS TO SUCCESS

!

Get Employees Involved

Communicate Often About Mental Health

Measure Impact

Employer-driven workplace mental health initiatives generally fit within three broad areas:
- Raising Awareness and Breaking the Silence
- Creating a Mentally Healthy Culture
- Improving Access to Services and Supports

There are four major factors that contribute to the success of workplace mental health initiatives:

- Securing Leadership Support. When CEOs, business owners and leaders show consistent and ongoing support for employee wellbeing and mental health as an organizational priority and share a personal connection to mental health and substance use, outcomes are more successful.
- Getting Employees Involved. In the U.S., nearly 47 million people have a mental health condition, but millions more are impacted, providing a ready pool of employees with lived experience to ask to contribute to a successful workplace mental health initiative.
- Communicating Often about Mental Health. Make mental health initiatives highly visible. Talk about mental health whenever discussing the health and well-being of employees. Find multiple ways to spread the word that mental health is an organizational priority and reference often how to access services and supports.
- Measuring Impact. Whether your goal is to increase awareness, improve access to mental health services, improve the culture of the workplace, reduce turnover, reduce disability claims, or related issues, start by deciding what success looks like for your organization.

Measures may include a combination of the following:

- Employee performance
- Employee productivity
- Employee engagement
- Health Risk Assessment results
- Short and long-term disability claims
- Pharmacy benefit spend
- Mental health and substance use disorder benefit spend
- Employee survey results focused on organizational culture
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP) usage, including referrals to behavioral health services

- Website or intranet views, clicks, and downloads on mental health and well-being resources and information

When selecting the measures that will help you determine success, decide on the outcome that you wish to achieve, then align that outcome with the activity planned and the data you will collect. Do not forget to collect baseline data—you need to know where you're starting from! Be sure to set a time frame for data collection and tracking (three months, six months, one year, etc.), and include the pre- and post-measures in that timeframe.

Raising Awareness
& Breaking the Silence

Start by knowing the impact. What and how much do your employees know about the prevalence of mental health conditions? What are their perceptions of people with mental health or substance use conditions? Do they want to help? Are they fearful about reaching out for help or talking with their supervisors or HR? Do managers and leaders feel comfortable talking with employees they may be concerned about? Should those managers and leaders have that conversation? Are they comfortable connecting those people with services and support?

Here are several ways to evaluate employees' understanding, experience and empathy:

Ensure that your Health Risk Assessment (HRA) instrument includes questions on lifestyle and health behaviors, use of alcohol and other substances, depression, and anxiety.

Consider creating an anonymous pulse survey that asks about employees' understanding and perceptions about mental health and substance use conditions, and the need to better address these issues in the workplace. This helps to create a baseline of understanding in your organization about mental health and substance use.

Consider using an assessment tool with questions on employee mental health and well-being, culture, access to care, leadership support, and more. Consider using an assessment tool that will compare your company's culture and practices with industry best practices.

Understand that while an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is an important part of an overall employer plan, it is key for your company to assess wellbeing as part of the culture. Examine your organizational data on Employee Assistance Program (EAP) use, mental health and substance use disorder benefit claims, pharmacy spend, and rates of disability for mental health conditions. Your organization's data should reflect the fact that 1 in 5 people experience a mental health condition. This provides insights into whether employees with mental health conditions are accessing needed support and treatment.

People experiencing mental health and substance use conditions should be accessing needed care. If they don't, it will impact the organization's bottom line in lost productivity through presenteeism, absenteeism, higher disability rates, and higher health care costs.

Raising Awareness and Breaking the Silence.

Now is the right time to start or expand workplace mental health initiatives. In the post-pandemic era, there is increased awareness of the role wellbeing plays in employee engagement, productivity and job satisfaction. People across our nation are talking more openly about mental health conditions. This exposure helps to normalize otherwise hidden conditions. It helps some people feel like it's okay to ask for help and helps those concerned about others to ask if they need support.

When it comes to breaking the silence surrounding mental health conditions, there are multiple approaches to consider. Design an initiative that fits your organization's culture, taking into consideration your industry, employee demographics, geographic locations, size and more. Also, as you develop your workplace mental health initiative, remember to provide access to information for those with speech, hearing and visual disabilities to ensure compliance with the American Disabilities Act (ADA).

Here are some options for raising awareness:

▸ Share information and resources with employees.
  • Key information to share:
    ◉ Early warning signs and prevalence rates of common mental health conditions like depression and anxiety.
      ➜ workplacementalhealth.org/Topics
    ◉ How to start a conversation about mental health.
      ➜ workplacementalhealth.org/MayMHToolkit
    ◉ The importance of getting help early to produce the best outcomes and keep life on track.
    ◉ How to connect with the EAP and mental health and substance use services and supports, and how to support and refer a co-worker for help.

  • Methods for sharing information:
    ◉ Distribute infographics that are engaging and provide easy access to information. As an example, check out these infographics from the Center for Workplace Mental Health:
    ◉ Five Myths vs. Facts About Depression
    ◉ Depression: More Common Than You Think
    ◉ The Collaborative Care Model: A Smart Investment with a High ROI
    ◉ Create a special section of your organization's intranet for information on mental health and substance use conditions, including fact sheets, short video clips, blog posts, announcements, community and external resources and more.
    ◉ Post mental health information in restrooms, employee newsletters, bulletin boards and other high-visibility locations.
    ◉ Include information about mental health in all communications sent out to

employees on health and well-being.

- ◉ Create a spotlight for mental health in your employee newsletters or other publications. Share stories from leaders to reinforce that mental health and substance use conditions impact people at all levels of the organization and that it's okay to talk about it

- ◉ Bring in speakers from community organizations like the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Mental Health America (MHA), and others to share information about the lived experience of mental health conditions. Ask leaders to introduce the speakers and share their personal connections to mental health. The story could be about themselves, unnamed family members, employees, or friends, and could address how they were impacted and any positive outcomes.

- ◉ Include the name of your organization's campaign on mental health in email signatures, reminding people of the importance of the issue.
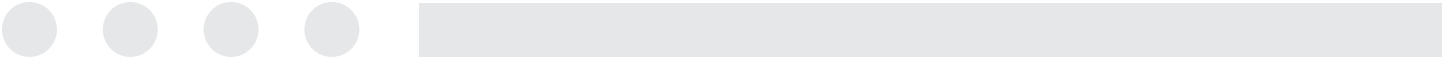
The Center provides free resources for employers on diverse mental health topics that can be shared with employees: workplacementalhealth.org.

- ▶ Consider turn-key trainings focused on mental health. The APAF Center for Workplace Mental Health has programs and resources that help break the silence including:
  - • **Notice. Talk. Act. ® at Work Mental Health Training**
    This 45-minute, e-Learning training module supports leaders, people managers and all employees to:
    - ◉ Raise awareness about the impact of mental health in the workplace
    - ◉ **NOTICE** changes that are not typical and may be signs of a potential mental health concern.
    - ◉ **TALK** by checking in and letting a person know that you care.

◉ **ACT** by connecting a person with services and supports when needed.

If your organization wants to make a commitment to creating a mentally healthy workplace with Notice. Talk. Act.® at Work, visit: workplacementalhealth.org/NTAatWork

Want to see how others have been successful in their mental health initiatives?

The Center's Case Studies highlight employers who have engaged in innovative and exemplary practices in workplace mental health.

To view the case studies, visit workplacementalhealth.org/CaseStudies
Pro Tip: You can search the case studies by key words!

Creating a
Mentally Healthy Culture

By raising awareness and breaking the silence about mental health, organizations take a step towards creating a culture in which employees feel safe and empowered to seek support when it's needed.

Employers increasingly see the value and importance of looking more holistically at employee health and well-being to include emotional and mental health. The investment in the whole person is supported by medical studies linking the interdependence of mind and body.

Stress, which exists in most workplaces, impacts all aspects of health and well-being. It can be both a motivating factor and a deterrent to productivity. Healthy organizations structure work to ensure a balanced workload and offer personal control over how work gets done, opportunities for reward and recognition, fairness in opportunities, and values and purpose in work to help reduce excessive work stress and potential burnout. Healthy workplaces also offer services to promote and build resilience before and during stressful work assignments. These supports include easy access to the EAP, accommodations, mindfulness, team-building exercises, and leadership coaching.

A comprehensive mental health initiative creates a continuum of support from building resilience through supporting mental health conditions, thereby enhancing the healthy functioning of the workplace. Team discussions about workload, pace, priorities, and objectives offer opportunities to build communication skills that strengthen the connection between employees and the organization.

Steps for creating a mentally healthy culture

Ensure that leadership's commitment to mental health is visible.
- Use leadership speeches, presentations, and communications with employees to talk about mental health, and ideally share a personal connection that reinforces "everyone knows someone" impacted by mental health conditions. There is nothing to hide.
- Encourage leaders to model healthy behaviors like setting reasonable work hours, creating healthy boundaries between work and home, recognizing the need to take breaks during the workday, and equipping employees with tools to keep their minds and bodies healthy.

Use all communication vehicles to reinforce the importance of mental health.
Find ways to continually reinforce that mental health is an organizational priority. The more an organization openly communicates about mental health, the more normal these conditions become, creating a safe environment for people to seek help.

Offer manager training.
Train managers to know how best to support employees who may be experiencing anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), high levels of stress, isolation, and related issues. It's also important for managers to know how mental health conditions impact performance, and how to support co-workers on the team. Check out Notice. Talk. Act.® at Work at workplacementalhealth.org/ntaatwork.

Examine your organization's policies and practices to ensure support for employee mental health.

Here are a few to consider:

- Sick leave policies that include mental health leave.
- Flexible work hours and alternative schedules to accommodate employees who take medications or experience conditions that impact functioning at certain times of the day.
- Return to work integration practices to welcome those returning from extended health or mental health leave.

Offer resiliency training.

Excessive stress and burnout in today's fast-paced and high-intensity workplaces create global health concerns. Resilience is a skill that can be mastered with training and repetitive practice, so employees are better equipped to handle the stress of interpersonal conflict, heavy work demands, interrupted sleep, and long work hours.

Offer information and resources on stress reduction and management.

Here are issues to consider in addressing stress:

- Ensure manageable workloads and reasonable deadlines and align employee capability with the demands of the job.
- Recognize the importance of allowing employees to maintain some control over their work.
- Share information about reliable and low-cost online meditation options or apps.
- Conduct mindfulness training virtually or in-person or share information about the value of mindfulness.
- Offer sleep apps for those experiencing challenges with getting to sleep, staying asleep, and waking up refreshed.

Address Burnout

Burnout in the workplace is not new—but it is worsening. SHRM's Employee Mental Health in 2024 Research Series, released for Mental Health Awareness Month in May, found that 44 percent of 1,405 surveyed U.S. employees feel burned out at work, 45 percent feel "emotionally drained" from their work, and 51 percent feel "used up" at the end of the workday. Small changes can lead to big results in reducing and preventing burnout by addressing six key workplace factors (Maslach, 2016).

Here are those factors and tips for addressing them:

- **Workload:** Ensuring people have the time and tools needed to get the job done.
- **Autonomy and Control:** Offering people the chance to have some control over how they perform their work.
- **Reward and Recognition:** Ensuring people are recognized and rewarded for a job well done.
- **Community and Sense of Belonging:** Creating opportunities for people to build trust & mutual support with colleagues.
- **Fairness:** Offering opportunities for people to be promoted and feel like they are treated fairly at work.
- **Values and Purpose in Work:** Supporting people in feeling good about their work and proud of their contributions.

Promote work-life integration and balance.
Enlightened organizations recognize the importance of reasonable work hours, flexibility to address caregiver responsibilities, time away from texts and emails, and convenient services and benefit choices that address a variety of diverse family needs.

Demonstrate fairness, appreciation and respect.
People want to work for organizations that have integrity, the courage to lead, and concern for social wellness

Form and strengthen Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).
Employees can be an extremely helpful resource and support system for one another. ERGs not only provide a space for employees to form communities, but they also demonstrate an organizational commitment to the mental health of employees.

Case Studies: Here are four featured case studies of organizations that engaged in innovative activity in creating a mentally healthy culture:
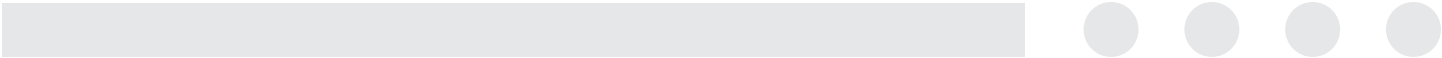
- Barry-Wehmiller – workplacementalhealth.org/Barry-Wehmiller
- Sprint – workplacementalhealth.org/Sprint
- American Express – workplacementalhealth.org/AMEX
- EY – workplacementalhealth.org/EY

To review the Case Studies and learn more about their innovative work, visit workplacementalhealth.org/CaseStudies.

Improving Access
to Services and Supports

Raising awareness, educating the workforce, and creating a healthier culture hold tremendous promise in encouraging employees to take care of their mental health, to seek help when it's needed, and to support co-workers. But it is critical that organizations assess what services and supports are available when employees are seeking help: How easy is it to access support? Do employees know how to access care?

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and health benefit coverage for mental health and substance use conditions are offered by many employers. An increasing number of employers are also offering mental health and wellness apps and digital tools that focus on meditation, mindfulness, and sleep. Some of these tools also provide guidance and coaching for common mental health conditions like anxiety and depression.

Deciding on what digital tools or apps to offer employees for mental health, wellness, stress management, sleep and more is a challenging endeavor for employers because of concerns around privacy, confidentiality, reliability, and effectiveness. The digital tools market is a moving target with new mental health apps and tools coming out regularly. To be safe, when it comes to the mental health digital space, consider consulting with a mental health specialist, counselor, EAP or local mental health agency before deciding on a tool to address mental health related issues.

When it comes to EAPs, many employers express concern with low utilization rates. National rates range from 3% to 6%. Research conducted through the Right Direction Initiative showed that mental health initiatives increase EAP utilization. In planning a workplace mental health initiative, be sure to coordinate the activity with your EAP

Working with your EAP:

- Meet with your EAP to examine existing aggregate data to determine whether employees are using EAP services adequately for mental health issues. Ask how the EAP is counting employee engagement with the EAP and how it is tracking outcomes for counseling sessions.
- Collect baseline EAP data before starting a workplace mental health initiative and compare self- and manager referrals before and after the workplace mental health initiative.
- Be sure employees know that EAP services are available and the value of the services. It is helpful to remind employees often about EAP benefits—well beyond the on-boarding process. Ask leadership to highlight that EAP services are available and lead to good results.
- Take into consideration the reasons employees may not be accessing EAP services for mental health and substance use conditions and address them directly. Here are a few:
    - ◉ Lack of awareness the services exist
    - ◉ Concern about privacy and confidentiality

- ◉ Fear of stigma and judgement by others
  - ◉ Worries about negative work-related consequences
- Find out how many counseling sessions employees and family members are offered. What happens after those sessions are completed and more assistance is needed? Are employees referred to mental health specialists? Does the EAP follow up to ensure employees connected with a mental health care provider?

Working with your health insurers

When it comes to securing mental health care, employees face challenges in locating and accessing timely and effective mental health and substance use treatment. It is important for employers to recognize and address these challenges.

The value in employers addressing access to care is high. When employees access effective and timely mental health and substance use care, employers have a healthier, more productive, more engaged, and higher performing workforce. Also, health care costs are two to threetimes higher for employees with co-occurring mental health and physical health conditions when it comes to treating underlying physical health conditions. For example, people with chronic medical conditions—like cancer, heart disease and diabetes—are at higher risk for depression, making it even more important to improve access to timely and effective mental health care.

Here are common challenges employees face in attempting to access mental health care

- Finding mental health providers in the health plan's network that are accepting new patients, accept insurance, and offer timely appointments.
- Paying for care when psychiatrists and other mental health providers are not accepting insurance, often because of low reimbursement rates and administrative burdens associated with providing in-network care.
- Experiencing long wait times for an appointment because of the shortage of mental health providers.
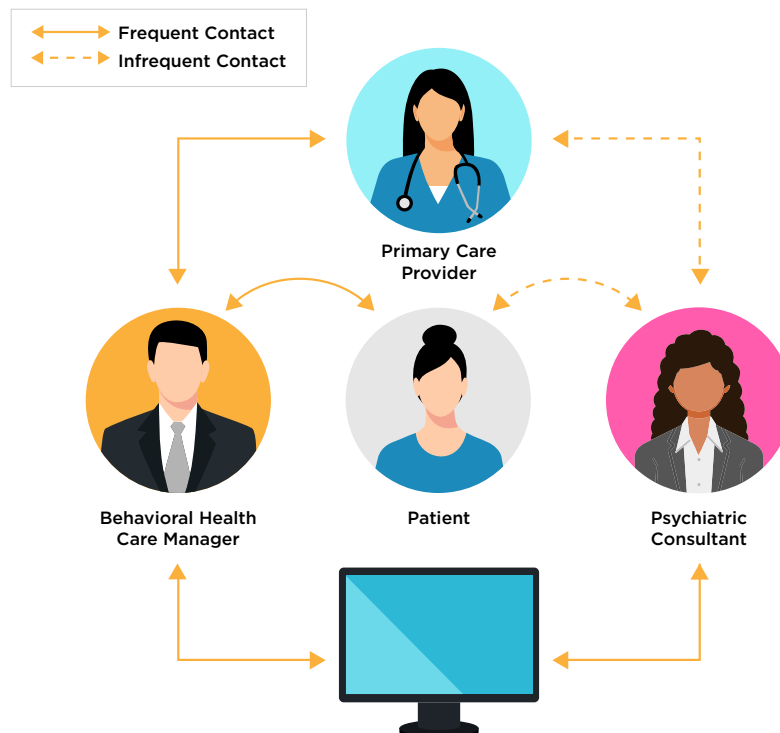
- Finding culturally and racially diverse mental health providers to serve the needs of diverse communities, including the LGBTQI community

These challenges led the Center for Workplace Mental Health and the American Psychiatric Association to join forces in developing recommendations for improving access to mental health and substance use care. These recommendations were developed in consultation with thought leaders representing psychiatrists, large employers, health plans, business groups on health, employer purchasing coalitions and other mental health professionals.

The recommendations provide detailed steps that employers and health plans can take in leveraging their purchasing power to improve access to mental health and substance use care in five key areas:

1. **Supporting the Expansion of the Collaborative Care Model (CoCM):** The CoCM is an evidence-based model that integrates effective mental health care into the primary care setting, achieving high rates of remission for mental health conditions like depression and anxiety, while addressing mental health provider workforce shortages. This infographic illustrates key features of the model: workplacementalhealth.org/CoCMinfo

Frequent Contact
Infrequent Contact

Primary Care Provider

Behavioral Health Care Manager

Patient

Psychiatric Consultant

2. **Supporting the Expansion of Measurement Based Care:** Using validated screening tools, tracking, and reporting on treatment outcomes as part of standard clinical practice that leads to greater accountability and positive treatment outcomes.

3. **Supporting Improving Network Adequacy:** Resulting in people more easily accessing timely, affordable, and effective mental health and substance use care.

4. **Supporting Mental Health Parity Compliance:** Increasing health plan and third-party administrator compliance with state and federal parity laws and regulations to improve access to affordable care.

5. **Sustaining Advances in Offering Tele-Mental Health:** Increasing access to care in otherwise under-served communities and offering choice in the modality of care delivery.

To address challenges with access to care, some employers are creating on-site clinics with counseling, seminars, and therapy, along with providing online access to therapists and counselors. As primary care providers are most often the access point to care, employers can play a key role in supporting improved quality of care and accountability in primary care by holding their health plans accountable for the expansion of the Collaborative Care Model.

Case Studies: Here are three featured case studies of organizations that engaged in innovative activity in improving access to mental health and substance use services and supports:
- Prudential Financial, Inc. – workplacementalhealth.org/Prudential
- Cerner – workplacementalhealth.org/Cerner
- American Express – workplacementalhealth.org/AMEX

Conclusion

Employers around the world recognize the importance of supporting the overall health and well-being of employees, including effectively addressing mental health and substance use conditions. Not only do employers see the bottom-line benefit related to improving employee performance, productivity, engagement, retention, and more, but they know it's the right thing to do.

Mental health conditions are common, impacting more than 46 million Americans and millions more connected with them. These conditions impact people during their prime working years. Yet, only about half connect with treatment to allow them to perform well at work and to keep their lives on track. We can do better, and employers have a key role to play.

Employers are uniquely positioned to support the mental health and well-being of employees, and more are stepping up to do so. The time is now to improve the mental health and well-being of our nation's workforce.

The Center for Workplace Mental Health has resources for employers addressing many areas of employee mental health and is available to provide guidance in developing strategic mental health initiatives. To learn more, contact us at WorkplaceMentalHealth@psych.org

Checklist for Planning Your Workplace Mental Health Initiative

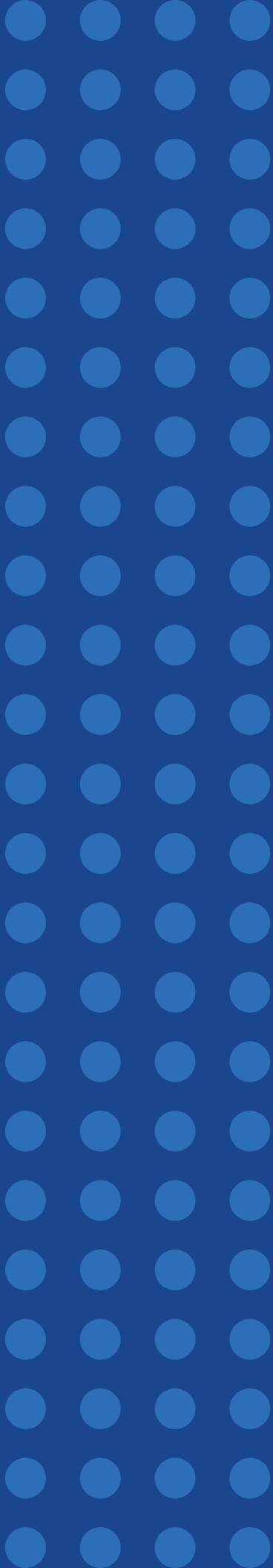| COMPLETE	ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RATIONALE	INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES
	Ensure leadership buy-in and support	Make sure leadership is informed and on board with ensuring the success of the initiative	No mental health initiative succeeds without commitment, support, and communication from leadership	HR or Employee Benefit leads
	Identify and form the project team	Engage a diverse team of stakeholders	Broad representation creates ownership, customization, and consensus	Leadership, EAP, HR, marketing & communications, organizational development
	Set measures and metrics for success	Establish project objectives and how you will measure results	Gain project team consensus on what will be measured & desired results to sustain team engagement	Leader (C-suite level, Director, team leader, business owner)
	Develop a communication plan	Create project name, branding, graphics, and customized messaging	Sustained & consistent promotion communicates commitment	Marketing Communications

COMPLETE	ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RATIONALE	INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES
	Share the plan for implementation and initiative roll-out	Engage key trusted leaders from the project team before launch on expectations of their roles	Employees will ask key trusted leaders about the project. Responses will greatly influence employee receptivity and engagement	Organizational development and/or EAP
	Launch!	Hold 'town hall' and remote meetings, send electronic messages to promote, educate & train employees	Reinforce that leadership is fully supportive, a diverse team developed the initiative & advancement opportunities will not be jeopardized by seeking help	All project team members
	Measure results	Collect data on a quarterly, or pre-determined basis & share with the project team, including leaders	Data and positive results provide the basis for increased investment in growing the initiative, tools, resources & more.	HR or another designated project team member

References

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3. Stangl, A.L., Earnshaw, V.A., Logie, C.H. et al. The Health Stigma and Discrimination Framework: a global, crosscutting framework to inform research, intervention development, and policy on health-related stigmas. BMC Med 17, 31 (2019) doi:10.1186/s12916-019-1271-3. Accessed at https://bmcmedicine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12916-019-1271-3