



A Wake-Up Call for Businesses

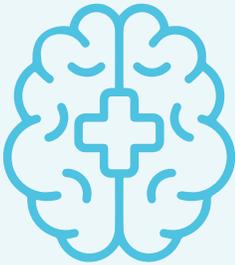
How Mental Health First Aid Helps Organizations Support Employees, Uphold Corporate Social Responsibility, and Address the Growing Mental Health Crisis



Overview

Mental health challenges are reaching crisis levels in the US. Although the problem has been growing over time, experts blame the pandemic for the recent and precipitous rise in mental illness. The isolation, anxiety, economic uncertainty, political strife, and societal unrest have all contributed to widespread mental health challenges. The figures are alarming:

According to a 2021 study conducted by Mind Share Partners and reported in *Harvard Business Review*, **76% of surveyed employees recounted at least one symptom of a mental health condition.**¹ This marks an 18% increase from the equivalent 2019 survey.



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported a **5.1% increase in the number of adults with recent symptoms of an anxiety or depressive disorder** between August 2020 and February 2021.²

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, **the average delay between symptom onset and treatment is 11 years**³, which means people are suffering for a long time before addressing the problem.

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Impact of Mental Illness on Individuals, Families, and Organizations.⁴

Like all medical issues, mental illness has costs—and these are borne by individuals, families, and organizations.

Individuals living with a mental illness have increased risk profiles for many other health and wellness metrics:

- 40% higher risk of cardiovascular and metabolic disease.
- 18% more likely to have a substance abuse disorder.
- 6.4% higher unemployment rates.
- 76% of surveyed employees reported experiencing workplace burnout, which can lead to anxiety, stress, depression, and mental illness.

For full discussion of this topic, see *Wellness Coaches' white paper:*

[Restoring Workplace Health, Well-being and Productivity](#)

Families of individuals living with mental illness and substance use issues also suffer serious consequences, including:

- 32 unpaid hours a week on average spent caring for the relative living with a mental illness.
- Stress, uncertainty, and financial instability stemming from the behavior and condition of the person living with a mental health issue.

Organizations and businesses are also impacted by mental illness. A study by the National Safety Council and the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago found:⁵

- Employees experiencing mental distress spend, on average, nearly \$3,000 more in health care service benefits per year than their peers.
- Mental illness-related absenteeism costs businesses an average \$4,783 per employee per year.
- Businesses incur annual turnover costs of approximately \$5,733 per employee affected with mental illness.

However, the news is not all bad. More and more individuals are seeking help and speaking up about their struggles. This openness has reduced the stigma around mental illness, which has encouraged more people to access support and treatment.

In addition, many proactive businesses are adopting a more holistic view of their role as employers. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is becoming the norm, with companies embracing a culture of good corporate citizenship with respect to the community, the environment, and the economy. To that end, companies are expected to provide comprehensive health and wellness services beyond a basic medical benefits package. As part of this commitment, many businesses consider employee mental health as a corporate social responsibility, and are providing support services such as Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) as part of their benefits and wellness plans.

What is Mental Health First Aid?

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is an international education program certified by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing. MHFA is proven to be effective in training individuals to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. The course provides the skills needed to reach out and provide initial help and support to someone who may be approaching or experiencing a mental health, substance use, or emotional crisis.⁶ Mental Health First Aid is intended to be a preliminary step toward helping an individual accept support. It is not a formal diagnostic tool, nor a long-term treatment plan, and does not take the place of professional medical, psychological, or psychiatric care. In the same way that administering CPR to a heart attack victim does not replace a cardiologist, or applying pressure to staunch the bleeding from a serious wound does not replace a surgeon, Mental Health First Aid serves as the initial step toward helping the individual in crisis, but does not replace the care of a psychologist or psychiatrist.

What Is and Isn't Included in MHFA

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| ✔ Recognizing signs/symptoms of mental illness | ✔ Recognizing signs/symptoms of substance use |
| ✔ Offering relevant information | ✔ Educating on available professional help, referring people to appropriate professional services and resources |
| ✔ Active listening, empathy, non-judgement acceptance, and encouragement | ✔ Reassurance through de-escalation techniques and calming language |
| ✘ Diagnosing mental illness or substance abuse | ✘ Prescribing medical or psychological treatment |

Corporate Social Responsibility and Mental Health

A focus on the mental health of its team is a meaningful demonstration of a company's commitment to CSR. Companies who do not take this seriously risk the ability to attract and retain talent in this competitive market.

Today's employees require that companies prioritize CSR in general, and workforce mental health in particular. If recruits fail to see authentic, measurable commitment, they will look elsewhere.

How MHFA Delivers a Solution

One way to uphold CSR and support workforce mental health is to select MHFA-credentialed, well-trained health and wellness providers. By confirming that providers who deliver benefits to employees are all MHFA-trained, companies are ensuring that their employees are engaging with professionals who can identify and triage mental health or substance use crises that may arise. This is important, because individuals heading for a crisis may not have the ability or awareness to seek the appropriate treatment. However, their existing providers, which could include a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, Wellness Coach, Safety and Injury Prevention Coach, and/or Smoking Cessation Coach, will be trained to identify the problem and provide initial help in the hopes of averting an acute crisis.

These MHFA-trained professionals utilize the ALGEE Strategy to act quickly and help individuals in need of urgent support. It is an action plan, a toolkit, that provides invaluable steps to assisting people in distress:



How to Select a MHFA Provider

The key to selecting an effective MHFA provider is to ensure that the approach is fully integrated through all health and wellness services. The value of MHFA is that it can be delivered by all wellness professionals—it is not a discrete service, but rather an overarching mindset that infuses all aspects of health and wellness programming.

When everyone involved in the health and wellness of the workforce is certified in MHFA, it greatly increases the likelihood that employees who may struggle with mental health and substance use will receive timely help. Because the providers are trained to be on the lookout for warning signs, they can proactively identify and address issues as they arise. This enables productive intervention and connection to appropriate support resources.

Evaluation and Value on Investment

Studies show a strong value on investment for companies that address employee mental health. According to a 2021 study by the National Safety Council, employers that support mental health see a return of \$4 for every \$1 invested in mental health treatment.⁸

McKinsey Global states the following with regard to companies' commitment to mental health: "If companies make mental health services more accessible and intervene in the workplace in ways that improve well-being, they will simultaneously make investments that will provide real improvements in employee outcomes and consequently in company performance."⁹

Conclusion

Depression and anxiety disorders cost the global economy \$1 trillion annually.¹⁰ There is an unquestionable need for companies to address mental health as part of their overall benefits plans. By providing a comprehensive program of health and wellness that includes qualified providers trained in Mental Health First Aid, employers can take a critical step to supporting the mental health of their workforces.

A full-service corporate wellness plan that integrates MHFA can deliver quantifiable benefits to a company's bottom line. Providing a full suite of proven health and wellness services also advances a company's corporate social responsibility, which is increasingly important to maintaining competitiveness in today's market.



About Wellness Coaches

Wellness Coaches is one of the largest and most experienced wellness, nutrition, and injury prevention coaching providers for the workplace, utilizing both onsite and virtual expertise to help employers reduce population health risks and reduce costs. In addition, since the start of the pandemic, Wellness Coaches has delivered new COVID-19 solutions including vaccine administration, testing, nursing services and other capabilities designed to help employees return to work safely.



Citations

- ¹ Greenwood, Kelly, and Julia Anas. "It's a New Era for Mental Health at Work." *Harvard Business Review*, 15 Nov. 2021, <https://hbr.org/2021/10/its-a-new-era-for-mental-health-at-work>.
- ² "Symptoms of Anxiety or Depressive Disorder and Use of Mental Health Care among Adults during the COVID-19 Pandemic - United States, August 2020–February 2021." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 Apr. 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7013e2.htm>.
- ³ "Mental Health by the Numbers." NAMI, <https://www.nami.org/mhstats>.
- ⁴ "Mental Health by the Numbers." NAMI, <https://www.nami.org/mhstats>.
- ⁵ "New Mental Health Cost Calculator Shows Why Investing in Mental Health Is Good for Business." *National Safety Council*, <https://www.nsc.org/newsroom/new-mental-health-cost-calculator-demonstrates-why>.
- ⁶ "About MHFA." *Mental Health First Aid*, 9 Mar. 2021, <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/about/>.
- ⁷ "Algee: How MHFA Helps You Respond in Crisis and Non-Crisis Situations." *Mental Health First Aid*, 15 Apr. 2021, <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2021/04/algee-how-mhfa-helps-you-respond-in-crisis-and-non-crisis-situations/>.
- ⁸ "New Mental Health Cost Calculator Shows Why Investing in Mental Health Is Good for Business." *National Safety Council*, <https://www.nsc.org/newsroom/new-mental-health-cost-calculator-demonstrates-why>.
- ⁹ Pfeffer, Jeffrey, and Leanne Williams. "Mental Health in the Workplace: The Coming Revolution." *McKinsey & Company*, McKinsey & Company, 1 July 2021, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare-systems-and-services/our-insights/mental-health-in-the-workplace-the-coming-revolution>.
- ¹⁰ "Mental Health by the Numbers." NAMI, <https://www.nami.org/mhstats>.