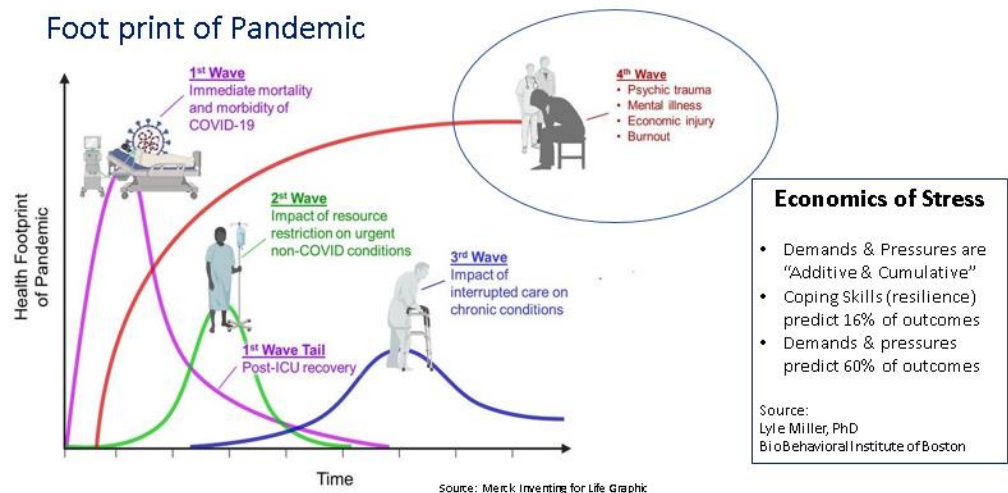


## MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES: AN EMERGING CONCERN FROM THE PANDEMIC

Among the significant concerns emerging from COVID-19 is an increase in mental health concerns. Health research firm IQVIA reported a 10.2% year-to-year increase in anti-anxiety medication prescriptions and a 9.2% increase in anti-depressants between March 2019 and March 2020. Express Scripts reported a 34% increase in anti-anxiety medicines, a 19% increase in anti-depressants and a 15% increase in sleep medications between mid-February and mid-March. Forty-six percent of parents with children under the age of 18 reported stress levels of between 8 and 10 points on a 10-point scale according to a recent survey conducted by the American Psychiatric Association. Mental health issues vary by location. Forty-six percent of people living in urban areas say COVID-19 has impacted their mental health, compared to 38% of suburban residents and 28% of rural residents, according to a May survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

The National Alliance of Healthcare Purchasers Coalition has cautioned that the psychic trauma from the COVID-19 pandemic may surpass and linger much longer than the mortality and morbidity of the infection itself. That could impact health plan costs both directly and indirectly. The National Council for Behavioral Health estimates that the annual average medical costs for people with co-occurring chronic conditions and behavioral health conditions is 9.4 times higher than those without.



### Recommendations

Proactive measures can mitigate the potential for higher health care costs and lost productivity due to COVID-19. The National Safety Council recommends:

- Providing a confidential help line or email address that employees can use to raise concerns and ask for help anonymously
- Provide links to national support resources, including the National Alliance on Mental Illness and the CDC
- Ensure return-to-work policies are flexible

Health plans should also monitor aggregate prescription drug usage, especially for anti-anxiety, anti-depressant and sleep medications in order to identify emerging mental health issues.

### Sources:

"More People Are Taking Drugs for Anxiety and Insomnia, and Doctors are Worried," *Wall Street Journal* (May 25, 2020)

National Alliance of HealthCare Purchasers Coalition: "COVID-19 Town Hall 05 14 Financial Impact of COVID19"

*The Real World Impact of Integrated Medical-Behavioral HealthCare*, TheNationalCouncil.Org.

*The Employer Role: Mental Health During COVID-19*, National Safety Council

Kaiser Family Foundation May 2020 Tracking Poll