

SPECIAL REPORT

Empathy + Benefits:
The Key Combination for
Supporting Employee
Mental Health

As the COVID-19 pandemic has made clear, well-being in every sense — physical, mental and financial — is a critical issue.

From social isolation to economic uncertainty to the very real risk of a dangerous virus, employees in all industries and across all demographics are facing unprecedented pressure on their mental health.

Yet the effects of the crisis are impacting segments of the workforce differently. Some industries have transitioned to remote work, whereas others, such as health care, have employees on the front lines of the crisis facing difficult conditions every day. Likewise, Gen Z is just starting their careers or looking for employment for the first time while some of their older employee counterparts who are more established professionally and financially are considering retirement. Yet across all demographics, only 69% of employees believe that all levels of their company are empathetic towards employee mental health.

Organizations must now find empathetic and effective ways to support the mental health and overall well-being of this diverse workforce.

Employees' mental health was a significant issue before the pandemic, but now it's front and center and must be addressed. Our entire workforce is grappling with new risks and severe economic turmoil, all of which affect mental well-being.

- ▶ **96%** of employees say that mental health is just as important as physical health, yet **64%** also say that if someone at their company reached out about a mental health issue, it could put their job at risk.
- ▶ **92%** of employees and **100%** of HR professionals think organizations should be doing more for overall well-being and needs of their employees.

Leadership and employees don't see eye-to-eye when it comes to empathetic approaches to mental health. In their elevated role of Chief Empathy Officer, executive leadership must close the gap between themselves and how their employees perceive mental health initiatives.

- ▶ **97%** of CEOs say all levels of their organization are empathetic to employees' mental health, but only **69%** of employees agree.
- ▶ **58%** of employees vs. **86%** of CEOs believe that their employer openly discusses the importance of mental health with their employees, a large and disconcerting gap.



64%

Employees who say coming forward about a mental health issue could impact job security.



58% of employees



86% of CEOs

58% of employees vs. 86% of CEOs believe that their employer openly discusses the importance of mental health with their employees.

Organizations can empathetically support employee mental health by offering related employee benefits. When employers provide mental health and financial assistance programs, employees more often perceive them as empathetic.

- ▶ When asked if their company offers mental health benefits, **76%** of CEOs said yes, but only **51%** of employees said the same — a 25-point difference.
- ▶ **90%** of employees believe that companies who offer individual mental health benefits are more empathetic than companies who do not.
- ▶ **95%** of CEOs believe that companies who offer their employees emergency financial assistance (e.g. disaster relief, unexpected medical finds) are more empathetic to their employees.



76% of CEOs vs. 51% of employees say we currently offer mental health benefits

Employers must emphasize their commitment to employee mental health like never before. Leaders need to craft empathetic approaches that can meet industry-specific challenges or the different pain points experienced by the record-setting four generations actively working today.

Here's where leadership can begin:



Highlight flexibility and support systems. Whether employees are working from home, splitting shifts, working outside typical hours or furloughed, the boundaries around work and the rest of our lives have changed significantly and created renewed concerns around mental health. Offering flexibility in whatever way possible is consistently seen as empathetic and can help employees manage caregiving, homeschooling, health issues and more.



Openly acknowledge and discuss the importance of mental health. This must start at the top and cascade down to all levels of leadership within an organization to support employees through open dialogue and communication. Provide leaders with clear messaging on how to share information about available resources and arm them with training on how to have empathetic conversations with employees who are struggling.



Communicate benefits offerings. Now is the time when employees need their benefits the most — especially Employee Assistance Programs and other benefits offering short-term counseling or referrals. In fact, 92% of employees say benefits are a good way to show empathy, so look for ways to get messages out. Texts, emails, benefits app messages and social media offer different ways to reach employees where they are.



Meet the needs of the whole person. The pandemic crisis will impact our world for a long time to come, and people will continue to cope and find healing through different avenues. Leaders need to ensure employees have access to mental health support, opportunities to volunteer in their communities and incentive to grow and develop their skills as the economy changes. Only by supporting the overall growth and mental health of employees can leaders build resilient workforces for the future.



Find out what your employees need for better well-being and challenge your organization to lead with empathy. [Learn more at businessolver.com/empathy.](https://www.businessolver.com/empathy)

The Businessolver State of Workplace Empathy Study was conducted in February 2020 and surveyed 1,950 employees, CEOs and HR professionals across sectors.