



CRISIS RESPONSE: A Pathway to Proactive Mental Health

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If it wasn't clear already, the publicity around [World Mental Health Day 2021](#), brought home the point—Covid-19 has increased the awareness and recognition of mental health. Up until early 2020, most organizational leaders focused on the impact on mental health in terms of employee productivity, health costs, engagement, customer service and other correlates. Today, they are focused on mental health on its own—stress, depression, anxiety, and work/family issues that the pandemic has amplified. This recognition is a good thing and means better care and funding of well-being and behavioral health services. However, by no means has the stigma surrounding mental health gone away.

For health and wellness advocates, we have an opportunity to capitalize on the increased awareness for behavioral health. This awareness was brought about by isolation, uncertainty, financial hardship, social divisiveness, and other effects of pandemic adjustments and has led to programs that foster resilience and increased the value of EAP and wellness services. Expanding access to care and measuring impact through apps like [Wellness Checkpoint](#) or [WellRight](#) and leveraging telehealth through providers like [Lyra Health](#) or [Eutelmed](#) are examples that have leveraged technology and blossomed over the past two years.

In most countries outside the US where providers and behavioral health resources are more limited and funding is nearly non-existent, technology can also play an important role in cutting

through stigma and increasing access to care. However another valuable pathway to get through the stigma and address mental health is **crisis response**—for natural disasters, violence in the workplace, terrorist attacks and other lower profile but equally traumatic losses. When a crisis occurs, those affected are often in acute need and more open to help. Responsive assistance to help normalize the varied emotional reactions to a crisis is inherently valuable, and also appreciated by co-workers not directly impacted by a crisis. With a focused and professional crisis response, organizational leaders have a sincerely compassionate way to support employees, and this can lead to investments in more proactive mental health services.

As summarized in the just released [2021 CHRO Insights Report Trauma and Mental Health in the Workplace](#) published by [One Mind at Work](#) and the [SHRM Foundation](#), trauma and workplace violence affect the majority of people in the course of their work lives. Further, the impact of trauma and mental health issues costs employers thousands of dollars per employee in health and productivity—[over \\$13,000 more per year](#) compared to employees without mental health concerns.

Jeff Gorter ([R3 Continuum](#)) and I joined Kathy Farmer, VP Global Benefits at Levi Strauss & Co. and Dr. Tom Insel, Co-founder of [MindStrong](#) and past director of [NIMH](#) at One Mind at Work's [fifth annual forum](#) in St. Helena, CA this past September. Moderated by One Mind Executive VP, Daryl Tol, the panel emphasized the importance of acknowledging and addressing crises in the workplace as an important employee benefit and risk management strategy, and an approach that cultivates winning cultures.

As we turn the corner on Covid, let us bring forward the lessons on resilience and adaptability and continue to acknowledge the importance mental health at work, in our families, and our aspirations.

Dave Levine has worked in the workplace counseling since 1980, and has managed the development of national and international EAP/WorkLife and behavioral health and wellness programs. Based in Minnesota now, he is the principal at [Global Care Experts](#), and previously lead development for industry players including Optum/UnitedHealth, ComPsych, Medco/Merck Behavioral (forerunner of Magellan), Human Affairs International/Aetna, and the Hazelden Foundation. He received his MSW from the University of Minnesota and his undergraduate degree from Augsburg College in Minneapolis.