



Employer Case Study: American Express



U.S. Headquarters

New York, NY

Number of Employees

50,000

Industry

Finance and Insurance

American Express: Embracing A Culture of Mental Health

American Express is providing “the next generation of health care for its employees,” according to global corporate medical director Wayne Burton, MD. This means looking at physical health and emotional health holistically, connecting the pieces across a wide spectrum of services, and garnering visible support from senior leaders and line managers. As a result, Burton and his team are decreasing the incidence of medical and behavioral health claims.

For their efforts, American Express was recognized by the American Psychological Association for “outstanding efforts to promote employee well-being and organizational performance” and was awarded the American Psychological Association’s inaugural Organizational Excellence Award in 2015. The national-level recognition is designed to highlight the effective application of psychology in the workplace — whether addressing mental health, applying good behavioral science to safety practices, using learning theory to strengthen training efforts, or a host of other ways in which psychology can promote well-being and performance.

A Focus on Behavioral Health

In their summary of American Express programs, the American Psychological Association describes several areas that have been Burton’s focus since joining American Express in 2009 (see full details here). Additional information is included below.

Note: The American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association are separate organizations that serve their respective bodies of professionals: psychologists and psychiatrists, respectively. The Partnership for Workplace Mental Health is a program of the American Psychiatric Association Foundation. For more information about the Organizational Excellence award, contact David Ballard at d Ballard@apa.org, or see www.apaexcellence.org.

Expanding the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

The company's anonymous, aggregated health risk assessment data showed that, as in many companies, stress, mental health, and behavioral health conditions were a focus of American Express employees, and employees indicated that they were looking for support in these areas. Originally, the company offered a telephone-only EAP that had a utilization rate in-line with the national average of approximately 4%. By adding onsite professionals for free, face-to-face counseling sessions in regional wellness centers in the United States, and rebranding the EAP as part of the "Healthy Living" program, covering lifestyle, safety, and disease management, utilization more than doubled.

"At American Express we take a holistic approach to wellness," explains David Kasiaz, senior vice president of Global Talent, Rewards and Learning. "By integrating our healthcare, mental well-being, and financial wellness initiatives, we have created a comprehensive benefits program that has had both a profound and positive impact on the company and our employees."

Developing Healthy Minds

In 2012, with the addition of Charles Lattarulo, PhD, as global director of Healthy Minds, the company introduced a major strategy to destigmatize mental health conditions and to appeal to a wider audience through enhanced communications, education, and behavior change programs under the umbrella of "Healthy Minds," a component of "Healthy Living." Lattarulo contends, "The degree to which we embed mental health into the culture of the company is the degree to which mental health will improve." A major component of the culture change strategy is enhancing communication about mental health. Several extensive world-wide communication campaigns have taken place over the past several years to expand awareness and to increase conversations about mental health.

Health and Wellness Leadership Team at American Express:

Wayne Burton, MD, chief medical officer

Charles Lattarulo, PhD, global director, Healthy Minds

Dave Kasiaz, PhD, senior vice president of Global Compensation and Benefits

The “One in Four” campaign, featuring actress Glenn Close, drew attention to how many people will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime. In the next campaign, “[I Will Listen](#),” a joint effort with the National Alliance on Mental Illness – New York City Metro, American Express leaders from around the globe posted videos pledging their support for mental health in their workplace. With the “[Time to Talk](#)” campaign, employees in the UK were invited to take five minutes to talk about mental health in a meeting or a one-on-one conversation and to record the time they spent talking through an online collection tool on the company’s intranet. The conversation could be about a personal experience, a movie depicting a mental health challenge, or resources available through the company. Employees logged over 24 hours “talk time” through the campaign.

In addition, behavior change programs and resources have incorporated evidence-based practices, pilot testing and rigorous evaluation, as well as consideration of cultural differences and norms across the globe. Examples include online applications that teach skills based on cognitive behavior therapy, “Find Your Brighter Side” webinars available in multiple time zones, and a meditation program available by telephone.

Departmental Collaboration

Other company programs have reached out to Lattarulo for ways to incorporate mental health into the activities they offer employees. For example, a nurse in occupational health created a sleep enhancement program that included mindfulness meditation as a strategy, as well as a diabetes management program with mental health components. Wellness coaches added mental-health-related activities to their “Energize Me” campaign after consultation with Lattarulo.

Support From Leaders and Managers

As medical director, Burton has gained the attention of leadership since 2009 through consistently linking health to key performance measures and by broadening the business case for workplace health and productivity. In February of 2016, American Express received the Enterprise Health Management & Performance Award at the annual forum of the Integrated Benefits Institute. Attention to aggregated, trend-level data and an understanding of the close tie between physical health and mental health allowed Burton to expand attention to strategies for a stronger behavioral health focus.

In addition to receiving the [American Psychological Association’s Organizational Excellence Award](#), American Express’s medical director, Wayne Burton, received the [Mark Dundon Research Award](#) from the Health Education Research Organization. This award honors Burton’s efforts to advance the science of employee health management.

“I have always believed that physical and emotional wellbeing are equally important elements of a healthy workforce,” explains Burton. “To truly care for our employees, I knew we needed to bring on a full-time mental health professional and create a dedicated program that complimented the healthcare benefits already available in our wellness centers.”

The Healthy Minds campaigns, educational resources, and EAP services are promoted to leaders through frequent blogs available to managers and by Burton’s and Lattarulo’s regular participation in leadership meetings. “The company truly believes in treating employees and customers well,” Lattarulo shares. “Leaders here are visibly involved in all of our wellness efforts. It’s part of our culture.”

Summary

American Express has strong commitment to providing resources and integrated health services for employees and their families and to building a culture of health. Extending their reach by including a high-level manager whose time is 100% devoted to mental health makes American Express an innovative leader in employee health and well-being.

Employer Take-Aways

From the work at American Express, what programs or activities might your organization consider?

- Does your organization screen for mental health conditions?
- Do you use aggregated, trend-level data to build a business case for focusing on mental health?
- Do you have a staff member dedicated to mental health promotion?
- Do you recruit leaders to talk openly about mental health and support services available through your company?
- Do you offer a variety of mental health supports and formats (e.g., learning and intervention programs available by phone or computer, mental health components added to other programs, such as fitness or chronic condition management)?

About American Express

American Express is a global services company that provides innovative payment, travel, and expense management solutions for individuals and businesses of all sizes. They have than 50,000 employees across the world.

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