

Views

7 best practices for implementing a successful mental well-being strategy EBN

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As the demand for employee mental health services grows, so, too, does the crowd of corresponding platforms, services and vendors. Unfortunately, HR is tasked with sorting through the jumble to unearth what's best for their specific organization. That's just step one.

Beyond vetting mental health offerings, HR must also integrate the final choices with one another *and* with existing benefits, not to mention implement and promote each and all. This process can quickly become a mystery or a complex challenge. Having a mental well-being strategy helps.

A proactive mental well-being strategy helps to position an organization as one that values mental health. A solid strategy will also spell out a detailed plan for deploying multiple mental or behavioral health solutions across a workforce, based on resources that have been – or will be – purchased by the organization. Partnering with a top-tier EAP throughout the process can be highly beneficial, as EAPs have extensive experience operating as well-being hubs.

But first, a key question: what is well-being?

Workplace well-being involves a holistic approach to achieving emotional and physical wellness, which ultimately drives organizational prosperity.

Evidence of this includes employees who work productively and creatively, build positive relationships with one another, cope with stress and make meaningful contributions. In addition, employees who are physically and emotionally well are more likely to reach their potential and enjoy what they do.

One requisite of a well-being strategy is the provision of a level playing field where work demands are reasonable and people speak openly about mental health without fear of stigma or consequences. Organizational culture is key to this environment, as it will end up reinforcing or undermining the strategy.

Ensuring a successful rollout

For a well-being strategy to succeed, an organization needs to demonstrate support for individual employees, families, managers and leaders – and their distinct requirements. Coordination is also key, as all aspects of the enterprise will be involved. As a result, individuals will receive the personal support they need, while the strategy will help the organization structure its teams, make decisions, shape its culture, and adapt with the times.

Consortium, a think-tank of top-tier EAPs and managed behavioral health providers who serve more than 30 million lives globally. Drawing on consolidated input from members, NBC has outlined seven best practices for implementing a successful mental health strategy.

If you are an HR leader charged with building and implementing a well-being strategy, the seven NBC practices below are worth keeping in mind.

An effective well-being strategy should reflect the unique culture, needs and resources of the organization it serves. Budget, of course, is also a factor. As with any emotional or physical health undertaking, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. However, most strategies begin with an inventory of current workforce benefits and services, along with, of course, the fundamentals of any strategy (process, timeline, etc.)

Subsequent steps may involve everything from an employee taskforce that modifies the strategy to a health plan reconfiguration that minimizes barriers to care. But in general, an effective wellbeing strategy:

- is holistic and preventive
- respects privacy
- emphasizes diversity, equity and inclusion
- leverages the latest technologies
- enables employees to access services in many different ways
- extends services to family members
- connects businesses with their community resources
- evolves over time

1. Understand what's *really* involved !"

2. Don't go it alone

A major challenge" with the rollout of mental health services, digital or otherwise, is managing the process from discovery to delivery. HR professionals essentially have four options: do-it-yourself, add the task to someone's job description (assuming they have mental or behavioral health experience), hire an outside vendor, or turn to your EAP.

As mentioned earlier, top-tier EAPs have proven experience as workplace wellbeing hubs, vetting, integrating, implementing, promoting and providing multiple, diverse solutions. This extends beyond counseling to include integration with health plan networks, childcare, elder care, legal services, and a broad range of other stress-drivers.

Equally indispensable, EAPs understand corporate culture and needs, and can provide leadership coaching, crisis management and other *organizational* well-being services. Most important of all, full-service EAPs combine technology platforms with a personal touch, which is crucial to helping employees in crisis.

3. Hold leaders and managers accountable

Leaders are ultimately responsible for ensuring the positive impact of a well-being strategy. Successful strategies have top-down support and identify champions for physical and mental wellbeing at all levels. These well-being apostles must work together to overcome obstacles and remove barriers to getting help.

Furthermore, leaders and managers must be visibly and enthusiastically involved, and remain accountable for maintaining a mentally healthy workforce. Some of these skills may require training, but without them, your strategy is likely to fizzle and fade.

4. Involve employees

Involving employees in the development and deployment of a well-being strategy increases the chances of success. For example, having management collaborate with an employee wellbeing taskforce can help with overall acceptance. Employee engagement can also simplify data collection, analysis and reporting on overall well-being program results. Simply stated, the people most affected by the strategy should help shape it.

5. Create a technology roadmap

In the past, 80% of well-being strategies were centered around the ability to deliver services in the workplace. That won't be the case tomorrow. It is estimated that only 20% of well-being services will be delivered onsite in the future. Tech platforms are essential to maximizing engagement because they offer convenient, simple access and many doors to entry. While technology cannot replace the need for a human touch when mental health is at stake, it has become a critical complement to personal support.

Tech platforms are, of course, also key to integrating multiple services, as well as to data analysis and reporting – all of which will only grow in importance as workplaces invest

more money in employee well-being. Over and above that, your roadmap must be open to new routes and future curves because technology evolves so rapidly. That means your well-being strategy must continually flex and change accordingly.

6. Develop a broad communications plan

Most employees are unaware of the mental health resources that are offered over time. Constant reminders are essential. Many organizations have benefitted from engaging communication experts who brand their well-being strategy. Regardless of whether an organization offers three well-being programs or 20, an ongoing professional communication strategy is the only way a well-being solution will remain prominent enough to make a difference.

7. Anticipate the challenges (As best you can)

As organizations add well-being programs, each must be coached about all the services that are available. That's one challenge. It is critical to avoid tacking on new programs without taking time to assess *all* of what's currently in place. That's challenge number two. You must conduct a well-being inventory and data analysis, potentially encompassing recruiting and turnover data, health plan and EAP data", culture surveys, and more. !"

Additionally, challenges may arise related to leadership skills, employee resistance, technology gaps, and other organizational characteristics. The deeper you dig up front when creating your strategy, the less likely you'll be digging yourself out of a hole in the future.

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