

Lyra

2022 Workforce Mental Health Trends Forecast



As the dust settles after nearly two years of upheaval, today's employers and employees inhabit a new world of work. The pandemic has upended the way we work and accelerated the urgency around supporting employee mental health—but that need existed well before COVID-19, and will persist long after the pandemic ends.

"The pandemic changed a lot of things—probably permanently—about the relationship between people and the way they view work. This intimately ties in to the job stress-mental health link," said Chester Spell, PhD, a professor of management at Rutgers University who studies psychological health and well-being in organizations. "Employers are realizing the veil has been lifted and are looking for ways to attract and retain good employees."

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A record [4.4 million workers](#) in the United States quit their jobs in September amid what's being called the [Great Resignation](#). This mass exodus of workers is partly what's fueling a transformational shift in employee expectations and employers' focus on workers' priorities and needs. Chief among those needs is support for employees' increasingly prevalent and serious mental health challenges.

In Lyra Health's new survey of 1,000 full-time workers across the U.S., more than a third (31 percent) said their mental health declined over the past year. Meanwhile, 84 percent said it's at least somewhat important to them that a prospective employer offer mental health care benefits. And 59 percent said they would stay at a job *because* "it provides robust and comprehensive mental health benefits."



84%

of workers said mental health benefits are important when considering a new job.



59%

said they would stay at a job because it provides robust mental health benefits.

Going into 2022, companies are increasingly taking action to attract and retain top talent by focusing on employees' well-being—including meaningful support for their mental health. And more and more companies are not only responding to the heightened demand but also seizing this transformational shift in the workplace to reimagine workforce mental health.

What strategies will leading businesses use to address mental health at work in the year ahead? Here are our top predictions, based on insights from Lyra clinicians, third-party experts, and our recent surveys of employees and employee benefit leaders across the U.S.

1. Employer-provided mental health support will continue to rise to meet soaring demand

As workers' mental health challenges have become ever more apparent during the pandemic, so too have their expectations of mental support from their employers. This is not lost on HR professionals: 60 percent of the 250 employee benefit leaders in Lyra's latest survey said employee expectations around mental health support rose over the past year. And the vast majority (92 percent) said providing mental health support became a higher priority for their company over the past year, with 93 percent predicting it will remain a high priority in the three years ahead.



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This support may manifest in a variety of ways, including more educational mental health programs and training and investment in mental health-related employee resource groups (ERGs). It will also likely mean more organizations invest in dedicated mental health benefits that bridge the [long-standing gaps in access](#) to care found under many health insurance plans or traditional employee assistance programs (EAPs).

In a tightening labor market, what was once seen as a nice-to-have or elite perk—not unlike fertility benefits or pet bereavement leave—will become more standard in 2022, especially in highly competitive industries such as financial services and health care. “Employees are getting more savvy about [mental health benefits], and it’s an employees’ market now,” said Joe Grasso, senior director of workforce mental health at Lyra. “Employers are forced to listen to those demands in a way they haven’t before.”

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2. Flexible work policies that benefit mental health will become a mainstay

In 2022, we expect companies to give employees expanded options and control over how they work, with the aim of boosting workforce morale, engagement, and retention. Over the past two years, both employers and employees got a crash course on the importance of flexible work. Offering flexibility around where and when people get their work done was essential in the early days of the pandemic as organizations grappled with COVID health and safety restrictions and workers rearranged their lives around health concerns, school closures, and other disruptions.

While the worst of these upheavals may be behind us, people now value flexible work more than ever—in fact, 69 percent of employees in our latest survey said flexible work policies such as remote work and work-from-home days are “very important” to them. Employees ranked flexible work second in importance among a list of key benefits only after health, dental, and vision benefits.

Workers are likely to pay attention to “any initiative, policy, or change that increases a sense of control,” said Spell. “This includes flexible scheduling, telecommuting ... or any policy that allows people to call their own shots as much as possible.” By contrast, companies that have taken flexible work options off the table have already seen a considerable [employee backlash](#).

Many employers are also finding that the advantages of flexible work—fewer physical workspace-related costs, better employee morale, [lower turnover](#), and [greater productivity](#)—outweigh the disadvantages. “Organizations are learning that optimum productivity can be achieved through increased flexibility about the location and timing of work,” said Vishwanath Baba, PhD, a professor of management at McMaster University. “In addition, the pool of skilled knowledge workers that [organizations] can have access to has become much larger.”



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3. More attention to the mental health needs of kids and families

Over the past year and a half, employers have witnessed COVID-19’s mental health fallout not only for workers but also their children and families. While [nearly one in five](#) children had a mental health condition pre-pandemic, that number appears to have risen. Six in 10 parents in an [October 2020 survey](#) said their child had experienced emotional or mental health challenges in the past month, and a third reported that their child’s mental health had declined during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, access to the care kids need remains scarce: According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), “Only about 20 percent of children with mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders receive care from a specialized mental health care provider.” These unmet mental health needs take a significant toll on working parents. “The mental health of

parents and children are inextricably linked,” said Kendall Browne, PhD, program manager of workforce mental health at Lyra. “Knowing that your child is struggling is a profound stressor for a parent. Few things are going to take your employee off of their A-game more than their child needing help.”

Fortunately, employers appear to be increasingly aware of these struggles. One in four benefits leaders in our recent survey said they believe child care and education are a top factor negatively affecting their employees’ mental health, and nearly a quarter (23 percent) cited “family and relationships.”

Given this growing awareness—plus the need to retain working parents who might otherwise leave their jobs—we expect to see employers offer more resources to support the mental health of employees’ kids and spouses as part of a holistic approach to workforce well-being.

“There’s more recognition that it’s necessary for employers to provide care for the entire family and not just the employee, and as a result, employers are more interested in access to child care providers and family therapy,” said Grasso.

“Only about 20 percent of children with mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders receive care from a specialized mental health care provider.”

– Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

4. A greater focus on destigmatizing serious or complex mental health conditions

As the [prevalence and severity](#) of mental health challenges have soared since the pandemic began, so too has the need to combat stigma against serious mental illness in the workforce. Mental health-related stigma is a common barrier to care, and going without treatment can mean even [bigger repercussions](#) for employees

dealing with serious conditions such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or severe depression.

To combat this, we anticipate that employers in 2022 will amplify support and resources for workers grappling with more acute mental health needs, including the increasingly common challenges of [substance use disorders](#) and [suicidal thoughts](#). In our recent survey of employee benefit professionals, nearly a third (28 percent) said they believe “more employees will seek support for complex issues, such as suicidality or a substance use disorder,” over the next year.

“It feels like the conversation has moved away from ‘How do we broach mental health?’ to ‘How do we have a conversation that’s more inclusive and brings in the experience of those with more severe and persistent mental illness?’” said Grasso. These types of discussions can be essential in ensuring employees with the heaviest mental health burdens don’t



28%

of benefits leaders predict more employees will seek support for complex mental health issues in 2022.

fall through the cracks, he added.

5. More mental health literacy and education

With an increasingly distributed workforce and the aforementioned rise in serious mental illnesses, people leaders need to be more vigilant for signs that an employee is in distress. To equip managers with the skills to do this, we expect more companies to offer mental health-related training and development opportunities to their workforces in 2022.

That will likely include “making mental health literacy more of a priority in employees’ learning and development, and things like mental health first aid,” said Grasso. Other key topics may cover building resilience in the face of unexpected challenges and strategies to create psychological safety among teams.

Since the pandemic began, forward-thinking companies are increasingly offering resources and training to help employees learn about topics such as psychological safety, how to discuss mental health at work, coping with stress and uncertainty, and other common

challenges.

“Our organizational development team put together a great resource at the beginning of the pandemic guiding employees on how to redesign what a regular conversation looks like to promote checking in on one another,” said Sheila Krueger, Zoom Video Communications’ head of global benefits. “It’s been great to encourage teams to have conversations that they may not have previously felt comfortable having.”

As employees across industries continue to face an increasingly uncertain future—from the effects of climate change and political upheaval to the ongoing pandemic’s ups and downs—employers in 2022 will likely continue offering mental health-related training and education. These programs can help employees cope with difficult emotions and promote an open and supportive workplace where it’s OK to discuss mental health.

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– Sheila Krueger, Head of Global Benefits,
Zoom Video Communications

6. A shift toward building workplace structures that prevent burnout

Pre-pandemic, both prevalence and awareness of work-related burnout were on the rise. After nearly two years living through a global health crisis and grappling with blurred boundaries between work and home, staffing shortages, and a lack of child care and other essential support for working parents and caregivers, burnout has become an epidemic of its own. To do this, we expect more companies to offer mental health-related training and development opportunities to their workforces in 2022.

More than one in three (32 percent) employees in our recent survey say they have experienced burnout over the past year, and 22 percent of employee benefits leaders surveyed recognize burnout as an issue affecting their company’s

workforce. It’s also a catalyst in the “Great Resignation”: 40 percent of those who quit their jobs in 2021 cited burnout as a top reason for leaving, according to [a survey](#) of 1,000 full-time workers by employee experience firm Limeade.



More than
1 in 3
workers dealt with burnout
over the last year.

As employers navigate how best to stem the tide of resignations and attract new workers, we predict that more companies in 2022 will take proactive steps to tackle organizational shortfalls that contribute to burnout. “We’re starting to see a shift where more employers are recognizing that burnout is a systemic issue, not an individual one,” said Grasso. “That means the solutions shouldn’t be individually focused.”

Grasso said he’s observed more companies looking to design workplace structures that mitigate the risk of burnout and promote employee well-being. “When people do work they find meaningful, and they feel respected and have the time and resources to get work done, they thrive and

have great mental health outcomes," he said. "When folks lack those things, that's when burnout happens."

And Professor Spell noted that "evidence-based findings have shown that a sense of control over one's work is key to mental health and psychological well-being—even more than being overwhelmed by volume of work." Employers are increasingly considering preventive measures like the following to lower the risk of burnout:

- Auditing employees' workload and helping them delegate to manage projects and tasks when needed
- Ensuring role clarity and avoiding role overload by providing clear expectations of what employees should achieve and to whom they should report
- Promoting [psychological safety](#) so employees can offer dissenting opinions, speak up if they're struggling, and feel included in an intentional way
- Tackling workplace bullying, unfair treatment, or policies that are disproportionately enforced for different groups (for example, avoiding different treatment for remote and in-person staff)
- Encouraging regular breaks, paid time off, and setting boundaries around workdays

The 'next normal' of work prizes mental health

The data we've gathered here underscore how rapidly work norms are shifting. The pandemic has not only exposed significant mental health needs among today's workforce—it's also made employees less likely to tolerate employers that don't take those needs seriously.

In a tight labor market where employee needs are increasingly gaining attention, most organizations today recognize that workforce mental health can't be ignored. And a growing number of employers are finding that taking action to support their people's mental health isn't just the right thing to do, but also can help [lower employee turnover, boost productivity, and reduce health care costs](#). In 2022, both workers' well-being and companies' viability will depend on this willingness to do more than just talk about workforce mental health.

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– Joe Grasso PhD, Lyra Health



METHODOLOGY

Lyra Health conducted two separate surveys to better understand the experiences and attitudes of both employees and employee benefits leaders related to workforce mental health.

For the employee survey, we gathered responses from 1,002 individuals via an online survey from independent brand intelligence firm PureSpectrum between October 29, 2021 and November 10, 2021. All respondents were at least 18 years of age, employed full-time by an organization that provides health care benefits, and living in the U.S. when the survey was completed.

For the employee benefits leaders' survey, we gathered responses from 250 individuals, also via online survey from PureSpectrum, between October 29, 2021 and November 24, 2021. All respondents were at least 18 years of age and living in the U.S. when the survey was completed. All respondents also self-identified as manager-level or above working in their organization's "employee benefits" department at companies with 1,000 or more employees.

PureSpectrum partners with the top online sample providers to supply a network of diverse, quality respondents to their client base. The survey data comes from traditional, actively managed, double-opt-in market research panels.



To explore how Lyra can help support your workforce's mental health, [request a demo](#) today.

About Lyra Health

Lyra Health, a leading provider of innovative mental health benefits for 2.5 million U.S. employees and dependents, is transforming mental health care by creating a frictionless experience for members, providers, and employers. Using matching technology and an innovative digital platform, Lyra connects companies and their employees—plus spouses and children—to world-class therapists, mental health coaches, and personalized medication prescribing. Leading self-insured employers partner with Lyra to tailor value-driven mental health benefits programs specific to their workforce. With Lyra, benefits leaders can offer employees fast, reliable access to clinicians who practice evidence-based mental health care approaches that have been proven effective. For more information, visit: lyrahealth.com, and follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#).