

Strengthening employees' mental health resilience across the globe

It's time for multinational employers to step up on mental health.

Is mental health our next global crisis? According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the answer is yes. Rates of already common conditions, such as depression and anxiety, went up by more than 25% during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ 1 in 3 individuals in the global workforce are at high risk of mental health issues.² In its most recent World Mental Health Report, WHO stated flatly: "Business as usual for mental health simply will not do."¹

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Mental health in the workplace is an increasing challenge for multinational employers.
- ✓ While employees struggle with some common stressors worldwide, individual country differences such as stigma and a lack of benefit coverages complicate an organization's response.
- ✓ Employers who focus on a holistic employee "bottom-up" approach and development of a more open local culture can make real progress on this issue.





The cost is too steep not to act

Estimates show that mental health conditions are costing the global economy up to **\$1 trillion per year in lost productivity**.³ In the US, individuals without prevention or treatment run up **156% more** in medical expenses.⁴ Mental health issues make up **20 to 30% of disability claims** globally.⁵

Mental health issues lead to both direct and indirect economic costs for employers

Source: Mental Health Commission of Canada

DIRECT

Health care costs, including drug costs

Income support, including short- and long-term disability claims



INDIRECT

Absenteeism

Presenteeism (attending work while unwell but with reduced productivity)

Employee turnover

Employees themselves are asking companies to provide more support. Fully a third of workers whose companies offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or insurance coverage for mental health care think their employer isn't doing enough to support their mental health.⁶

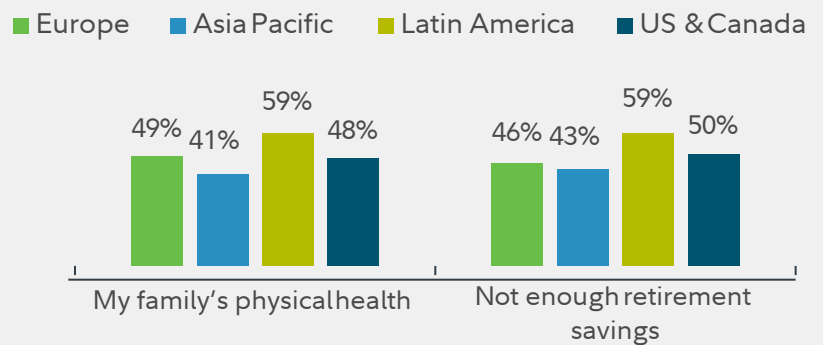
An investment in employee mental health can yield positive returns. According to Zurich Group, for every \$1 put into scaled up treatment for common mental disorders, there is a \$5 return in improved health and productivity.⁷

Common stressors exist across countries, but cultural differences and lack of benefits uniformity create hurdles

The reality is that mental health is a broad reaching and challenging issue for multinational employers and exacerbated by country differences. Employees do share some common stress factors, specifically related to items where individuals have more control (excluding major global issues like climate crisis, the pandemic, global inflation/ state of the economy and political events). In 2021 the top causes of individual stress were related to health and financial concerns.⁸

2021 Top Causes of Employee Stress

Source: Fidelity 2021 Global Employee Sentiment Survey



Addressing mental health concerns is not a one size fits all endeavor. In many countries, social stigma and a lack of mental health resources and trained workers are primary issues. The data shows that employees in Latin America are struggling the most. Why? In Latin America cultural values have prevented employees from seeking treatment or support – Latinos are feared to be seen as weak, that they're faulty, and/or a source of individual and familial shame.⁹

What's more, employer-provided benefits across the globe lack uniformity in protecting the most vulnerable employees. The chart below highlights the trouble spots in certain regions and paints a picture of inequity. In many regions, EAPs and mental health company-paid benefits are not available or insufficient. China, UAE and Mexico, in particular, stand out.

Employer—Provided Global Benefits are not Uniform and are Insufficient

Region	EAP	Short-term disability	Critical illness/long-term disability/income	Mental health outpatient or inpatient coverage
EMEA	UAE	●	●	●●
	UK	●	●	●
	France	●	●	●
	S. Africa	●	●	●
APAC	China	●	●	●
	Singapore	●	●	●
	Australia	●	●	●
	India	●	●	●
Americas	Mexico	●	●	●
	Brazil	●	●	●
	Canada	●	●	●
	USA	●	●	●

Progress in some areas

There are some bright spots, but not nearly enough. EAP programs, flexible leave policies and work arrangements are being rolled out globally by some multinational companies.

Mexico has a new mental health law which aims to reform their mental health system. And there is high interest from human resources professionals across Asia to provide improved mental health coverage in their medical plans.

● available ● unavailable/insufficient

Three steps employers can take to make a difference in the global mental health crisis

It's time for multinational employers to make their employees' mental health a business priority. **"In addition to providing benefits, company culture plays a significant role in addressing this situation – from headquarters down to in-country local leadership, engaging and supporting employees during stressful times is key"** says Carolina Wanderley, a senior consultant from Fidelity Workplace Global Consulting practice.

The world showed how it could come together and take action during the COVID-19 pandemic with measures to mitigate the virus. It's well past time to put mental health on par with physical health.

What actions should multinational companies take to address the mental health crisis?



1

Take action to reduce stigma in your culture.



Make stress and mental health a normal part of your workplace conversation. Take steps to create a culture where people feel safe and encouraged to talk about mental health and know where to seek support. Anti-stigma actions will help ensure your workers experiencing difficulties feel able to ask for extra support if they need it, without fear of managerial repercussions or judgement.

Share your story: Some CEOs who have struggled themselves are bravely and openly sharing their stories. This can help create an environment where other leaders, supervising managers and the broader workforce may feel "I am not alone in feeling this way." That can be powerful.

Listen to your people: Now more than ever it is important to bring your employees to the discussion to use their help to change your culture. Employees' virtual focus groups have proved to be a great resource to seek a common understanding and a bottom-up engagement.

2

Emphasize prevention and manager training.



Recognize that employees need different supports at different stages along a full continuum of care, from promotion of well-being and prevention tactics to intervention and care. Some tactics to try:



Equip your local leaders and secure their commitment. Provide your local leaders with training to help them develop more knowledge and learn how to identify and support employees who may be experiencing distress. The intention is not for them to diagnose issues or become mental health providers, but rather to be alert for signs of struggle, and demonstrate active listening, authenticity and empathy. Encourage them to refer employees to the right sources and cross reference other programs when they see signs of struggle. This might include childcare programs, paid time off, commuter benefits for those who no longer feel comfortable with public transportation, and disability insurance to alleviate stress for employees who may need to take extended leave if job modifications aren't possible.¹⁰



Give your managers autonomy to try new things. Enable more sustainable ways of working and mentally healthy behaviors. Ideas include no emails after hours and no meeting days. Have managers encourage employees to take regular breaks. This could mean taking a walk or talking with a friend. It is important for employees to give their minds a moment to rest and rejuvenate. Leaders must model these behaviors so that they stick.



Create employee resource groups. Peer-led networks enable people with lived experience to play key advocacy roles. Valuing the insights of people who have lived with mental health conditions gives them a voice and true influence with others. At the grassroots level, think mental health champions and peer listening initiatives. Benefits are two-fold: Those who lead the sessions find purpose, and those who attend find hope.



3

Support employee mental health on a holistic basis.



Mental health is interwoven into the other domains of employee well-being: Health, Life, Financial and Work. What happens in the context of any domain can affect an employee’s mental well-being, for example, family financial issues can manifest as stress and anxiety in your employee:

Mental health

Review your well-being programs on a holistic basis to ensure that they are working in concert to protect your employees’ mental health:

Push your local EAP providers for additional support. Generally speaking, employee enrollment in EAP programs is low across the globe (2% to 3%), but webinars or in-person sessions led by EAP providers are becoming more and more popular with higher engagement and positive employee feedback. Look at ways to supplement your EAP with additional in-country group sessions covering some hot topics like sleep, nutrition, exercise and financial counseling.

Review your plans and policies. Review your supplemental plans to consider a minimum level of mental health support and coverage. Push insurance carriers to provide additional benefits and regular communication about existing benefits. Review access so employees don’t have to travel long distance or wait weeks or months to see a provider. Make it okay to take a “mental health” day by building it into your organization’s sick time policy.

Offer digital tools. Digital tools can be especially powerful because they help an employee decide how and when to engage. Many people delay seeking help because they are trying to solve their problems on their own. Virtual and teletherapy tools allow them to test the waters privately and in a safe manner.

Mental health prevention in the workplace



AWARENESS

Launch a global well-being campaign. Equip local leaders with training and tools.



RELEVANCE

Roll out programs and communications tailored for local cultures and needs.




ACCESS

Make access to program easy.



ADVOCACY

Use local influencers to drive engagement on the ground.



Mental health is a nuanced and broad-reaching issue. We can help you see every aspect.

The good news is that addressing mental health and well-being in the workplace can make a difference.

For more information on our global consulting services and insights on employee mental health, please contact your Fidelity Managing Director or email the Fidelity Workplace Consulting group at fidelityworkplaceconsulting@fmr.com.

Sources:

¹ World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all, World Health Organization, 2022

² Main causes of Mental Health disorders according to LifeWorks 2021 and Palig

³ Brassey, Guntner, Isaak and Silberzahn, "Using digital tech to support employees' mental health and resilience," McKinsey & Company, July 8, 2021

⁴ Zhdanava M et al/ Palig

⁵ Zurich Group internal data from U.S.-based-multinational clients and those based in: UK, Ireland, Australia and Switzerland

⁶ Survey from International Foundation of Employee Benefits Plans, 2022 and "Employers Struggle With Mental Health Help as Traumas Pile Up," Bloomberg, June 13, 2022

⁷ Zurich Group internal data from U.S.-based-multinational clients and those based in: UK, Ireland, Australia and Switzerland

⁸ Fidelity 2021 Global Employee Sentiment Survey

⁹ Palig

¹⁰ Hirsch, Arlene "Supporting Mental Health in the Post-Pandemic Workplace, SHRM, May 11, 2021

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