



Workplace Wellness



4 Employee Wellness Trends to Watch in 2022



The workplace continues to change as the two-year mark of the COVID-19 pandemic approaches—and employer-sponsored wellness programs are no different. The pandemic has put employee health and wellness in the spotlight, and employers' wellness initiatives will continue to grow in 2022. According to the Business Group on Health's 2022 Large Employers' Health Care Strategy and Plan Design Survey, employers recognize that COVID-19 may have long-term impacts on employees. Notably, many employers anticipate increasing medical services due to delayed care (94%) and are concerned about long-term mental health issues (91%).

Given the pandemic's immediate and lasting impacts on employee health, it's no surprise that employers are expected to expand their wellness offerings in 2022. Here are four popular employee wellness trends to look out for in 2022.

1. Expanded Mental Health Resources

Many organizations have prioritized mental health during the pandemic. Many workers continue to battle stress and anxiety in both their personal and work lives. Not only are employees faced with changing workplace policies and responsibilities, but they are also navigating how to reconnect with friends and family. Fortunately, the mental burden of the COVID-19 pandemic has enabled more transparency and empathy around the topic, especially in the workplace.

Many employers will continue to work on ways to address employees' short- and long-term mental health issues, as there's a significant need and desire for mental health support in the workplace. According to a 2021 Calm for Business [workplace mental health survey](#), 97% of employees said that employers should be trying to improve employee mental health. Consider the additional survey findings:

- 76% of employees find mental health benefits critical when evaluating a new job.
- 87% of employees feel nervous, anxious or stressed working through a pandemic.
- 80% of employees are having difficulty falling and staying asleep during the pandemic.
- 43% of employees attribute poor mental health to their job based on a lack of recognition and belonging.

Employers who are invested in their employees' mental health often yield healthy employees who take fewer days off, contribute to positive workplace culture and are more productive. One way to address employee mental health is by ensuring mental health is an essential part of overall health care offerings. Additionally, employers may expand tele-behavioral health and employee assistance program (EAPs), as well as increase the use of [mental health apps](#). Employers who provide diverse health care resources that deliver behavioral, emotional and social services are in a great position to improve their workforce's overall well-being.

2. Advancement of Health Equity

The pandemic has undoubtedly shed light on health disparities. Several underlying social and economic challenges (e.g., health care, income and childcare) can influence overall well-being. To tackle health inequalities, some employers are making employee benefits and wellness programs more affordable and inclusive. The goal is to ensure all employees have access to the health care

they need. That can look different for every employee, so employers may start with focusing on general goals to help employees manage any chronic conditions or severe acute needs, such as cancer, or receive recommended prenatal care.

Furthermore, some health insurance providers are working with local, state and federal governments to improve health equity to ensure Americans have an equal opportunity to thrive and achieve their best health. Employers can select providers striving to make health care more affordable and accessible to all employees. Employers have a great chance to help employees maximize their full health potential by supporting efforts that advance health equity in the communities where employees live and work.

3. Increased Focus on Hybrid Work-life Balance

Employee wellness programs must continue to evolve to meet the demands of the current workforce. At this point in the pandemic, it appears the hybrid workplace is here to stay. As such, many employers are shifting their perspective of hybrid work from a novelty to the new standard in 2022; but with that shift, employers must recognize the unique challenges employees face as hybrid workers. As the boundaries between work and home are blurred, employees may experience burnout or undergo a decrease in their physical or mental health.

A healthy work-life balance seems like an unattainable goal for many Americans. Still, employers can do their best to help and offer robust resources and support, especially for hybrid or remote employees. A holistic approach helps address all aspects of the body and mind. Health plans may include access to mental health professionals and assistance dealing with stress and depression. To support varying personal responsibilities, organizations may also consider how to increase schedule flexibility or time off for mental health or recharging. Such companies may also be focusing on key performance indicators like employee satisfaction and retention. As more organizations operate in hybrid or remote settings, employees are more likely to expect such comprehensive wellness offerings from their employers.

4. Expanded Financial Wellness Resources

Money is a top stressor for employees, and the pandemic has reinforced that fact. Seventy-three percent of Americans rank their finances as their number one source of stress, according to a 2021 [CreditWise survey](#). As the pandemic evolves, employers are uniquely positioned to support employees with much-desired financial guidance and educational resources.

First, employers should be aware of the most common financial goals of employees:

- Building an emergency savings
- Navigating cashflow changes
- Choosing the proper health insurance and benefits
- Preparing for significant life events
- Saving for retirement

Many organizations employ a multigenerational workforce, which means employees often face unique financial stressors. To provide relief, some employers offer financial wellness programs that vary in complexity but can include virtual personal financial planning meetings, tuition reimbursement and seminars. The idea is to provide a wide variety of services for the workforce. Employers can help reduce employee financial stress by exploring financial wellness resources and support options and offering attractive programs for current and prospective employees. Financial wellness is a critical component of well-being and can be a competitive offering in today's labor market.

Conclusion

All signs indicate that mental and financial wellness will become significant pain points in 2022. The pandemic also continues to expose health inequalities and an unattainable work-life balance for many American workers. The most robust 2022 employee wellness offerings and programs will likely be employee-centered, focusing on how to provide the most comprehensive, attainable and affordable benefits. Many employees will not only need resources for handling new pandemic-related mental and financial challenges but also support for working in a remote or hybrid setting as the lines blur between their home and work lives. This year, employers are expected to explore programs and initiatives that ensure all employees have access to the physical, mental and financial benefits they need to address the pandemic's short- and long-term impacts.

Organizations can start with evaluating current wellness initiatives and thinking about ways to improve them. To ensure offerings and investments will resonate with the workforce, it can be helpful to survey employees first and see what they find most valuable and necessary for their overall well-being after two years of living through a pandemic.

Contact Ollis/Akers/Arney Human Resources Consulting today for more wellness program ideas or ways to get started.

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