

# **Employees' Health and Professional Success Go Hand-in-Hand. Here's How to Support Both**

When your health takes a serious hit, it can impact more than just your physical well-being — a major health event can result in someone losing control of their finances as well as their personal and professional life.

A recent survey by Cigna found that 31% of employees have experienced a serious health event that had a negative impact on their work or career advancement, and about one in five people said a serious health event resulted in them losing control of their finances.

“A major health event can have a multi-dimensional impact on the health and well-being of employees,” says Marc Jeffreys, president of supplemental health solutions at Cigna. “And we know that if an employee is not well, that has a direct impact on their ability to be productive and impactful in their work lives.”

Jeffreys has witnessed this firsthand. When a good friend of his became seriously ill, she struggled as she made the painful decision to walk away from her job as a teacher, which had a ripple effect on every other aspect of her and her family's life. Suddenly, she was managing grocery budgets and dealing with child care issues, on top of juggling doctors appointments and medical tests.

“More than one-third of the U.S. population has less than \$1,000 saved for emergencies, and almost two thirds of bankruptcies in the U.S. are tied to a medical issue that's primarily driven by medical expenses or loss of work,” Jeffreys says. “Health events negatively impact employees' personal relationships as well as their ability to be productive at work, and ultimately their career advancement.”

Employers, Jeffreys says, have an opportunity to get proactive and help employees prepare for unexpected medical events, providing support, resources and benefits that can help them prepare financially and cushion the blow. Some options include offering high deductible health plans and HSAs, disability insurance, and benefits that focus on financial protections and savings.

One option he enthusiastically advocates for is the adoption of supplemental health coverage, which is designed to complement major healthcare plans and help pay for medical costs the employee's regular insurance doesn't cover. These plans are typically offered on a voluntary basis and can be paid for through payroll deductions.

“The core medical insurance dominates decision-making around the benefits plans that are offered to employees, and it's predominantly driven around affordability, both for the employer and employee,” Jeffrey says.

“Often, that scenario has led to situations where medical insurance can be very affordable to buy, but ultimately unaffordable to use because of co-pays and deductibles. So one opportunity is to introduce supplemental health coverages that are designed to complement core medical by providing cash benefits for covered events.”

Educating employees on the benefits of supplemental insurance coverage is a vital part of the equation. Helping workers understand that these programs are intended to complement core medical insurance by providing cash benefits for covered can help incentivize employees to participate in the offering.

“HR professionals are in a unique position,” Jeffrey says. “They can ensure access to a robust set of benefits and build awareness around supplemental health coverages, and how they can dovetail and play a significant role in providing peace of mind for individual employees who are suffering from a major health event.”

By Amanda Schiavo