

Well-being Benefits Can No Longer Be One Dimensional

For decades, clients have thought of well-being programs as one-dimensional with the focus on physical health, only offering benefits like on-site fitness centers, gym discounts or a health program that encourages more movement.

But now, in a highly competitive marketplace where employers are looking to attract and retain motivated and productive employees, the idea of well-being programs is expanding and evolving. Just focusing on physical health won't cut it anymore. Rather, employers are now seeking out innovative workplace well-being programs that encompass five aspects of health: physical, mental, financial, social and community.

Overall employee well-being matters. Newly released data shows that employees who are offered programs that address most or all of the five aspects of well-being are significantly more likely to say their job performance is excellent, they have a positive impression of their employer and would recommend their company as a place to work.

The study by Optum and the National Business Group on Health surveyed more than 2,200 employees at large companies with 3,000 or more employees. The objective was to determine how well-being impacts employee experience and how employers can enhance well-being.

This study supported the idea that employees are looking toward their employer to support all the dimensions of health and well-being.

The key findings include:

- Employees want their employers to do more to support their financial health;
- Access to quality behavioral health services at convenient locations correlates with employee well-being; and
- Employees would like more opportunities for paid time off to volunteer in the community.

While few employees rate their overall well-being as excellent, two-thirds consider it very good or good. Perhaps not surprisingly, those reporting higher levels of well-being include males, those with incomes of more than \$50,000 annually and those working from home for part of the week.

The survey results are instructive for companies seeking to better address employee well-being. For example, the study found that nearly one-third of employees want their companies to invest more on their financial health, 27% want more focus on mental health and 17% want greater emphasis on physical health. Of course, there's no one-size-fits-all approach.

Financial health

Besides helping them save for retirement and maximizing health savings accounts, employees want their companies to improve their financial health in other ways. For example, of those who do not receive support from their

employer, more than one-third would like assistance in reducing the cost of healthcare or medications, and a sizeable amount want help with housing costs, transportation needs, managing student loan debt and child care.

This clamoring for financial support isn't surprising. Employers increasingly report that workers feel financially insecure. Indeed, many people are just one emergency away from a financial meltdown. According to the Federal Reserve Board, 40% of Americans can't cover an unexpected \$400 expense. Additionally, only 40% of adults think they are on track to save enough for their retirement years. Employers are responding, in part, by offering onsite or telephonic financial counselors that can help employees plan a budget, climb out of credit card debt and save for a rainy day.

Mental health

With significant numbers of employees feeling squeezed financially, mental health is at risk. Roughly eight in 10 Americans feel stress sometimes or frequently during their day, according to a Gallup poll.

Of those employees who do not receive support from their company, 40% of those surveyed say they want help with burnout at work, 29% want help managing stress and 27% would like a sleep health program.

The embarrassment and shame people often feel about their substance use disorders and mental health conditions presents an additional challenge. In response, employers are pushing to destigmatize depression and promote social health through stronger social connections at work.

Social health

The survey defined social health as the ability to relate to and connect with others, and having supportive, positive relationships including feelings of belonging. Thirty-six percent of employers provide programs to address social health, but more can be done. Of those not supported, roughly one-quarter of employees would like to see their companies increase support for social health, such as designing jobs and the work environment to boost collaboration and improve relationships at work.

It's not easy figuring out how best to address employees' myriad of needs. But the message employers and benefits managers are getting from their employees is that helping workers manage and deal with all aspects of their well-being will be rewarded. Supporting multiple aspects of well-being, and ensuring that the programs are what employees really want is a major step in the right direction.

By Seth Serxner