



The employer imperative:

Driving US economic vitality through a healthy, productive workforce

Covid-19's great reset: A defining moment for employers to turn crisis into opportunity

The covid-19 pandemic has arguably changed the world of work more radically than any other single event in a century. Consequently, it has presented employers with an unprecedented opportunity to hit the reset button on pre-pandemic working norms and shape their practices in a way that better supports workforce wellness. This includes the imperative for openness to new tools and innovations that offer

employees more effective avenues to maintain wellness. In turn, this leads to greater productivity, better business performance and ultimately economic recovery and growth.

In this way, employers who embrace this unique moment to focus on what can be done to support a well workforce will position themselves ahead of the curve. In order to achieve this, however, employers must understand and navigate the ongoing evolution of employee needs and expectations to truly impact the bottom line and drive growth in the future.



Strengthened workforce wellness = strengthened business and economic vitality

While many US employers have efforts in place aiming to effectively address workforce health and safety concerns, a well workforce requires a company-wide commitment to a broader range of needs, and to the strongest drivers of employee engagement, well-being, and productivity. Beyond traditional benefits which aim to support employees who have health care needs, employers gain even more by taking a proactive approach to

wellness maintenance, and ensuring benefits are in place that also cater to employees that are healthy to keep them that way.

Given that over half (55%) of people in the US receive health care coverage through an employer-sponsored health plan¹, employers are uniquely positioned to reap business and economic value through a well workforce.



¹ Keisler-Starkey K, Bunch LN. Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2019. United States Census Bureau, 2020. Available from: <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2020/demo/p60-271.html>.

Healthy workforce → healthy productivity → healthy bottom line → healthy economy




Well-being & Productivity: Proactive approaches to help employees stay healthy and productive


While US employers have a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of their workforce, they also have abundant opportunities and a clear incentive to optimize employee well-being and foster a continual health-promoting work environment. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) encourages employers to provide their employees with preventive services, training and tools in order to reduce health


care expenditures, increase productivity and engagement, and improve and maintain the overall well-being of their employees.²

There is no one-size-fits-all strategy to promote workforce well-being. A comprehensive approach is necessary to integrate a coherent set of benefits, programs and policies in order to maintain a culture of well-being and productivity throughout the entire organization.

Effective workforce well-being plans incorporate the following three actions:

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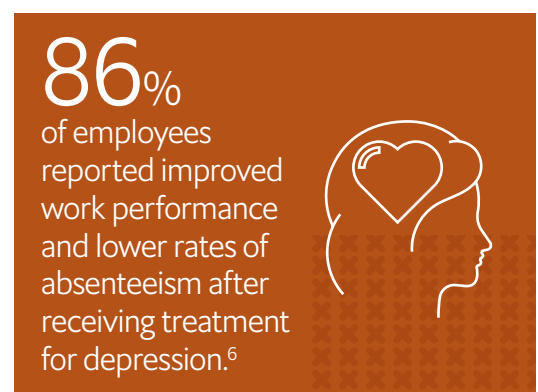
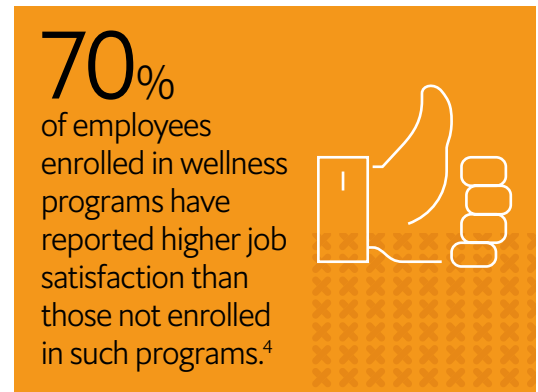
1. Prevent
Help employees stay healthy and productive, and reduce their risk of illness through health promotion and education, safety engineering, organizational design, nutritional support, prenatal care, and vaccinations.
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2. Detect
Provide services aimed at early detection of wellness needs such as physical and mental health screenings, coaching, biometric testing, and proactive work disability deterrence.
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3. Maintain
Manage the impact reduction of existing disease through evidence-based quality care management, return to work programs and vocational rehabilitation.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard: An Assessment Tool to Promote Employee Health and Well-Being. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2019.

Key employee benefits of these approaches:



³ Consumer Wellness Report: Trends & Attitudes Towards Employer-Sponsored Health & Wellness Programs. The HealthMine, 2016.

⁴ 2020-2021 Aflac WorkForces Report. Aflac, 2020.

⁵ 2016 Work and Well-Being Survey. American Psychological Association, 2016.

⁶ Finkelstein SN, Berndt ER, Greenberg PE, et al. Improvement in subjective work performance after treatment of chronic depression: some preliminary results. Chronic Depression Study Group. *Psychopharmacology Bulletin*. 1996; 32(1):33-40.



Business performance: Investing in workforce well-being drives more value than costs for US employers

US employers should approach workforce well-being as a social, business and economic investment to be leveraged rather than a cost to be justified. After all, improving the health of workers reduces total health care costs for employers (including health-related productivity loss, disability benefit costs, and medical/pharmacy costs):

For every dollar that's spent on a wellness program⁷, a US employer saves \$3.27 because of reduced health care costs.⁸

For every \$1 spent on integrated care, a US employer saves \$6 in overall medical costs.⁹

Research shows a direct correlation between company stock value and employee health and wellness:

- Stock values for a portfolio of companies receiving high scores in a corporate health and wellness self-assessment **appreciated by 235%** compared with the S&P 500 Index appreciation of 159% over a 6-year simulation period.¹⁰
- This suggests that robust investment in workforce health and well-being is one of the many practices adopted and pursued by high-performing, well-managed companies.



⁷ A wellness program is defined as a “coordinated and comprehensive set of strategies which include programs, policies, benefits, environmental supports, and links to the surrounding community designed to meet the health and safety needs of all employees.” See: Workplace Health Program Definition and Description. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016.

⁸ Baicker K, Cutler DM, Song Z. Workplace Wellness Programs Can Generate Savings. *Health Affairs*. 2010;29(2):304-11.

⁹ Livesey, Matthew Press and Cecilia, et al. “Integrated Care Opens New Doors to Mental Health, Addiction Care,” December, 2019.

¹⁰ Grossmeier J, Fabius R, Flynn JP, et al. Linking Workplace Health Promotion Best Practices and Organizational Financial Performance: Tracking Market Performance of Companies With Highest Scores on the HERO Scorecard. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. 2016;58(1):16-23.



Economic growth: Keeping the US workforce healthy and productive is critical to keeping the US economy strong

A healthy workforce is one of the best indicators of a nation's overall health. The

impact of investing in healthier employees and, by extension, a healthier population, not only drives immense value to US employers, but also the nation's economy.

For every \$1 invested in improving the health of the population, the US economy stands to reap up to \$4 in financial rewards.¹¹



¹¹ Linzer K, Remes J, Singhal S. How prioritizing health is a prescription for US prosperity. McKinsey Global Institute, 2020.

The prognosis for a healthy, productive workforce: How employers can drive US economic prosperity

It is precisely in moments of crisis, like covid-19, that silver linings can present themselves and new opportunities can be seized. It has never been more imperative for US employers to leverage their unique role and influence to support employee well-being and productivity

in the short-term, and strengthen workforce and economic vitality for the future.

Below are additional ways US employers can support and maintain a healthy and productive workforce to drive wider economic impact:



Embrace a holistic workforce health model that supports all aspects of employee well-being – mental & emotional, financial, physical, and social – and acknowledges diverse needs and values.



Take a proactive, preventative approach, instead of a reactive approach, to health and wellness benefits and programs.



Collaborate and share information with internal and external stakeholders across the entire health ecosystem. Such collaborations not only support integrated data analysis and outcomes measures, but can also drive innovation to develop more personalized solutions, as well as build a continuous cycle of review and improvement.



Ensure workforce well-being plans are agile and responsive to changing workforce needs. For example, employee surveys can help employers become more aware of concerns around caregiver support, financial issues, or other social determinants of health which can impact the employee experience.



Leverage technology to foster social interaction, employee engagement, and a healthy company culture, especially in new virtual and hybrid settings. For instance, employers can provide access to collaborative video-conferencing platforms, online stress management webinars, wearable health trackers, mindfulness apps, online workload management tools, and telehealth services.

Seldomly do investments deliver on so many societal needs, substantially improving US employee, employer and community well-being, while also delivering an impressive

shot in the arm to the US economy. If there was ever a time for US employers to derive the greatest value possible for their most important asset – their people – it is now.

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