

AUGUST - 2021

WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS TOOLKIT



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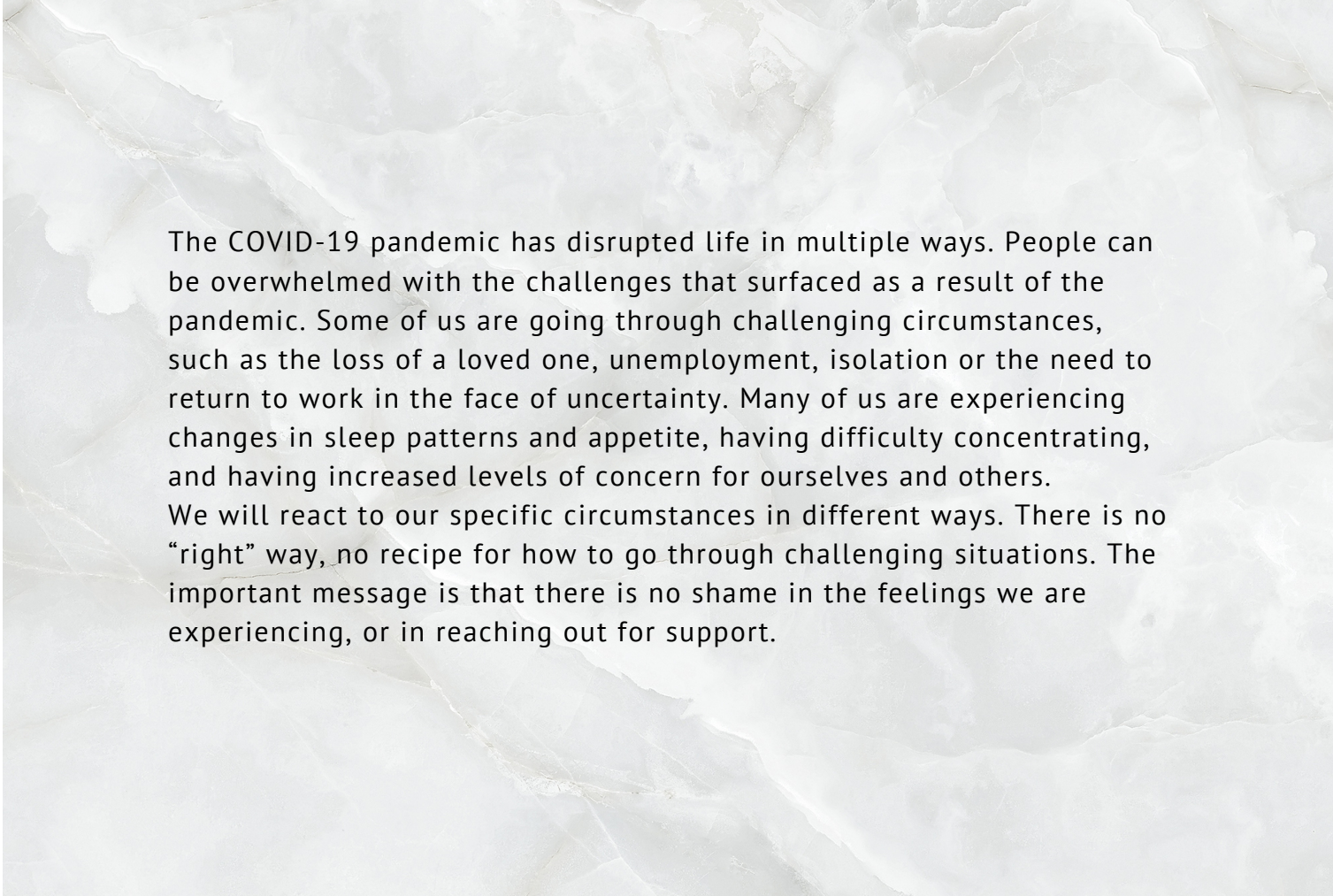
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GETTING STARTED: WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

**The US Department of Health and Human Services
defines Mental Health as:**

"Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood."

Source: <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health>



The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted life in multiple ways. People can be overwhelmed with the challenges that surfaced as a result of the pandemic. Some of us are going through challenging circumstances, such as the loss of a loved one, unemployment, isolation or the need to return to work in the face of uncertainty. Many of us are experiencing changes in sleep patterns and appetite, having difficulty concentrating, and having increased levels of concern for ourselves and others. We will react to our specific circumstances in different ways. There is no “right” way, no recipe for how to go through challenging situations. The important message is that there is no shame in the feelings we are experiencing, or in reaching out for support.

WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Employees face a new set of challenges since the pandemic started. Quarantine, isolation and disconnect are affecting all of us and will impact us in the work we do. Essential workers have worked throughout the pandemic, and might be dealing with fears and distress for themselves and their families. Those who worked remotely may be preparing to return to worksites. This will come as a relief to some, but cause high stress for others.

Employers are uniquely positioned to support employees in managing stress, building resiliency, and connecting them with needed services and supports. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed many aspects of our lives, it is an opportunity to focus on building a mental health-friendly workplace. This Toolkit will provide you with resources and key concepts to support you and your company in building a workplace that fosters wellness through COVID-19 and beyond.

The Eight Dimensions of Wellness take into account not only an individual’s physical health, but all the factors that contribute to a person’s overall wellness.

SAMHSA (2016)



To learn more:

www.samhsa.gov/wellness-initiative

RETURNING TO WORK AND COVID-19

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

“

To better understand employee concerns in returning to the workplace, consider conducting a pulse survey or holding a virtual town hall.

”

Employees may have concerns about returning to work, they may include:

- New and overwhelming physical interactions with people
- Concerns about getting the virus
- Challenges in commuting (e.g. using public transportation)
- Managing caregiving responsibilities



A PREVENTION APPROACH TO WELLNESS

The Mental Health and Wellness Toolkit will explore key concepts of mental health and wellness in the workplace. The Toolkit will address how your organization can optimize the workplace to foster wellness and address mental health. This Toolkit will provide you with clear definitions and concrete actionable steps to improve your workplace mental health approach.

This Toolkit uses the 5 steps and 2 guiding principles of the Strategic Prevention Framework developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Assessment: identifying local needs

Capacity: determining the assets you already have

Planning: figure out what you should do and how

Implementation: putting a plan into action

Evaluation: assessing outcomes and adjusting as appropriate.

Cultural competence and **sustainability** are guiding principles that permeate all the work. Cultural competence refers to the ability to interact with multiple and different values, cultures and backgrounds.



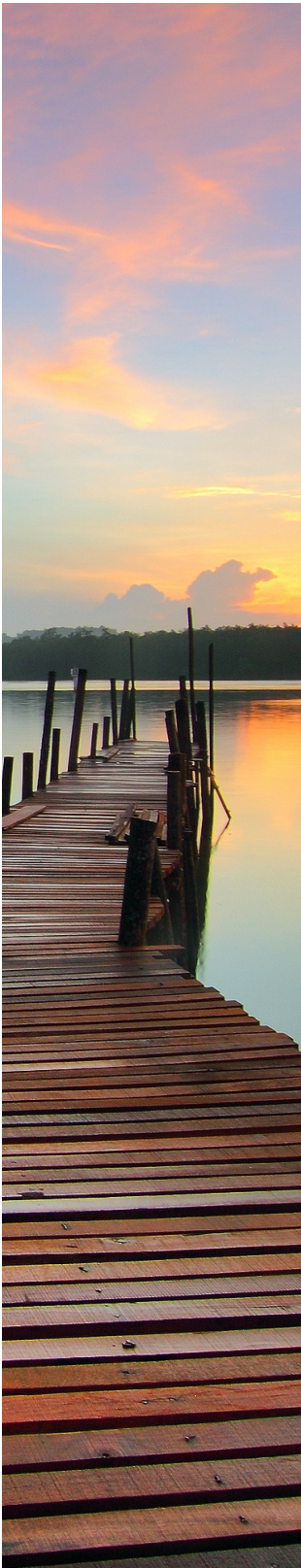
LEADING THE WAY

“People are experiencing fear, stress, uncertainty, grief, and loss that is off the charts, so increased support and finding new ways to lead are essential.”

Source: workplacementalhealth.org

Leadership has a key role in developing and instilling the values and principles that shape the organization's culture. In the process of developing the processes and policies that will build a mental health-friendly workplace and promote employee wellness during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, leadership should:

- Create a wellness committee
- Reassure employees as much as possible, and acknowledge how difficult the situation is
- Show vulnerability, empathy and compassion when addressing employees
- Encourage self-care and work/life balance
- Be available to employees with an "open door" policy
- Create a healthy work environment and flexibility to accommodate different needs
- Provide good physical workplace conditions
- Foster good communication and create opportunities for employee feedback throughout the entire process
- Be proactive in creating awareness about mental health and tackling stigma



ASSESSING EMPLOYEE NEEDS

The first step to promote mental health and wellness in the workplace is to identify the needs of your employees. You may already have several resources in place, or you may be starting from scratch, in any case, it is important to know where you're starting from and what is needed. Make sure employees are engaged throughout and that feedback mechanisms are in place. Below are a few resources you can use to assess employees' and workplace needs.

HealthConnections Workplace Wellness and Mental Health Toolkit

In this Toolkit you will find several resources:

- Company Mental Health Culture Audit
- Workplace Wellness Needs Survey

The Ultimate Workplace Mental Health Toolkit

In this Toolkit you will find several resources:

- Employee Quiz to Assess the Current State of Mental Healthcare Accessibility in Your Organization
- Employee Survey to Assess Your Team's Knowledge & Feelings
- About Mental Health

Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN)

In this Toolkit you will find:

- Checklist for Mentally Healthy Workplaces

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY TO ADDRESS NEEDS

The idea of setting up an entirely new program in your workplace may sound overwhelming. After assessing the needs of your employees, it's time to figure out what you already have in place and can build up from. Your organization may have a full Employee Assistance Program, or it may have nothing related to mental health and wellness. It is important to know that there are a range of strategies that will suit your and your employee's needs regardless of size or whether you're starting from scratch or building on something that already exists. Be realistic about what is feasible and creative with existing resources.

Use the 4A's framework to address capacity:
Awareness, accommodations, assistance and access.

You may find that many of the pillars to develop a mental health-friendly workplace are already there and only need minor tweaking to meet the needs of your employees.

4 The 4 A's of a Mental Health-Friendly Workplace



Source: <https://askearn.org/mentalhealth/>

PLANNING FOR WELLNESS

The planning stage is key to successfully developing and implementing policies, processes and initiatives that foster workplace wellness and mental health.

The wellness committee should engage employees' perspectives at all stages. It is crucial that leadership is held accountable, transparent and builds in feedback mechanisms to ensure the implementation phase runs smoothly and that goals are achieved. Create an Action Plan with the wellness committee. Next are examples of key areas/dimensions to be addressed as you develop your organization's policies and initiatives.



FIGHTING STIGMA

"Our language itself can become a barrier to wellness. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, as many as 1 in 5 Americans have experienced a mental health condition in the past 12 months, and many will never seek treatment for fear of the stigma that may be attached to it."

Source: [Workplace Wellness Mental Health Toolkit](#)

Stigma involves treating and looking at people differently because of their membership to a specific group. It is defined by stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination. People get discouraged to seek treatment when they fear being stigmatized. Stigma manifests not only as individual interactions, but at the societal level as well and negatively impacts people's opportunities, resources and wellbeing.

WHAT TO DO

- Language is important, educate your employees about non-stigmatizing terms such as: person in recovery, person diagnosed with, person with disability.
- Foster a culture of dialogue and empathy towards the issue
- Provide employees with education opportunities
- Clearly communicate the organization's commitment to promoting mental health and wellbeing



HOLISTIC WELLNESS

“Physical wellness benefits and initiatives are essential components of a modern human resources approach.”

Source: [The Ultimate Workplace Mental Health Toolkit \(2020\)](#)

How to foster workplace physical wellness and a holistic framework:

- Wellness has many dimensions, make sure initiatives address the mind-body-spirit connection
- Consider creating a "Calming room" that employees can use to take breaks and relax
- Yoga, meditation and mindfulness are good options
- Provide access to multimedia resources regarding fitness and nutrition
- Help employees connect with certified fitness professionals and licensed dietitians
- Ensure employees have access to nutritious, affordable meals
- Foster a community where employees can create a wellness support system
- Provide access to exercise facilities

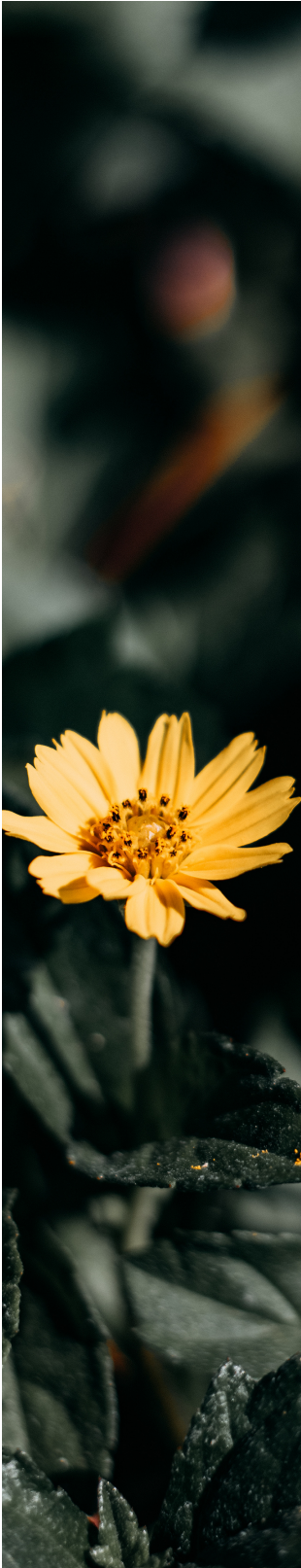


HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT

“ Environmental wellness means that the physical work environment is conducive to mental wellness. ”

Source: [The Ultimate Workplace Mental Health Toolkit \(2020\)](#)

- Ensure lighting is appropriate
- Maximize access to windows and sunlight
- Provide comfortable desks, chairs and workspaces
- Implement cleaning and disinfecting protocols
- Assess ventilation and spread out work stations
- Promote hand-washing and good respiratory hygiene
- If employees are working remotely, encourage separation of personal and workspace
- Encourage healthy time management and respecting boundaries - such as hours for checking emails and reaching out to people



IMPLEMENTING WELLNESS OPPORTUNITIES

Now that a thorough needs assessment was conducted, a wellness committee is in place, existing capacity has been identified, and a plan has been developed, it's time to implement changes, new initiatives and put it on paper. Policies help keep everyone accountable and clearly state the organization's commitment to creating a safe workplace that is free of bullying, harrassment and stigma.

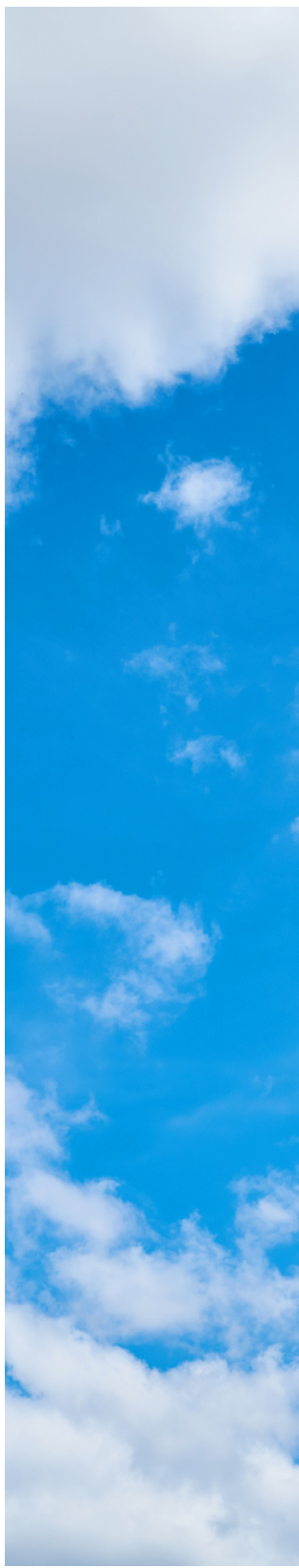
Engaging employees throughout the entire process helps ensure buy-in across the organization. Top management buy-in is crucial for successful implementation, modeling behavior and workplace ethics consolidates the organization's set of values and principles. Having an active wellness committee helps keep the initiatives alive and ensure that goals are achieved and needs are met. Developing an Action Plan establishing roles and responsibilities and a timeline is important as well.



EVALUATION: IS IT WORKING?

There are many ways to track if a new initiative is working. Some ideas are below:

- **Conduct an employee satisfaction survey including specific items related to mental health and wellness**
- **Track uptake and usage of new programs**
- **Periodically review policies related to mental health and workplace wellness**
- **Embed a culture of dialogue and check-ins between managers and employees to ensure there's always an open line to discuss mental health and wellness**
- **Reflect on managerial style**
- **Continue to engage employees and keep the wellness committee alive**



RESOURCES

Here you will find all the resources you need to assess your needs, identify capacity, plan and implement policies/initiatives and evaluation strategies. You will also find examples of successful programs that can inspire your organization's mental health and wellness in the workplace initiatives.

- The [CDC COVID-19 Information for the Workplace](#) website provides the most up-to-date recommendations for employers
- The [State of Connecticut website](#) provides an array of helpful and up-to-date information about COVID-19
- The [Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services website](#)

The Ultimate Workplace Mental Health Toolkit (2020)

Developed by NAMI Chicago in partnership with Launchways in 2020, this Toolkit offers a comprehensive overview of key concepts and provides tools and actionable items to employers who want to improve or develop their mental health and wellness programs in COVID-19 times.

The NIH Emotional Wellness Toolkit (2021)

Developed by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) this Toolkit offers several printable materials with strategies for improving mental health and wellness.

Mental Health at Work (2021)

The UK-based charity Mind, with the support of the Royal Foundation, has curated several Toolkits and other resources about mental health and wellness at work.

Mental Health at Work Commitment guide for employers during coronavirus (2021)

The UK-based charity Mind has developed a helpful guide for employers with multiple useful resources and substantive information about strategies to improve and foster mental health and wellness in the workplace.

HealtheConnections: Workplace Wellness Mental Health Tool Kit

Developed by HealtheConnections, this toolkit offers comprehensive resources for organizations to support the development of initiatives and programs to improve mental health and workplace wellness.

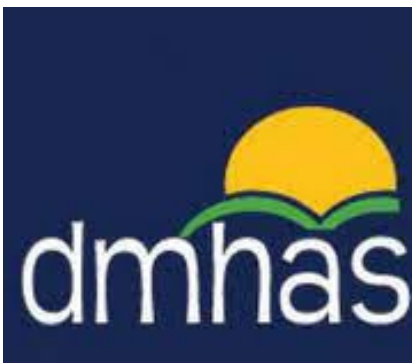
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services is a health care agency whose mission is to promote the overall health and wellness of persons with behavioral health needs through an integrated network of holistic, comprehensive, effective, and efficient services and supports that foster dignity, respect, and self-sufficiency in those we serve.



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