

Lyra

Recognizing and Addressing Mental Health Stigma at Work



With [1 in 8](#) people around the world experiencing a mental health disorder each year and a global workforce of over [3 billion](#), employers play a prominent role in improving access to mental health services. Unfortunately, mental health stigma creates significant barriers to employees accessing the support they need.

While most employers acknowledge the need to support employee mental health, fewer than [1 in 10 employees](#) say their workplace is free of [mental health stigma](#). The good news? By understanding mental health stigma and following some key recommendations, employers can reduce stigma and better support their employees.

Mental health stigma: The negative beliefs and attitudes people have toward themselves or others about what it means to have a mental health disorder, including what it means to be diagnosed with one or seek treatment.

Sources of mental health stigma

The first step in building a stigma-free workplace is recognizing where it comes from. Sources of mental health stigma can include:

- Lack of awareness and understanding of mental health conditions
- Limited access to accurate information about mental health and mental health treatment
- Stereotypes or generalized beliefs about whole groups of people
- Exaggerated, inaccurate media portrayals of people with mental illness
- Judgmental language or labels that sensationalize mental health disorders, such as calling someone “crazy”
- Cultural messages (for example, that religion and spirituality can’t coexist with mental health care or are a replacement for mental health care)
- Intentional or unintentional government or private organization policies that limit opportunities for people with mental illness (e.g., fewer mental health services compared to other types of health care or lower funding for mental illness research)



[8 out of 10](#) workers with mental health concerns say stigma and shame keep them from seeking mental health services.

Why addressing mental health stigma is important

Stigma is a key reason why mental health struggles often go unaddressed—because, when mental health is stigmatized, people often feel they may be judged or perceived negatively for seeking professional mental health support. They continue to have symptoms and experience distress. Employers also pay a price in terms of higher turnover, reduced productivity, and unfavorable business outcomes. Employers can be a powerful force in overcoming mental health stigma and supporting the mental health of their employees.

Lyra Health has found that investing in employee mental health results in significant cost savings, including:



Lower health plan spending—An [independent study](#) shows better utilization, lower overall medical claims costs, and a lower incidence of inpatient/outpatient mental health spending among the surveyed employers that offer Lyra.



Reduced turnover—Employees who use their Lyra benefit are almost [twice as likely](#) to stay with the company over a 12-month period as those who don't use the benefit.



Improved engagement—[Seventy percent](#) of members in the clinical range on the [Work Limitations Questionnaire](#) (WLQ) who seek care with Lyra show improved productivity levels.



7 ways to address mental health stigma in the workplace

Companies are [increasingly offering mental health support](#) for employees, but these benefits are likely to be underutilized if no one reaches out. So, how do you make sure your employees feel comfortable asking for help? Here are a few strategies to reduce mental health stigma in the workplace:

- 1 **Communicate using de-stigmatizing language.** For example, use person-centered language like “a person with a substance use disorder” rather than stigmatizing terms like “addict”; and try, “that’s wild” instead of “that’s crazy.”
- 2 **Make a habit of discussing mental health** and well-being by checking in with your teams regularly on how they’re doing, and proactively sharing useful mental health resources.
- 3 **Model healthy behaviors** by using PTO or telling employees you took time for a mid-day walk, therapy appointment, or other forms of self-care.
- 4 **Accommodate PTO** to focus on improving mental health, not just physical health.
- 5 **Create space** for company leaders to use contact-based education strategies for sharing their stories of mental health recovery, which signals that it’s OK to struggle and ask for support, and challenges the perception that experiencing mental health concerns impedes professional success.
- 6 **[Train managers](#)** to notice and respond to signs of distress in the workplace.
- 7 **Implement a process for supporting employees** who are returning to work following a mental health leave of absence.



About Lyra Health

[Lyra Health](#) helps leading companies improve access to effective, high-quality mental health care for their employees and their families. With Lyra's innovative digital care platform and global provider network, members receive the best care and get better faster.

Learn more about supporting the well-being of your employees and their families.

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