



# An Employer's Week-by-Week Guide to Mental Health Awareness Month

Insights

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May is Mental Health Awareness Month, which creates an opportunity to reflect on the well-being of your workforce. Recent statistics reveal that employees across all industries are now more susceptible to stress, burnout, and depression at work than they were pre-pandemic. In fact, the current environment for employees has even been termed a state of “permacrisis,” because of the seemingly endless series of issues such as the pandemic, economic inflation, international instability, war, and political tension that permeate our lives each day. In honor of Mental Health Awareness Month, we’ll give you a week-by-week guide for supporting your employees – not just during the month of May but throughout the year.

## May 1–3: Start the Conversation

To kick things off, you can learn about the status of workplace mental health in 2024 and start an open dialogue with your employees. The [2024 National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\) Workplace Mental Health Poll](#) found that:

- **52%** of employees polled reported feeling **burned out** in the past year because of their job.
- **37%** of employees reported feeling so overwhelmed it made it **hard to do their job**.
- Around **33%** noticed their **productivity suffer** because of their mental health – and conversely, **36%** noticed their **mental health suffer** because of work demands.

Although employers sometimes fear raising the subject of mental health due to potential liabilities, workers may be afraid to speak up about mental health problems if leadership does not initiate the larger conversation. The NAMI poll suggests that while most Americans believe it is appropriate to discuss mental health at work, they may not feel comfortable doing so due to stigma or retaliation. This is significant because NAMI found that employees who are *less comfortable* discussing their mental health at work are *more likely* to report feeling burnout.

Here’s another reason to start the dialogue: poor mental health among workers can pose significant business risks and impact morale. For example, the Society for Human Resource Management [reported in 2019](#) that:

- **20%** of Americans had left a job during the prior five years due to **bad company culture**.

- The resulting **turnover cost** organizations an estimated **\$223 billion**.

While you should broach sensitive topics with care and discuss them with applicable laws in mind, removing the stigma around mental health in the workplace can go a long way in improving employee feelings of well-being.

### **May 6–10: Support Working Parents and Minors**

National Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day falls this week, so you could focus on supporting working parents and any employees who are under the age of 18.

#### ***4 Ways You Can Support Working Parents***

Working parents and those with caregiving responsibilities face unique challenges that others in the workforce do not. Here are some ways you can support them:

- **Offer flexible work arrangements.** This might include fully remote and hybrid work, as well as part-time or flexible schedules.
- **Consider implementing parental leave policies** that extend beyond what is legally required to better support working parents during the critical stages of early parenthood.
- **Provide childcare resources** such as on-site daycare facilities, employer partnerships with local childcare providers, or reimbursements for such costs.
- **Facilitate parenting support groups.** Creating opportunities for working parents to connect with each other and offer mutual support can help them feel less isolated and more empowered.

#### ***3 Ways You Can Support Working Minors***

Special attention should also be paid to working minors, who must balance work with school, extracurricular activities, and other responsibilities. Here are some ways you can support minor employees:

- **Train your supervisors.** Offer training sessions or workshops to managers and supervisors to help them recognize signs of mental health issues in minors. Minor employees should feel safe seeking help and support, or reporting any concerns they have with their work environment.
- **Offer flexible work arrangements.** Flexible scheduling is also important for working minors, who may need to adjust their work hours to balance their job responsibilities with academic activities and personal lives.
- **Facilitate teen support groups.** Like parenting support groups, support groups that allow teens to connect and identify with each other could help ensure minor employees do not feel isolated in their work environments.

## May 13–17: Address Substance Misuse

This week is dedicated to substance misuse prevention and promoting positive mental health practices.

### *5 Ways You Can Address Substance Misuse Issues*

By understanding how to recognize, prevent, and address substance misuse, you can reduce physical and mental harm to your employees, improve employee satisfaction, and avoid legal risk.

- **Establish clear comprehensive policies** that set forth your expectations for employees, the consequences of substance use at work, and the support resources you offer, such as an employee assistance program (EAP) and a list of a rehabilitation facilities and treatment programs covered by employer health benefits. Your policies could offer employees the opportunity to seek rehabilitation pursuant to a leave of absence, rather than continuing to struggle for fear of retaliation. Work with legal counsel to ensure your policies are compliant.
- **Foster a workplace culture** where employees feel comfortable coming forward to seek help without fear of judgment or retaliation.
- **Train your managerial employees** to recognize the signs of substance misuse and how to support employees in need of assistance.
- **Implement educational programs** to raise awareness about the risks of substance misuse and the importance of maintaining positive mental health.
- **Use EAPs** to confidentially support employees who may be struggling with substance misuse or other mental health issues.

## May 20–25: Use AI As a Mental Health Tool

AI tools offer a modern way to analyze countless potential data points related to employee activities and sentiments – which can be leveraged to effectively boost engagement and improve mental health. For example:

- **Data collection.** These tools collect data from various sources such as employee output, emails, and digital communications. For instance, AI-driven analytics platforms can monitor trends in communication patterns, frequency of collaboration, and other indicators of engagement. By analyzing this data, AI can help identify areas where engagement is lacking and suggest targeted interventions.
- **Employee interaction.** AI can also actively interact with employees to gauge their satisfaction and well-being through automated chats or surveys conducted at regular intervals. This continuous feedback mechanism allows you to keep a pulse on the workforce's mood without waiting for annual reviews. For example, AI-powered chatbots can initiate check-ins with employees, offering a platform for them to express concerns or provide feedback in a less

formal, more immediate manner. This not only helps in addressing issues promptly but also fosters a culture of openness and continuous improvement.

- **Spotting problems.** Moreover, AI systems can be programmed to recognize signs of disengagement or burnout. They can alert managers and start the process of rolling out proactive measures. And they can even help tailor these measures and develop personalized retention strategies – such as career path discussions, role adjustments, or mentorship opportunities.

#### ***4 Ways You Can Use AI to Improve Your Wellness Program***

- **Virtual well-being concierges or chatbots** can be used to interact with employees in real time to provide personalized support, guidance, and resources for managing stress, improving work-life balance, and accessing mental health services.
- **Generative AI** can also be used to analyze communication patterns within the workplace to identify signs of stress, burnout, or other mental health concerns. By flagging concerning patterns or behaviors, employers can intervene early and provide support to employees in need.
- **Predictive analytics** can be used to analyze large datasets to predict trends and patterns related to employee mental health and well-being.
- **By combining data from wearable devices, health assessments, and other sources,** AI algorithms can recommend specific activities, resources, or support services to address each employee's unique mental health challenges.

Recognize, however, that some employees may not appreciate hearing rumors that they are being surveilled by robots to improve their mental health. As with most AI tools that support your HR functions, you should consider providing full transparency with your workforce about the ways you are leveraging technology. Providing disclosures about the specific ways in which you use AI – and perhaps offering alternative measures or even an opt-out feature – could be a best practice that will serve your organization well.

#### **May 27–31: Improve Your Work Environment**

As Mental Health Awareness Month draws to a close, you could take time to focus specifically on what kind of work environment you are fostering. You should examine factors that impact mental health, such as work overload, bullying, harassment, and poor management support. Here are seven ways to improve your workplace culture:

- **Train managers and supervisors** to recognize signs of stress, burnout, and mental health issues among their team members.
- **Lead by example** by prioritizing your own work-life balance and demonstrating empathy about employees' personal and professional challenges.

- **Acknowledge and celebrate** employee achievements and milestones to ensure employees feel like valued members of your organization.
- **Offer flexible work arrangements**, such as remote work options, flexible hours, and compressed workweeks to accommodate employees' diverse needs, promote balance, and reduce stress.
- **Offer quality benefits** to increase employee satisfaction. While 92% of employees say mental healthcare coverage is important for creating a positive workplace culture, just 60% say their employer offers such coverage, according to NAMI.
- **Clearly define the channels** employees can use to confidentially report workplace concerns, such as harassment or bullying.
- **Encourage social connections** among employees by organizing team-building activities and optional social events.

## Conclusion

Supporting employee mental health is not a once-per-year effort but an ongoing commitment. By implementing the strategies outlined in this guide and integrating mental health initiatives into your organization's culture, you can foster a workplace where employees feel valued, supported, and empowered to prioritize their well-being year-round. If you have questions, please contact the authors of this Insight or your Fisher Phillips attorney. Make sure you are subscribed to [Fisher Phillips' Insight System](#) to gather the most up-to-date information directly to your inbox.

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