

A photograph of two men in a meeting. The man on the left is younger, with a beard and a red and blue plaid shirt, looking towards the right. The man on the right is older, with glasses and a grey beard, wearing a grey sweater over a light blue shirt, looking towards the camera. They are both looking at a document or screen that is partially visible on the right side of the frame. The background is a blurred office setting.

# Supporting Behavioral Health in the Workplace

Behavioral Health Impact Study



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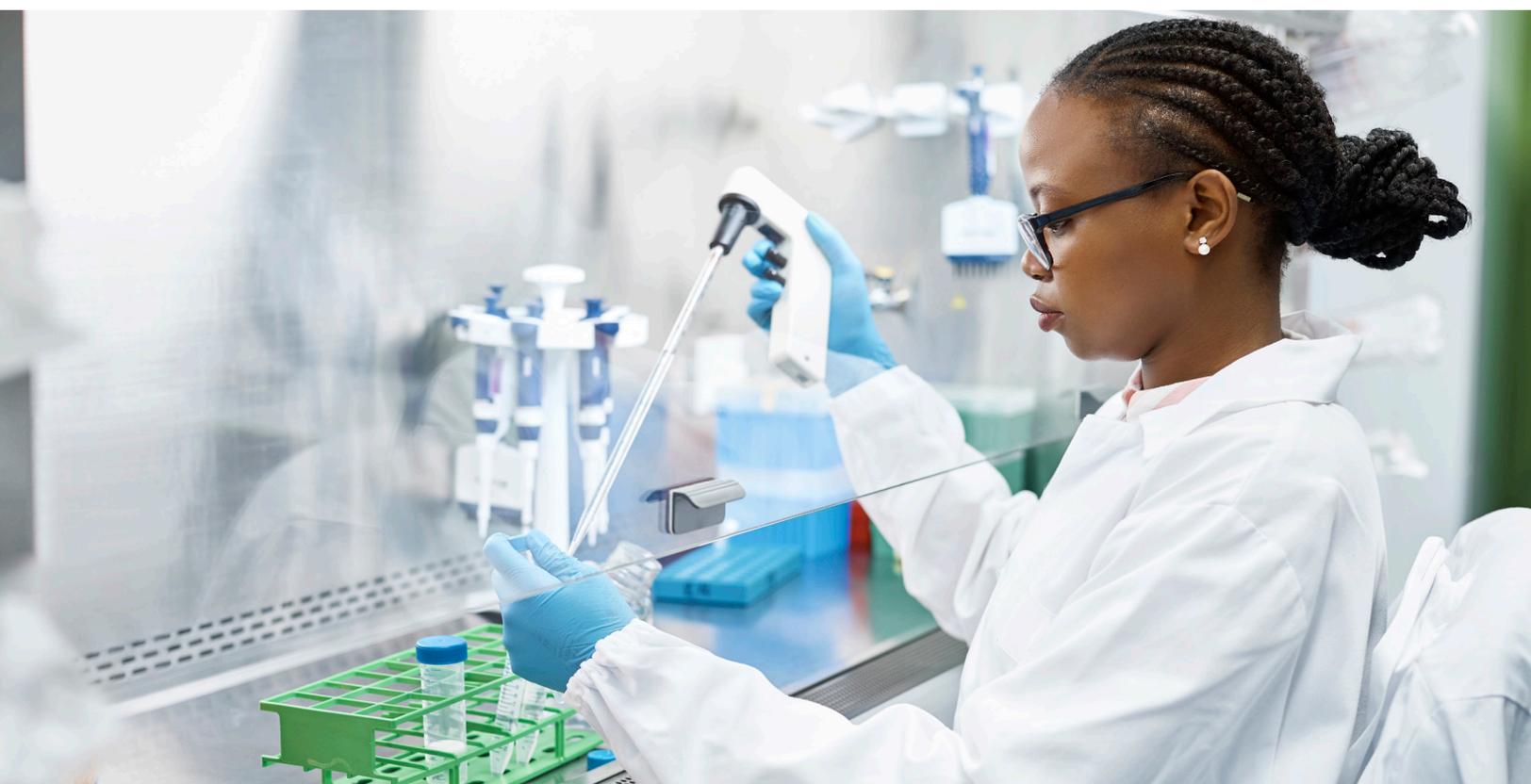
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# The State of Behavioral Health

Mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety, and substance abuse issues affect a broad range of people, across ages, industries, and organizations.

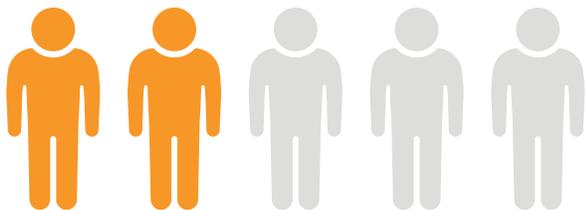
And as stressful events or uncertainty add more disruption and stress to people's lives, these conditions are rightly receiving more attention.

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To learn more about employee expectations and behavioral health conditions in the workplace, The Standard conducted the Behavioral Health Impact Study. In this report, we'll show that the business case is strong for supporting employees who are struggling with Behavioral Health conditions. And employees — especially younger employees, which make up the majority of the workforce — are expecting employers to create a workplace that supports those with behavioral health conditions.

# How Employees Are Affected

While many employers understand they may have some employees with mental health conditions or substance abuse issues, they might not have a clear picture of how many employees are actually struggling. In our research, 39 percent of U.S. workers suffer from mental health distress, such as anxiety or depression. And 31 percent of workers with serious mental health conditions also reported suffering from an addiction.



**39%** of workers suffer from **mental health issues**

**These conditions affect people's emotional, physical, social and financial health.** They also greatly disrupt a person's time, energy, and attention. Unfortunately, these challenges affect people in all areas of their life, including work.

In the workplace, these challenges often result in impacts on job performance and productivity.



**30%**

of employees say they **have ever been less productive at a job due to a mental health issue**



**24%**

of employees say they **have ever missed a day of work due to a mental health issue**

The amount of work affected by behavioral health conditions isn't small. A significant number of work hours are being impacted by behavioral health issues — **32% of employees whose productivity suffered because of a mental health issue say 20+ hours per week of their work time was impacted.**

And other factors—from an individual level to a worldwide scale—are adding extra layers of stress. Potential illness, the fear of layoffs, disrupted workstyles, and constrained resources can increase behavioral health concerns — and ultimately impact the organization overall.

# Employee Workplace Concerns

While employees with behavioral health issues often want help, few are comfortable turning to their employers in their time of need.

For mental health issues, only 38% of workers are comfortable seeking help from their employer. For addiction or substance abuse it's even less, with only 32% of workers comfortable seeking employer help.

Work-related stigmas and concerns can create a roadblock. Employees worry about how their workplaces and coworkers will react, and how knowledge of their condition could affect work relationships, career opportunities, or even lead to them getting fired.

## 5 WORRIES EMPLOYEES HAVE

FOR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES	FOR ADDICTION OR SUBSTANCE ABUSE ISSUES
<b>35%</b> Having coworkers find out	<b>46%</b> Getting fired
<b>33%</b> People treating them differently	<b>38%</b> Having coworkers find out
<b>31%</b> Being talked about behind their back	<b>36%</b> People treating them differently
<b>25%</b> Being passed over for opportunities or promotions	<b>33%</b> Being talked about behind their back
<b>25%</b> People thinking they are weak	<b>32%</b> Having their managers find out

# Employee Workplace Concerns, continued

As a result of stigmas and concerns, as well as practical obstacles such as schedules, duties, and other work pressures, some workers aren't pursuing the professional or medicinal care they need.

## BECAUSE OF WORK



Even when employees do let their employers know about their behavioral health struggles, they worry about whether or not their employer would support them.

**“[My employer] said, ‘Call the assistance program, and please don’t bother us with this.’ That was the feeling I got.”**

— Male, age 43, education industry

**“Beyond the generality of the stigma of mental health or substance abuse, I think people are concerned that they don’t want to have anything tied to them. They don’t want any additional reason why they might be the next one on the chopping block. People are very leery about showing any type of weakness, whatsoever.”**

— Female, age 44, technology industry

When it comes to **mental health issues**, more than a quarter of employees say their employer would expect them to just manage it on their own. Eight percent say their employer would find a way to get rid of them.

When it comes to **substance abuse**, there’s even more concern that their employer would try to terminate their job. While 21 percent say their employer would expect them to manage their substance abuse issue on their own, 23 percent say their employer would find a way to get rid of them if they knew.

# Employee Expectations of Their Employers

When it comes to how well employers are understanding, recognizing, and supporting behavioral health needs, there's work to do.

**Fewer than a third of employees rate their employers as doing very good or excellent at supporting behavioral health needs.**



Recognizing mental health as being just as important as physical health



Improving employee access to mental health services and support



Providing work accommodations and flexibility for employees who need help



Creating a work culture that fosters less stress and better mental health



Raising awareness of these issues in my workplace

Yet, an overwhelming majority of employees believes that companies should be helping employees with mental health or substance abuse issues.

**91 percent agree helping employees who have mental health or substance abuse issues keep their jobs is the right thing for companies to do.**

Employees agree it's not only the right thing to do, but **91 percent also agree it is in a company's own best interest to help employees who have mental health or substance abuse issues.**

When it comes to what employees believe an employer's responsibility is with behavioral health, the numbers paint a clear picture—employees expect a supportive employer and a work culture that fosters mental health.

**“If I’m a mental basket case, I’m obviously not going to be doing a good job for them, and in the long run that’s going to affect their bottom line.”**

— Female, age 41, tech industry



## Creating a Supportive Culture

We've seen employees are struggling with behavioral health challenges. It's affecting their work and their workplace is affecting how they seek help.

And when events outside of their control add disruption to life and work, employees' behavioral health expectations, conditions, and needs will likely increase.

Employees are expecting their employers to do more to create a work environment where employees are comfortable seeking help and providing them with resources to help them achieve positive outcomes.

**“There would be one-hour lunchtime workshops, or different things like that on wellness. [An email would] say, “You are highly encouraged to attend these kind of wellness things.” But then supervisors would be like, “That’s not part of your work time.”**

*— Female, age 36, education industry*

# 41%

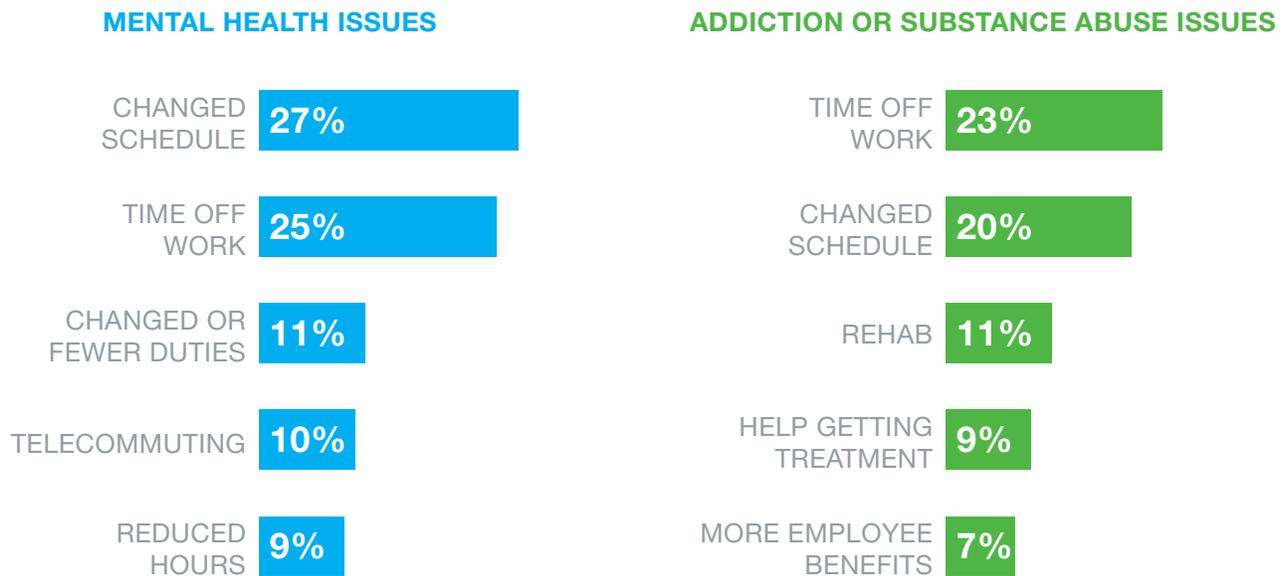
When asked to pick among several options, workers say what they want most from their employer is to **create a work culture that fosters mental health**



# What Can Employers Do?

If you're aware of employees suffering from behavioral health conditions, one immediate way to support them is to provide some form of practical accommodation to help them at work.

For those requesting accommodations, these were the five most common:



Remember, employees are aware of how their employer supports workers dealing with a personal crisis.

They are also aware of how organizations respond during economic downturns and stressful social events. **How their employer acts can inform how an employee feels supported — or not — in their workplace during challenging times.**

# What Can Employers Do?

Here are a few practical things employers can begin doing to build a culture that fosters positive behavioral health:

## For HR leaders:

- Review your benefits offerings to identify behavioral health features
- Design benefits offerings and programs that include input from employees
- Offer wellness programs and incentives to encourage employee participation
- Account for how stressors may be affecting employees and what can be done to support them in the workplace
- Partner with experts, like your disability carrier, who understand effective behavioral health accommodations and solutions
- Ensure employees know where to access benefits information and resources, and who to contact for help

## For managers:

- Get to know employees on a professional and personal level, and be sympathetic and empathetic to their unique situations
- Clarify what behavioral health accommodations are available to employees and connect employees to the right contacts and resources
- Demonstrate and contribute to a healthy work/life balance for employees

# What Can Employers Do?

## For organizational leaders:

- Incorporate employee health into company mission and values, and ensure that leadership and policies reflect these values
- Equip managers and leaders with behavioral health training and resources
- Create company-wide behavioral health awareness and anti-stigma communications, especially those that factor in the added stress of the disruptions caused by stressful health, economic, and social events
- With increased telecommuting, ensure remote workers and teams are supported and included in positive work culture programs
- Offer flexibility to employees during disruptive times, and to those experiencing behavioral health challenges

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Find additional resources related to behavioral health in the workplace by visiting the behavioral health resource center at [standard.com/behavioralhealth](https://standard.com/behavioralhealth). You'll find more reports developed from our Behavioral Health Impact Study and other helpful tools.

# Research methodology

The Standard commissioned Versta Research, an independent research firm, to design and execute a survey of 2,004 full-time employees in the U.S. about mental and behavioral health issues in the workplace. All respondents were aware of employer sponsored disability benefits, whether or not their employer offered those benefits and whether or not they participated. All industries and economic sectors except federal government employees were included. The survey was fielded in September and October, 2019.

In addition to the survey, selected respondents were invited to participate in follow-up phone interviews to gain deeper insight related to worker perspectives on how effectively employers are dealing with behavioral health issues, and the critical workplace needs of employees with behavioral health issues. The follow-up interviews were conducted in January and February, 2020.

In the survey, mental health was measured using the Kessler K6 scale with cut off criteria recommended by Judith J. Prochaska, Hai-Yen Sung, Wendy Max, Yanling Shi, and Michael Ong in “Validity Study of the K6 Scale as a Measure of Moderate Mental Distress based on Mental Health Treatment Need and Utilization” published in *The International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research*, June 2012, Volume 21(2): 88–97.

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## About The Standard

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