

Benefits Insights



3 Employee Wellness Trends to Watch in 2021

After a year that was turned upside down by the COVID-19 pandemic, many aspects of the workplace have changed, including employer-sponsored wellness programs.

Prior to the pandemic, employers were already making a shift to the way they viewed and implemented wellness initiatives at their organization. Some of these changes included focusing on holistic well-being and bolstering mental health offerings.

According to the Business Group on Health's [2021 Large Employers' Health Care Strategy and Plan Design Survey](#), 45% of employers surveyed in 2020 considered their health care strategy to be a critical component of their overall workplace strategy, up from 36% in 2019.

Given the pandemic's effects on employees' health, it's no surprise that employers are expected to expand their wellness offerings in 2021. With these expectations in mind, here are three popular employee wellness trends to look out for in 2021.

1. Greater Focus on Holistic Well-being

Similar to last year, employers will likely continue to focus on offering wellness benefits that address overall well-being rather than just physical well-being. A holistic approach to wellness helps address all aspects of the body and mind, as opposed to just the former. These plans include access to mental health professionals and assistance dealing with stress and depression. Companies using this method are focusing more on metrics like employee satisfaction and retention than one-size-fits-all health plans. Employees are likely to expect a robust offering of wellness resources moving forward, which means it's important for employers to consider evaluating their current offerings to stay on trend.

2. Expanded Mental Health Resources

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an underlying pandemic that's affecting workers, regardless of whether employees are working on-site or remotely. Americans are increasingly suffering from behavioral health issues during the pandemic, including mental health issues and substance abuse, with 80% reporting feeling moderately or highly distressed due to the pandemic, according to a survey from The Standard.

Employers have taken various approaches to addressing the mental health concerns and stress employees are experiencing. One of the most prominent trends for 2021 is that employers are looking to expand access to mental health resources for their employees. According to the Business Group on Health's 2021 survey, in the next year:

- 88% of employers plan to provide access to online mental health support resources (e.g., apps, videos and articles)
- 65% plan to provide manager training to help recognize mental and behavioral health issues
- 50% plan to conduct anti-stigma campaigns

In addition, employers are planning to revitalize or implement employee assistance programs, and lower or waive costs for employees to access mental health resources. Regardless of the methods used, to effectively support employees during these uncertain times, employers will need to evaluate their mental health wellness initiatives in 2021.

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3. Expanded Financial Wellness Resources

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, employers were focused on expanding financial wellness resources. However, the pandemic has put significant strain on employees across the country. According to MetLife's [18th Annual U.S. Employee Benefit Trends Study 2020](#), 81% of employees report feeling major financial stress since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many organizations employ a diverse cast of employees—some may be nearing retirement, and others may be finishing school. This means employees can often face unique financial stressors from one another. To combat this, some employers offer financial wellness programs to help reduce these stressors. These programs vary in complexity but can include virtual personal financial planning meetings, tuition reimbursement, seminars and payday loan assistance. The idea is to offer enough services for anyone in your workforce to take advantage of, no matter their financial situation.

Conclusion

If you want to retain and support current employees and attract new ones, consider investing in your wellness programs in 2021. First, evaluate your current initiatives, then think about ways to improve them. Be sure to reach out to employees and see what they find most valuable.

Contact us today for more wellness program ideas or for ways to get started.