Inside you’ll find tips and information on a range of health and well-being trends. Use this guide to support your employee wellness program strategy.
Discover what’s trending this year

Our 2021 well-being trends guide is here! The pandemic, politics and protests had significant effects on our well-being, and these impacts will continue to shape our future. As we look ahead, it will be important for organizations to prioritize employee health and foster a supportive and inclusive culture. Design a more robust well-being program with activities, policies, benefits and environmental changes that support your employees in achieving True Health. When employees are healthy, they are inspired to do great things for their organization and their community.

Here’s what we’ll be tracking this year:

- Mental well-being
- A diverse, equitable and inclusive culture
- Family well-being
- Financial well-being
- Preventive care
- Sustainability
- Eating well
- Self-care
- Social determinants of health
- Engaging remote employees
Many adults report the worry and stress over COVID-19 has negatively impacted their mental well-being. We’re seeing increased social isolation, loneliness and burnout, and individuals are reporting difficulty sleeping or eating, increased alcohol consumption or substance use, and worsening chronic conditions. Poor mental well-being can contribute to diminished productivity and increased risk for chronic conditions, burnout, absenteeism and health care costs. Implementing initiatives that foster resilience can help employees handle stress better and increase happiness.

**Here’s what you can do:**

+ Foster resilience by investing in health plan services and resources, an employee assistance program, access to virtual behavioral health visits and health coaching.

+ Offset stress and burnout by offering mental health days, promoting flexible schedules, encouraging meditation and sleep apps, and hosting virtual yoga classes.

+ Encourage social support to mitigate loneliness by organizing team-building activities and establishing regular check-ins.

+ Educate employees through an anti-stigma campaign or by offering mindfulness or mental health first aid training.

**Read more:**

+ [Resilience: A strong workforce needs it](#)
+ [Mental well-being toolkit](#)
A diverse, equitable and inclusive culture

The summer of 2020 brought issues of racial injustice and inequity to the forefront, and many organizations committed to action and change. Employees want more transparency on these efforts and look for organizations that are values-driven and take bold, intentional action on issues that matter and impact communities. Employees who feel like they belong, have equal access and are part of a diverse team are more likely to be engaged, be loyal to the organization, recommend their company as a great place to work and have greater overall well-being in their lives. Diverse, equitable and inclusive cultures are more likely to be innovative and productive by being better able to anticipate change and effectively respond, resulting in overall better business outcomes.

Here’s what you can do:

+ Commit to balanced representation across all levels of the organization by developing a strategy that focuses on recruiting, onboarding, developing and retaining a diverse workforce.

+ Provide opportunities for ongoing learning across all levels of the organization on topics such as unconscious bias and conscious inclusion.

+ Offer health plan services and resources to support a diverse range of needs, ensure all employees have access to your well-being programs, allow parental leave, and consider floating holidays to recognize traditions outside the standard holiday calendar.

Read more:

+ The journey to equity and inclusion
+ The time is now: Addressing diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace
+ Inclusion in your workplace e-book
Family well-being

While challenges posed by the pandemic have affected all employees, working parents are dealing with disruptions that add extra strain to their work and home lives. Parents are experiencing more stress, anxiety and burnout, and cases of burnout are even more prevalent among Black, Asian, and Latino mothers. To balance their responsibilities, parents may need to rearrange their work schedules, decrease their hours, take leave, or pursue alternative employment opportunities. Investing in employees and their families can lead to greater innovation, higher talent retention, and increased productivity.

Here’s what you can do:

+ Share a more equitable and sustainable future by investing in working parents and addressing the unique drivers of burnout for employees of different races, ethnicities, and genders.
+ Provide holistic support at every stage of life with fertility benefits, generous leave policies for mothers and fathers, return to work programs, and childcare support.
+ Allow flexibility with scheduling, encourage protected time, and offer a compressed workweek.
+ Help employees feel supported by promoting resources, such as your EAP, community support groups, parenting workshops, virtual trainings, meditation apps, and meal planning services.
+ Create a culture where employees feel comfortable using these benefits and services.

Read more:

+ [Parents at the best workplaces](#)
+ [The state of working parents](#)
**Financial well-being**

Financial well-being is a critical component of overall well-being and a growing concern for employers. According to Workforce Institute, 77% of Americans report anxiety over their financial situation and more than 40% say that financial stress makes it difficult for them to concentrate at work. Financial stress can lead to depression, panic attacks, poor sleep, increased absenteeism and decreased productivity.

**Here’s what you can do:**

+ Work with your financial partner to offer financial education services on topics like budgeting, retirement planning, emergency savings and debt repayment.
+ Benefits such as a 401(k) or tuition repayment program can help employees save for the future or pay down debt.
+ Consider contributing to employees’ retirement, FSA or HSA accounts.
+ Promote tools and benefits that can save employees money like employee assistance programs, discount programs and lower-cost health care options, like primary care and 90-day supply benefits for prescription drugs.
+ Incentivize activities that promote financial health such as attending a financial education seminar or setting a monthly savings goal.

**Read more:**

+ [5 ways to help employees with their money](#)
+ [Employee financial wellness survey results](#)
Preventive care

Early in the pandemic, utilization of health care services dropped significantly, and many individuals deferred their well-care visits. Delaying or skipping these services can increase the risk of serious illness. Three conditions that cost employers the most (diabetes, heart attacks and high blood pressure) can often be prevented or caught early and treated successfully. Missed health conditions can also result in increased sick time, lost productivity, and increased health care costs. Virtual care grew significantly in 2020 with improved availability of providers and expanded services.

Here’s what you can do:

+ Understand your population’s health by collaborating with your health plan to review insights about your health care claims.
+ Educate employees on the importance of staying up-to-date on recommended screenings and immunizations, and remind them of the rigorous safety procedures implemented at health care facilities.
+ Encourage employees to use virtual care when appropriate.
+ Provide paid time for preventive care services, including well-care visits, flu shots and the COVID-19 vaccine once available to your population.

Read more:

+ Primary care provider toolkit
+ COVID-19 vaccine communication toolkit
Sustainability

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of creating and maintaining environments where employees feel safe, comfortable and supported. From air quality to cleaning supplies to building designs, we view the places we work through a different lens. Taking actionable steps towards creating a sustainable environment can increase employee happiness and productivity, enhance collaboration and community and reduce the organization’s carbon footprint.

Here’s what you can do:

+ Think about how you can design your workplace to support the comfort, health and safety of your employees.
+ Take steps to improve air ventilation, use all-natural cleaning products, create spaces that have adjustable workstations, and maximize natural light throughout the building.
+ Create a healthy office environment by offering recycling options in the breakrooms, adding greenery to common areas, and installing water bottle filling stations.
+ Be socially responsible by allowing telecommuting, using digital collaboration tools and promoting virtual meetings.

Read more:

+ WELL v2 and WELL Health-Safety Rating certification criteria
+ Your plan, your planet
Eating well

It has never been more important to focus on the well-being and immunity of your workforce. The pandemic has changed many aspects of life, including how and what we eat, and it has brought greater awareness to the health risks associated with poor nutrition. We’ve consumed more comfort foods, snacks and added sugars, but we’ve also cooked more at home, focused on immune-boosting foods, and increased our plant-based meals. The risk of adverse outcomes from COVID-19 are compounded for those with diet-fueled chronic conditions, like hypertension, obesity, and type 2 diabetes. For employers, these illnesses contribute to absenteeism, lost productivity, long-term disability, and increased health care costs.

Here’s what you can do:

+ Support healthy habits by promoting food tracking apps, offering healthy food experiences, or hosting a hydration challenge and providing water bottles.

+ Help employees build their kitchen skills by offering virtual cooking classes on topics such as meal planning and mindful eating.

+ Provide a subsidy for a community supported agriculture share or meal subscription service.

+ Promote health plan benefits, like the Healthy Eating and Active Lifestyle program and LifeBalance.

+ Think about how you can help make the healthy choice, the easy choice – offer fruit-infused water, redesign your break areas to include a food prep area with common kitchen appliances, implement a healthy meeting policy, or install water bottle filling stations.

Read more:

+ Creating a healthy worksite food environment
+ Dig into mindful eating guide
Self-care

Stress generators like the pandemic, political divisiveness, an uncertain economy and social unrest have caused increased levels of anxiety and burnout. It’s vital to focus on self-care during these difficult times. Self-care is different for everyone, as we all use different tools to reduce personal stress and improve our mental well-being. Helping employees feeling supported and encouraging them to prioritize their self-care can result in a thriving, more progressive workplace. These initiatives can increase employee engagement and productivity, improve trust and culture, and reduce absenteeism and burnout.

Here’s what you can do:

+ Help your employees feel more confident with caring leadership, transparent communications and well-being resources.
+ Consider offering meditation app subscriptions, yoga classes, or virtual cooking classes.
+ Promote health plan benefits, like Active&Fit, LifeBalance, ChooseHealthy, preventive care and alternative medicine.
+ Support employees by allowing flexible schedules and providing a generous PTO policy.
+ Build trust through social connections, like leadership meetings, virtual coffee hours, and forums that enable employees to have difficult conversations on relevant issues.

Read more:

+ Mindfulness toolkit
+ Habit bank
COVID-19 has highlighted the inequities in health driven by social determinants like social support, education, neighborhood and built environment, and access to care. These complex factors affect employees’ physical and mental well-being, their ability to be productive at work, and their overall quality of life. Employees who delay care because they lack transportation or childcare, or choose the emergency room because they’re not aware of lower-cost options, may pay the price with their physical and financial well-being. Similarly, employers whose workers use health care resources ineffectively may experience higher overall health care costs.

Here’s what you can do:

+ As an employer, it’s critical to implement benefits and well-being initiatives that address these social and economic factors, so everyone has a chance to achieve True Health.

+ Offer programs that make people feel valued and cared about, such as social events and diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings.

+ Create access to smoke-free environments, walking paths, locker rooms with showers, and quiet spaces.

+ Consider the social needs of your employees when designing your benefits strategy by offering paid time for well-care visits and preventive services, subsidies for public transportation, and back up childcare services.

Read more:

+ [Actions employers can take to address social determinants](#)

+ [Addressing social determinants of health for employers: awareness, accountability, and action](#)
Engaging remote employees

Many organizations shifted their office workforce to remote work during the pandemic, and according to Gallup, about 1/3 of Americans are still working remotely. While employers expect that percentage to drop post-pandemic, it’s expected that it will be nearly three times what it was pre-COVID-19. It is critical for employers to enhance their benefit and well-being programs to address unique needs of remote employees in today’s environment, with some of the top concerns being reduced physical activity and sleep, increased stress, poor ergonomics, and lack of access to care.

Here’s what you can do:

+ Based on the unique needs of your workforce, implement customized strategies to engage your remote employees.
+ Consider digital programs, webinar or video-based health education classes, virtual sessions with health care professionals and wellness challenges that cultivate social well-being.
+ Encourage connectedness with mentor programs, diversity and inclusion forums, Zoom coffee chats, and volunteer activities.
+ Invest in resources that foster collaboration and productivity, like better hardware, equipment, work applications, and security policies.
+ Support work-life balance by allowing flexibility in work hours, encouraging time off, and defining performance and development expectations in this new way of working.

Read more:

+ Work from home playbook
+ Best tools to support your remote workforce
When you’re healthy, you can feel inspired to do great things for your community and the world at large. We believe healthcare is a human right — everyone has a right to quality healthcare. We’re dedicated to the health and care of every member of our community, no matter where they live or who they work for.

Because everyone’s well-being matters.

**Want support for your employee well-being program?** Contact your Health Management Consultant or Account Manager. Or, email our team at [workplacewellness@providence.com](mailto:workplacewellness@providence.com)

[ProvidenceHealthPlan.com](http://ProvidenceHealthPlan.com)