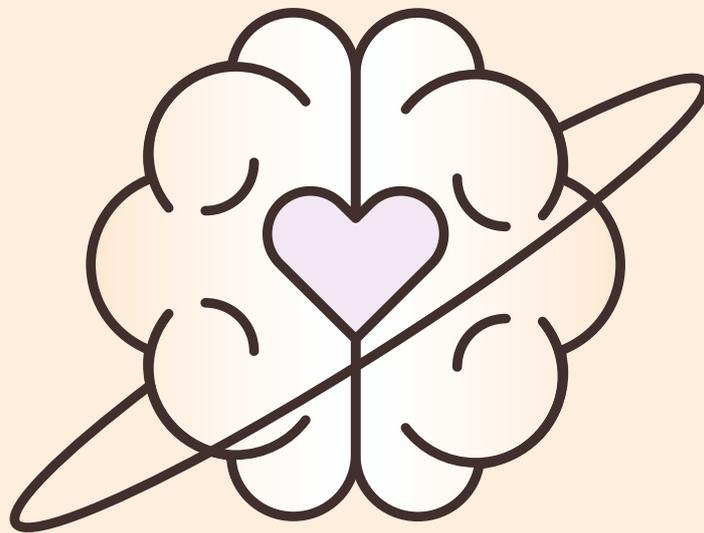


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No Vaccine for Mental Health

Managing employee mental healthcare in a post-pandemic world requires long-term preventive strategies with scalable solutions - not quick fixes.



kai

INTRODUCTION

Let's talk about the elephant in the room, mental healthcare at work.

For years, better employee mental healthcare has been a critical need that has failed to garner due attention.

Employees, misled by unreasonable cultural expectations for behavioral performance, and fearing stigma and consequent job loss, tend to keep mental health private.

Employers, for their part, have been reluctant to cross into personal boundaries or assume responsibility over mental health that may increase employee welfare costs or adversely affect business performance.

While the conditions leading to our collective avoidance of discussing mental health in the workplace are inherently understood, they have never been more ripe for change. The pandemic has squarely placed the elephant in the spotlight by 10Xing the need for scalable, preventative, mental healthcare solutions.

According to a December 2020 report by McKinsey *“What has effectively been a “don't ask, don't tell” approach to mental health in the workplace is becoming instead “do ask, do tell, let's talk.” There is a coming revolution in how companies (and public-policy makers) think about, talk about, and cope with all forms of mental health issues.”*

Importantly, we'd be remiss to tag the need as temporary and treat it with stop-gap measures. Covid has exacerbated an existing condition, it hasn't created a new one. With all of the newfound challenges implicated in living in a post-pandemic world and working remotely, good mental healthcare in the workplace will still be necessary when the implausible 'day after' arrives. The strategies we put in place now mark the beginning of the long-term transition to Mental Health 3.0.

The most effective (and cost-effective) strategies for employee mental healthcare must be preventative

Mental health issues are prevalent in adults, regardless of life stage, gender, or socio-economic status¹. Approximately 50% of people will have a mental health disorder at some stage in their lives².

Research shows that work-related factors affecting wellbeing include: job demands and pressures, degree of autonomy and flexibility, quality of interactions with supervisors and coworkers, frequency of shift work, and length of the workday³.

Long before COVID, work-related stress came at a high cost to employers:



Whether for those experiencing difficult circumstances, or those on a spectrum of recurring issues, mental health challenges can be better managed by actively training with tools for psychological wellbeing (PWB) before the need becomes acute⁴.

Among PWB interventions, “positive psychology offers a compelling intervention strategy that aims to improve the frequency and intensity of positive emotional experiences, including optimism, gratitude, purpose/satisfaction in life, and positive affect, through intentional actions in the form of targeted, structured activities.”

Offering these structures internally to support preventative mental healthcare is cost-effective for employers in three ways:

1. It can help reduce the need for more expensive treatments, such as traditional therapy.
2. It can help prevent causally-related, and expensive to treat physical health conditions, such as diabetes, cancer, and heart disease⁵.
3. It has a direct effect on productivity and absenteeism⁶.

1) <https://ourworldindata.org/mental-health>

2) <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm>

3) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0033354919878434>

4) <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/bmri/2018/5130676/>

5) https://money.cnn.com/2010/06/07/news/companies/starbucks_schultz_healthcare.fortune/index.htm

6) https://hbr.org/resources/pdfs/comm/achievers/hbr_achievers_report_sep13.pdf

According to a December 2020 report by McKinsey, “Employees need, and increasingly demand, resources to help them cope with mental health problems. If companies make mental health services more accessible and intervene in the workplace in ways that improve wellbeing, they will simultaneously make investments that will provide real improvements in employee outcomes and consequently in company performance.”



A recent Harvard Business Review article cites: “\$4 is returned to the economy for every \$1 spent caring for people with mental health issues.”⁷



Another study cited in the McKinsey reports states that “91 percent of employees surveyed believed that their employers should care about their emotional health, and 85 percent said that behavioral health benefits were important when evaluating a new job... ahead of financial advising, gym memberships, and free meals.”

Accessibility alone is not viable, mental health care solutions must be both accessible *and* scalable

Mental health 2.0 companies, such as online therapy platforms, have helped to break down barriers of accessibility to traditional treatment. But at \$150-300/month, most are still unaffordable for the majority of US households⁸.

Furthermore, recent research from McKinsey⁹ shows that COVID-19 is expected to have a potential 50 percent increase in the prevalence of behavioral health conditions.

Those hit hardest are still in their prime years. Young adults ages 18 and 25 have the highest prevalence of any mental illness—and they’re also more likely to talk openly about psychological wellbeing and seek assistance¹⁰. Progressive mental health companies are already starting to prepare the infrastructure.

According to the Thesis 3.0 approach at Union Square Ventures, “The superpower of [Mental Health] 3.0 is scalability by a leap, not a step, that drives down cost to broaden access while improving patient outcomes.” Potential models include mental health companies ‘in disguise’ such as: “user as producer”, AI, P2P, gaming, and group care.

“These have a real opportunity to address a wider swath of the market than users explicitly searching for a therapy solution... though there are opportunities across the spectrum from general wellbeing to severe illness to improve efficiency and efficacy¹¹.”

As a category, wellbeing is easier to integrate with purely tech-based solutions. While more acute conditions of mental illness will always require clinical interaction, they too can leverage tech-based resources by helping patients train in psychological resilience.



The World Health Organization stresses that mental health is more than just the absence of mental disorders or disabilities. **Peak mental health** is about avoiding active conditions *as well* as looking after ongoing wellness and happiness.

8) <https://money.cnn.com/2018/05/22/pf/emergency-expenses-household-finances/index.html>

9) <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare-systems-and-services/our-insights/mental-health-in-the-workplace-the-coming-revolution#>

10) <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml>

11) <https://www.usv.com/writing/2020/09/mental-healthcare-3-0/>

It All Starts With A Conversation

Kai is an AI-powered mental health and wellbeing companion. Using chat-based conversation it helps you create positive daily routines to reframe your mindset and make your life happier and more meaningful. Try it anywhere, anytime, to get through anxiety, stress or whatever life throws at you.

Learn more about [Kai](#) and [Kai for work](#).

Good morning, Maya 🌻

One Thing ⭐

What is the one thing you'll focus on to make today great?

The interview I have in 30 minutes

How do you feel toward your interview?

Worried and nervous :(

Want to do something to boost your confidence and energy? 💪

Yes!

Maya, do you want to pick up a few things from your affirmation and gratitude journals that can