Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Workers Throughout and Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The Impacts of COVID-19 on Worker Mental Health

(1) Employees with preexisting mental health conditions are experiencing an increase in symptoms
   • May have more difficulty handling disruptions to daily life that have accompanied the pandemic

(2) More workers are struggling with mental health conditions
   • 4 in 10 adults have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder during the pandemic, up from 1 in 10 in 2019
The Impacts of Mental Health Conditions on Employment

- Mental health conditions can interfere with essential workplace skills
  - E.g., participating effectively in teams, interacting with customers and co-workers, and maintaining concentration

- Even moderate mental illness can have negative effects
  - 75.9% of people without a mental illness are employed, compared to 62.7% of people with moderate mental illness
The State of Mental Health Supports for Workers

- Reasonable accommodations are mandated but insufficient

- Employees lack workplace supports
  - <50% of workers think their employer provides a safe and welcoming environment for employees with mental health conditions

- Individuals encounter barriers accessing external supports
  - Only half of people with mental health conditions receive treatment
SEED Brief

Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Workers Throughout and Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic
State Responses

By Elise Gurney | January 2022

The last year has been challenging for all, and the state has been working to support the health and well-being of workers. In November 2021, SEED launched the COVID-19 Policy Collaborative for an Inclusive Recovery, also known as the Collaborative, to support states in their work to expand mental health resources, develop strategies to address the pandemic and its impact on workers, and to ensure equity in the expanded policies and programs. The Collaborative is working to ensure that policies and programs align with disability and civil rights laws and policies.

COVID-19: Participants included SEED’s federal interagency partners, researchers, advocates, federal and local government leaders, state departments of health, disability policy specialists, and other thought leaders.

States have sought to expand telehealth services to provide care to those in need of mental health services.

The Rise of Telemental Health

The health insurance company Cigna found that more than 12% of behavioral health consumers used virtual services during the pandemic, and 67% of people who accessed behavioral health services during the initial stay-at-home order (March to May 2020) did not have a behavioral telehealth plan prior to the pandemic.

Empower (2021). Cigna found that more than 12% of behavioral health consumers used virtual services during the pandemic, and 67% of people who accessed behavioral health services during the initial stay-at-home order (March to May 2020) did not have a behavioral telehealth plan prior to the pandemic.

Increasing telehealth for behavioral health services includes:

- Requiring Medicaid plans and private insurers to cover telehealth services.
- Thirty-three states directly or indirectly required Medicaid plans to cover telehealth services. 
- Twenty-one states require private insurers to cover telehealth services.
- Allowing behavioral health providers to utilize telehealth.
- Pennsylvania House Bill 412 allows behavioral health providers, licensed professional counselors, psychologists, licensed social workers, and midwives to provide mental health services through telehealth.
- New York Senate Bill 1939 requires a mental health provider to provide comprehensive mental health services to all individuals, including those with disabilities.

In Oregon, House Bill 3523 requires certain health benefit plans to provide coverage for telehealth and other services.

The Council of State Governments

The Collaborative: A New Approach to Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Workers Throughout and Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The Rise of Telehealth in Various States

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Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Workers

1. **Increasing** access to telemental health services
2. **Strengthening** supports for heavily-impacted communities
3. **Expanding** workplace mental health supports
Increasing Access to Telemental Health

- Requiring payment parity between in-person and telehealth visits
- Increasing mediums, platforms and settings for telehealth
- Expanding types of providers who can provide telemental health services
- Allowing patient-provider relationships to be established through telehealth
Increasing Access to Telemental Health - State Examples

Utah HB 313 requires certain health benefit plans to provide coverage parity for telehealth and telemedicine services.

Montana issued guidance clarifying that a pre-existing provider/patient relationship is not required to provide telemedicine, including mental health services.
Strengthening Supports for Key Communities

- Convening task forces and advisory councils to identify and address the mental health needs of minority groups.
- Increasing availability of and access to culturally competent mental health care.
- Establishing mental health hotlines and other supports for essential workers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
Strengthening Supports for Key Communities – State Examples

**Oregon** [HB 2949](#) expands funding, develops programs and provides incentives to improve access to culturally responsive behavioral health services.

**California** [AB 562](#) proposed establishing a mental health support system for licensed health care providers who have provided direct care to COVID-19 patients.
Expanding Workplace Mental Health Supports

• Requiring employers to provide sick leave, and allowing employees to use it for managing mental health needs

• Providing resources and technical assistance to guide organizations in developing mental health supports for their employees

• Training state employees on supporting mental health in the workplace

• Expanding mental health supports (including Workplace Wellness Programs and Employee Assistance Programs) for state employees
Expanding Workplace Mental Health Supports - State Examples

**New Mexico** HB 20 allows employees to use sick leave for mental illness, injury, or health conditions.

The **Nevada** Public Employees’ Benefits Program offers **Doctor on Demand**, which connects plan members with licensed psychologists through live video.
Questions?

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