

5 ways to address mental health stigma

According to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#), the average delay between symptom onset and treatment for a mental health condition is 11 years. Often, people delay seeking treatment because of stigma, or the fear that they will be discriminated against or treated differently for disclosing their mental health condition. [Eight in ten](#) workers with a mental health condition say shame and stigma prevent them from seeking treatment. With thoughtful and intentional effort, employers can address stigma in their organization and foster a supportive culture that promotes optimal mental well-being.

1. Create an inclusive environment

Ensure policies and processes reflect your values, support your efforts, and accommodate the needs of your current workforce. Use non-stigmatizing and unbiased language in all internal and external communications. Focus on using respectful, person-first language – language that prioritizes the person over their mental health status – and encourage others to do the same. Avoid using words like “crazy,” “insane,” or “OCD,” even during casual conversation.

Offer accommodations to support the work style and needs of neurodiverse employees or people with mental health conditions. This might include flexible hours or working locations, noise cancelling headphones, a private workspace or different lighting to limit sensory stimulation.



Tips for HR Teams:

- + Create an inclusive environment
- + Empower leaders to make mental health a priority
- + Provide mental health literacy training
- + Promote a psychologically safe culture
- + Offer robust benefits



2. Empower leaders to make mental health a priority

Leaders set the tone for their teams and influence the degree to which people are comfortable talking about mental health and prioritizing their well-being. Ask leaders to model positive mental well-being activities at work and to talk openly about mental health. This authenticity can go a long way in letting staff know it's okay to open up about their own challenges and seek support when needed. Talking about it reinforces the message that using mental health support programs is not an indication of weakness, which helps destigmatize mental health conditions.

3. Provide mental health literacy training

Train leaders to recognize signs of distress and ensure they feel comfortable approaching employees they think may be struggling. Make sure leaders are well-versed on the available benefits and resources and can easily connect employees to the support they need.

Offer targeted programs like Mental Health First Aid training, which helps people recognize and respond to behavioral-health challenges in the workplace. These programs reinforce the message that mental health conditions are common and can be managed with prevention, early intervention and support – in the same way we talk about physical health conditions.

4. Promote a psychologically safe culture

Create workplace where all employees feel welcome, safe, and respected in sharing their ideas, voicing their opinions, and being their authentic self. Hold regular check-ins with staff to discuss workload, challenges and concerns. Ask employees how they are doing and really listen. Create a safe space for employees to feel comfortable sharing when they're struggling.

5. Offer robust mental well-being benefits

Offering a variety of resources ensures equitable access and allows employees to get the care they need, at the right time and place. Be sure your vendor partners support cultural competency and offer tools and resources in your employees preferred or native languages. Promote your employee assistance program, behavioral health benefits, digital mental well-being tools, and health coaching. Ensure leaders are familiar with resources and know how to access them so they can connect employees to these resources when needed.

At Providence, we offer solutions across the behavioral health continuum. Members have access to everything from self-help tools to 24/7 crisis support. We make it easy and affordable to access help, virtually and in-person.

**Want to learn more about how you can support workplace mental well-being?
Our team will be glad to help!**

WorkplaceWellness@providence.org | [ProvidenceHealthPlan.com](https://www.providencehealthplan.com)

