



# Culture of health: The productivity summit

*Improving behavioral health and well-being in the workplace*

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In late May, the Carter Center's Mental Health Program hosted the productivity summit with support from its partners, Sedgwick and Pacific Resources. Summit participants included some of the nation's leading employers, academics and mental health experts. During the two-day event, we shared our experiences and recommendations with a common goal in mind – achieve healthy, sustainable individual and organizational performance through the optimization of behavioral health and well-being.

Mental health conditions in the workplace cost U.S. employers \$80–\$100 billion in medical expenses and productivity losses annually.<sup>1</sup> The emotional and psychological impact of mental health conditions on employees, their family members and the community, coupled with a lack of knowledge and willingness to address the issue, makes it a significant concern.

Before the summit, participants were surveyed to gain insights on their thoughts and experiences, and the success (or failure) of existing programs. The survey results put a spotlight on the ongoing need for proven, effective mental health programs that offer evidence to support the value of workplace interventions, which is required to secure support and funding from leadership.

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Healthcare spending today is \$3.8 trillion<sup>2</sup> compared to \$179 billion<sup>3</sup> for mental health. In today's workforce, most knowledge-based employees are dealing with job insecurity because of outsourcing, downsizing and layoffs, combined with increasing pressures to innovate and produce. The resulting stress and anxiety can translate into higher medical costs and diminished productivity for employers.

The importance of employee health and well-being is clear, but corporate leaders need proof that investing in mental health issues will pay off in areas such as benefit costs, productivity and employee satisfaction.

Productivity summit participants explored several areas such as how to keep the employee well, how to create a program that can be implemented quickly, what evidence shows the relationship between mental health and corporate success, and what is the best information to present to leadership. Suggestions included linking the benefits of good mental health to what matters to the organization, such as quality and safety; using terminology that resonates with employees; and focusing on creating a culture of well-being.

We agreed that the key attributes of a successful program should include:

- Creating a culture of health and well-being that incorporates respect, support, positivity, meaningful work, career progression and life balance
- Developing emotional and social intelligence in leaders
- Encouraging supervisor awareness, and early intervention with Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) with better internal and external integration
- Providing training in secondary prevention techniques such as mindfulness
- Reducing stigma



*Productivity summit participants included some of the nation's leading employers, academics and mental health experts, joining together to impact behavioral health and well-being in the workplace.*

EAPs are commonly used to address mental health concerns, but they have often had poor support and success rates, making it difficult to create or deliver anything new. During the summit, the concept of moving from reactive to proactive was discussed, and some of the questions revolved around how to transform the workplace culture, how to make mental health as important as physical well-being and how to prevent mental health conditions. Recommendations included positioning comments related to mental health in terms of performance, providing annual mental health checkups and recognizing the need to address underlying factors, such as lack of workplace control or stability to help prevent employee depression.

The need to de-stigmatize the full range of mental health conditions must also be a priority. Participants posed questions about establishing common terminology, implementing programs to help retain talent and explored what vendors can offer. We discussed using terminology such as “mastering life skills” rather than “depression” or “stress” to allow employees to enter programs without the mental health label; developing

programs that emphasize life skills, resiliency and respect for others to gain greater acceptance and participation; improving the way behavioral health is integrated into primary care; and engaging in creative partnerships with other companies, local government and the community at large.

The following items are needed:

- Strategies and a framework for programs
- Resources to address the challenges surrounding detection
- Science on well-being and workplace mental health in general
- Evidence-based metrics, benchmarks and universally accepted measurements
- More resources that translate research-based evidence into real-world advice
- Better tools for environmental assessments
- Ways to help business see good mental health as an imperative
- A common language when addressing mental health conditions and programs in the workplace





## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### **Carter Center Productivity Summit Summary**

<https://www.sedgwick.com/news/documents/studies/Carter%20Center%20Productivity%20Summit%20Summary.pdf>

### **Research summary: Stress in the workplace study**

<http://www.sedgwick.com/news/Pages/stresssummary.aspx>

### **Sedgwick Connection blog: Carter Symposium: Opportunities for transforming mental health care**

<http://blog.sedgwick.com/2014/12/11/carter-symposium-opportunities-for-transforming-mental-health-care>

### **Sedgwick Connection blog: Mental health series**

<http://blog.sedgwick.com/tag/mental-health>

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### **<sup>1</sup>Partnership for Workplace Mental Health**

<http://www.workplacementalhealth.org/Business-Case.aspx>

### **<sup>2</sup>Forbes: Annual U.S. Healthcare Spending Hits \$3.8 Trillion**

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/danmunro/2014/02/02/annual-u-s-healthcare-spending-hits-3-8-trillion>

### **<sup>3</sup>Projections of National Expenditures for Treatment of Mental and Substance Use Disorders, 2010-2020**

<http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4883/SMA14-4883.pdf>

## HELPING EMPLOYERS SUCCEED

Developing an approach that works for employers begins with creating viable models to implement and use as road maps for success. To address questions about cost, research goals, resources and managing cultural differences, participants recommended the following:

- Ensure that we are leveraging the knowledge and resources we do have
- Generate funding for research with trade associations, government entities, etc.
- Develop and promote a core set of research-based behavioral health benchmarks and metrics
- Build coalitions and bring together outside organizations, including community and faith-based organizations

The most important conclusion was the immediate need to create an innovative program for employers to pilot to help employees, families and companies, and advance the science behind the behavioral health issues. In addition, the team came away with some key deliverables such as developing short- and long-term value propositions for the support of mental health programs; promoting the development of implementation metrics and benchmarks that can become a foundation for programs nationally; identifying tools, resources and best practices currently available; and developing systems and processes to share them.

Sedgwick has partnered with the Carter Center in its ongoing efforts to create meaningful programs to help employers establish a more proactive approach to mental health conditions. We understand the value and importance of addressing mental health issues for our clients' employees with workers' compensation, disability and leave claims. Our team provides key healthcare services to help them deal with these issues, overcome the challenges and return to work sooner.