



5 ways to help employees find the behavioral health care they need



As behavioral health care needs continue to increase, strategies designed to help guide members to care are becoming essential to employer benefits.

In a 2024 survey, 9 in 10 Americans said they believe the U.S. is in the midst of a mental health crisis.¹ This is largely due to the rise in substance use, increased social stressors and feelings of isolation and loneliness.² One-third of those surveyed said they were finding it difficult to get help, in part due to the cost of care and the shortage of behavioral health providers.¹

The inability for employees and their family members to access behavioral health services can have repercussions for employers. Left unaddressed, mental health issues can quickly balloon into more serious conditions, which may result in additional medical problems, more costly care and a poorer quality of life. That can lead to increased tardiness and absenteeism at work, as well as reduced motivation and productivity. In fact, depression and anxiety alone cost the global economy \$1T each year primarily from reduced productivity.³

And while solving for those access issues requires considerable effort within the entire health system, many employees are looking to their employers for support as well. In fact, more than 1 in 4 employees reported quitting a job because of their mental health, and 1 in 5 said their company didn't do enough for their mental health, according to a recent study.⁴ That same study also revealed that nearly 50% of respondents wanted their employers to commit to supporting a healthy work-life balance.⁴

Employers can help employees find behavioral health care by:



Building a benefits strategy that supports a full continuum of care needs



Selecting a network designed to meet members where they are



Offering a guided experience to help employees and their families navigate their care



Reducing the mental health stigma, especially for at-risk populations



Planning for future behavioral health needs

“At UnitedHealthcare, we’re intent on helping guide members to care by supporting employers with strategies that work to make it easier for their employees to get the behavioral health care they need.”

Dr. Rhonda Randall

Chief Medical Officer
UnitedHealthcare Employer & Individual

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Build a benefits strategy that supports a full continuum of care needs

Focusing only on the medical side of a person’s health doesn’t address the full picture of an employee’s overall well-being. Employees have come to expect their employer to offer benefits that support all aspects of their health and well-being. In fact, 7 in 10 surveyed employees agreed that their employer has a responsibility to ensure they are mentally, emotionally and physically well.⁵

UnitedHealthcare is dedicated to delivering a whole-person approach to health care that addresses more than just the physical needs of members. In particular, integrating medical and behavioral health benefits allows for a more complete picture of a member’s overall health and helps better identify and address their holistic care needs.

By applying clinical knowledge and data analytics, UnitedHealthcare developed a behavioral health care continuum, aimed at identifying where members fall

along a spectrum of behavioral health issues and severity levels. This helps guide members to care options that best fit their needs and schedules, including quality clinical care, virtual services, coaching programs, self-care apps and more.

For instance, the continuum uses a severity scale from low (preventive) to moderate (emerging risks) to high (crisis and recovery) that correlates with a full range of behavioral health solutions for employees and their dependents, including a component of **youth and family support**.

In addition to a 24/7 crisis line, UnitedHealthcare members can access urgent appointments within 24 hours and non-urgent appointments within 5 days from a growing network that includes the addition of 52K+ behavioral health and EAP providers and 41K+ virtual providers in 2023 alone.⁶

UnitedHealthcare behavioral health care continuum





Select a network designed to meet members where they are

Although the need for behavioral health care is increasing—depressive disorders are up 66% since the pandemic⁷—there are still many barriers to accessing care. For instance, where an employee lives can determine the availability of nearby providers. In fact, nearly half of Americans live in areas with mental health workforce shortages, with two-thirds of those living in rural areas.⁷ Those shortages are projected to grow substantially, peaking in 2036.⁸

That’s why UnitedHealthcare is focused on **expanding its network of behavioral health care providers**—now offering access to 391.7K+ providers, including 177.8K+ virtual providers.⁶ But it’s not enough to just increase the number of providers within a network.

“At UnitedHealthcare, we’re working to ensure our networks include providers who specialize in different conditions, providers with diverse areas of expertise and

who can deliver culturally relevant care and different ways for members to access those care providers that transcend a traditional doctor’s office,” Randall says.

Virtual health options and digital tools have broken barriers and opened doors for employees and families who may have otherwise struggled to get care and support. Plus, they can help reduce the amount of time employees spend away from work commuting to and from appointments.

“Adding virtual health options into our network designs ignited the demand for members to access care when and where they wanted, which prompted us to start on a path towards revolutionizing our entire digital ecosystem of offerings,” says Trevor Porath, vice president of behavioral health solutions for UnitedHealthcare Employer & Individual.



“With more people using digital tools to manage their daily lives, it’s important that we meet members where they are with a digital experience designed to help guide people along their care journey, especially when it comes to behavioral health care.”

UnitedHealthcare’s behavioral health network⁸

391K+
providers



177K+
virtual providers

Samantha Baker

Chief Consumer Officer
UnitedHealthcare Employer & Individual





Offer a guided experience to help employees and their families navigate their care

Once an employer has selected the right mix of behavioral health benefits and network options for their employees, it's important to ensure that their experience navigating the health system feels connected and supported.

A robust digital experience can help make the behavioral health journey a smoother and more efficient one. UnitedHealthcare digital tools like the UnitedHealthcare® app and myuhc.com® allow members to navigate care with a single sign-on and search for providers, pharmacies, costs and more. And as these tools are more fully integrated into the member's journey, more opportunities for enhanced personalization arise.

Strong customer service and **advocacy programs** are also essential when more compassionate, high-touch support is needed. These professionals are trained to help identify needs beyond basic mental health support and can connect members to the advanced care and resources they may need.

"Our advocates are trained to listen for signs of distress when speaking to members," Randall says. "They also help guide members through the complexities of behavioral health, including understanding different licensed mental health professionals, such as social workers, counselors and psychiatrists."

Predictive tools can also help identify members who may need behavioral health support. Data around the use of specific diagnostic codes and utilization patterns can help segment members based on their conditions by both the level of severity and the advocate's ability to engage. This information is used to support advocates or make suggestions to employees when they sign in to myuhc.com or the UnitedHealthcare app.

For those without a behavioral health diagnosis or utilization of services, a prediction can be made on their level of risk based on social drivers of health (SDOH) data and prevalence of chronic disease—two of the most critical factors that put employees at risk for developing or having an untreated behavioral health condition.



"It's important we have the right data, tools and support in place to deliver an experience that helps guide members along their care journey."

Stacie Grassmuck

Director
Behavioral Health Product and Innovation
UnitedHealthcare Employer & Individual



Reduce the mental health stigma, especially for at-risk populations

While mental health is becoming more comfortable for people to talk about, that doesn't mean it's a common conversation that employees are having with their employer or manager. That stigma can be hard to overcome. Taking steps to reduce its prevalence within an employee population can nurture a healthier workplace culture in addition to better health outcomes, improved productivity and lower costs.

The reality is that mental health impacts all ages⁶ but affects women, teens and racial minority groups disproportionately.⁹ For example, racial minority groups tend to be less likely to seek mental health support as

often as their white counterparts, with 64% of white adults with moderate-to-severe anxiety or depression receiving mental health services compared to 47% of Black adults and 60% of Hispanic adults.¹⁰

Employers can help reduce the mental health stigma within their employee population through targeted campaigns that highlight available resources and services. Through these communications, employers should avoid language that could potentially hurt or inadvertently discourage someone from seeking mental health treatment.



✘ Don't use

Words that may reinforce stereotypes and minimize the importance of understanding mental health conditions, such as "crazy," "head case," "lunatic"

A mental health condition to define the person

The disease to describe the person

✔ Use

Specific and sympathetic language

"Someone who lives with a mental health condition" or "someone who is affected by a mental health condition"

A person-first approach such as "a person living with schizophrenia" or "someone diagnosed with schizophrenia"



Plan for future behavioral health needs

The challenges in the behavioral health landscape demand that all stakeholders—including private and public insurers, care providers, employers and government policymakers—find ways to better serve society’s behavioral health needs.

At UnitedHealthcare, one way this takes shape is working with employers to help identify gaps in care and develop data-driven solutions.

“We are constantly looking at population health trends, employee utilization patterns and group-

specific claims data to pinpoint opportunities and strategies that may lower costs for our clients and drive better overall health outcomes all around,” says Craig Kurtzweil, chief data and analytics officer for UnitedHealthcare Employer & Individual. “So, when behavioral health claims come in lower than the norm, it’s an indication that employees may not be getting the behavioral health support they need. That’s where we step in and help employers implement the right strategies for their workforce.”



“Mental health conditions are not benign illnesses — they really impact your workforce. The sooner you can intervene, you may be able to halt the progression of these diseases.”

Dr. Rhonda Randall

Chief Medical Officer
UnitedHealthcare Employer & Individual

Learn more

Contact your broker, consultant or UnitedHealthcare representative or visit uhc.com/broker-consultant and uhc.com/employer

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¹ Stringer, H. Mental health care is in high demand. Psychologists are leveraging tech and peers to meet the need. American Psychological Association, Jan. 1, 2024. Available: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2024/01/trends-pathways-access-mental-health-care>. Accessed: April 4, 2024.

² Lopes, Lunna. KFF/CNN Mental Health In America Survey. Kaiser Family Foundation, Oct. 5, 2022. Available: <https://www.kff.org/report-section/kff-cnn-mental-health-in-america-survey-findings/>. Accessed: April 4, 2024.

³ The Behavioral Health Care Workforce. National Institute for Health Care Management, June 8, 2023. Available: <https://nihcm.org/publications/the-behavioral-health-care-workforce-shortages-solutions>. Accessed: April 4, 2024.

⁴ Mason, K. Survey: More Than 1 in 4 Have Quit a Job Because of Their Mental Health. JobSage, April 1, 2022. Available: <https://www.jobsage.com/blog/survey-do-companies-support-mental-health/>. Accessed: April 4, 2024.

⁵ Insights We See—Lifestyle Benefits. UnitedHealth Group internal analysis, Feb. 8, 2023.

⁶ SURE Network Summary Dashboard, Commercial E&I and non-E&I UBH General Networks Q4 2023 (Jan. 1, 2024 data); Deanna DuBois, Jan. 31, 2024.

⁷ Mental Health and Substance Use. World Health Organization. Available: <https://www.who.int/teams/mental-health-and-substance-use/promotion-prevention/mental-health-in-the-workplace>. Accessed: March 21, 2024.

⁸ Behavioral Health Workforce, 2023. HRSA Health Workforce, Dec. 2023. Available: <https://bhwh.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/Behavioral-Health-Workforce-Brief-2023.pdf>. Accessed: April 4, 2024.

⁹ Mental Illness. National Institute of Mental Health. Available: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness>. Accessed: March 13, 2024.

¹⁰ Panchal, N. et al. Five Key Findings on Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders by Race/Ethnicity. KFF, Sept. 22, 2022. Available: <https://www.kff.org/mental-health/issue-brief/five-key-findings-on-mental-health-and-substance-use-disorders-by-race-ethnicity/>. Accessed: April 4, 2024.

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