

# Thrive in Your Workplace: Toolkit for Employers Redefining Workplace Mental Health



**THRIVE**  
NYC

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To learn more about Thrive in your Workplace,  
please email: [TWP@Thrive.nyc.gov](mailto:TWP@Thrive.nyc.gov)

## Your quick start guide to strengthening workplace mental health

Whether your organization is a small business, large corporation, or social service provider, there are evidence-driven and innovative strategies that can help you **promote mental health for your employees and strengthen your organization's ability to deliver on its goals. There are many benefits to becoming a workplace that promotes mental health, including:**

- A more engaged and present workforce, with less absenteeism<sup>i</sup>
- Improved job retention and productivity<sup>ii</sup>
- Reduced health care costs<sup>iii</sup>

### Every employer can get started with these three steps:

- Enhance your employees' awareness of existing mental health resources:
  - [Share a directory of resources, such as NYC Well, a free 24/7 helpline](#)
  - [Schedule a Mental Health First Aid training at your workplace.](#)
- Contact Thrive in Your Workplace. We will be happy to offer you free consulting services to help you select and operationalize the strategies and resources best-suited to your goals.
- Complete our Workplace Assessment, which will allow Thrive in Your Workplace to develop a tailored set of recommendations from this toolkit that reflect your organizational context.

## Ready to learn more? Explore the range of workplace mental health innovations that are possible for your organization.

### To improve Access to Care, your organization could:

- Distribute an employee survey to learn more about your employees' mental health needs.
- Contact your benefits or employee assistance plan to discuss mental health coverage.

### To strengthen Leadership and Organizational Culture, your organization could:

- Develop and share a workplace mental health business case with your organization.
- Convene a town hall to discuss workplace mental health and learn more about your workforce's needs.

### To promote Awareness and Communication, your organization could:

- Launch an internal communication campaign to increase knowledge of the importance of mental health and the resources available through your organization.
- Create a campaign of Instagram Stories and have leadership shares their experiences with mental health and why it is important to the organization.

### To increase availability of Workplace Programs, your organization could:

- Empower mental health champions to support mental health initiatives at the organization.
- Implement a cognitive behavioral therapy program for stress reduction in the workplace.

### To develop Management Skills, your organization could:

- Conduct a training for managers about common mental health issues and how to supportively address performance issues related to mental health.
- Implement a management training program to promote psychological safety, such as Guiding Minds at Work, a free program that can enhance employees' psychological well-being.

<sup>i</sup> Lerner D., Adler D.A., Rogers W.H., Chang H., Greenhill A., Cymerman E., & Azocar F. (2015). A randomized clinical trial of telephone depression intervention to reduce employee presenteeism and absenteeism. *Psychiatr Serv*, Jun; 66(6):570-7.

<sup>ii</sup> Lerner, D., Adler, D., Hermann, R. C., Chang, H., Ludman, E. J., Greenhill, A. & Rogers, W. H. (2012). Impact of a work-focused intervention on the productivity and symptoms of employees with depression. *Journal of occupational and environmental medicine*, 54(2), 128-135. doi:10.1097/JOM.0b013e31824409d8

<sup>iii</sup> Vasilicadis H.-M., Dezetter A., Latimer E., Drapeau M., Lesage A. (2016). Assessing the costs and benefits of insuring psychological services as part of medicare for depression in Canada. *Psychiatr. Serv.* 68, 899-906.

## I. Part 1

# Introduction

### About the Office of ThriveNYC and Thrive in Your Workplace

The overarching aim of new Mayoral Office of ThriveNYC is to ensure that every New Yorker who needs mental health support has access to it, where and when they need it. The Office addresses needs that have gone unmet by traditional services and we pilot innovative strategies. This includes new services for historically underserved special populations, expanding the range of mental health support available to New Yorkers, and enhancing mental health equity across the city. The Office works with City agencies and strategic partners to achieve effective citywide implementation of strategies, maximize their effectiveness and ensure sustainability.

Reaching New Yorkers where they are means putting mental health front and center where people live, learn, and work. A part of ThriveNYC, (TWP) is a public-private partnership that engages New York City (NYC) employers to bring mental health support to the one in five New Yorkers who experience mental illness in a given year. The workplace has long been a powerful driver for social change – from influencing civil rights, to women’s rights, to LGBTQ inclusiveness, among many other issues – and now is the time to build on its potential to promote mental health. Alongside a national and international groundswell of interest in workplace mental health, local employers that participate in TWP join a cadre of industry leaders who are committed to leveraging the workplace to raise awareness and fight the stigma of mental health; to teaching the critical skills needed to recognize and respond appropriately to mental health challenges; and to promoting their employees’ access to care.



### Why workplaces?

In an increasingly stressful world where people spend most of their waking hours at work, workplace mental health is now more important than ever. In NYC, workers across industries spend more time at work than their counterparts in other cities, on average, and typically experience longer commuting times.<sup>i</sup> Workplace stressors affect all aspects of our lives as they relate to job security and financial stability, interpersonal

and relational dynamics, workload and work/life balance, fit with values, among many others. The dynamism of the local economy offers us an opportunity to leverage workplaces as places that promote mental health and encourage connections to care where appropriate, ensuring that NYC workers and organizations are equipped to meet their potential.

While NYC workplaces are often at forefront of innovation, the fast pace of work can come at a cost; these workplace environments can be stressful in their own right, or even aggravate underlying mental health conditions.

Alongside the daily stress faced by New Yorkers, the rise of mental health challenges also has a profound effect on the workplace. Poor mental health can be costly to both individuals and their employers. In NYC alone, depression and substance abuse are estimated to cost \$14 billion in lost productivity.<sup>ii</sup> Globally, more than 300 million people suffer from depression, with many people also experiencing symptoms of anxiety.<sup>iii</sup> A recent World Health Organization (WHO)-led study estimates that depression and anxiety disorders cost the global economy US\$1 trillion each year in lost productivity. Another WHO study estimated that absence, disability, and loss of productivity due to mental illness cost employers more than four times the price of medical treatment itself. Research also points to even greater savings from providing appropriate treatment of mental disorders and addictions via increased employee productivity, speed and quality of return to work after disability, and decreased absenteeism and turnover.<sup>iv</sup>

In spite of the suffering caused by mental illness, recovery is possible and many people who experience a mental illness can go on to live a joyful, productive life with the right support and treatment.<sup>v</sup>

Now is a good time for employers to act. Recently, there has been a national and international groundswell of interest in workplace mental health, seen in diverse contexts ranging from Arianna Huffington's [Thrive Global](#) initiative and WHO's recent recognition of [burnout as an occupational hazard](#). Additionally, employees are interested in the role that workplaces can play in improving mental health. A recent national poll of U.S employees found that nine out of ten respondents agreed that employers have a responsibility to support mental health, with many respondents stating that employers can do more than they are currently doing in relation to mental health benefits and support at work.<sup>vi</sup> There is a burgeoning body of research showing that mental health interventions delivered in the workplace are effective at improving mental health,<sup>vii</sup> and emerging methods, such as digital technologies, can provide new opportunities to increase access to care and support employees to live emotionally healthy lives both in and outside of the workplace.

## **What do we mean by “workplace mental health?”**

Mental health-friendly workplaces are those that value the health of their employees, including their mental health and well-being, and have specific practices and policies in place to support employees. Specific policies and practices can include valuing diversity, treating mental illness with the same urgency as physical illness, promoting a healthy work-life balance, and providing training for managers and supervisors on mental health issues. In addition, mental health friendly workplaces support employees in seeking treatment, safeguard employee health information, and provide employees referral resources such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs).<sup>viii</sup>



## What do we mean by “workplace mental health innovation”?

A goal of Thrive in Your Workplace is to encourage employers to adopt workplace mental health innovations, which entails adopting or expanding workplace interventions that increase the ways employees can learn about mental health, receive support, or access mental health care. A sample of potential workplace mental health goals and their corresponding innovations is below:

We suggest some general principles to guide every employer’s efforts:

<b>Sample Employer [Global Corporation]</b>	<b>Sample Employer [Large non-profit]</b>	<b>Sample Employer [Small business]</b>
<p><b>Goal:</b> Increase knowledge of mental health resources and help-seeking behavior</p> <p><b>Innovation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Develop an awareness campaign to reduce stigma and promote help-seeking behavior</li> <li>(2) Implement an Employee Assistance Program to help employees optimize their health benefits</li> </ul>	<p><b>Goal:</b> Educate workforce about mental illness and build supportive skills</p> <p><b>Innovation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Train managers to recognize, appropriately support, and refer employees to care</li> <li>(2) Develop a peer navigator program for employees with lived experience to provide support to others in the recovery process</li> </ul>	<p><b>Goal:</b> Facilitate connection to high-quality mental health support</p> <p><b>Innovation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Assess mental health benefits and utilization to determine accessibility and affordability</li> <li>(2) Provide employees with free or subsidized access to digital health tools to help manage mental health needs</li> </ul>

## II. Part 2

# Taking action on workplace mental health

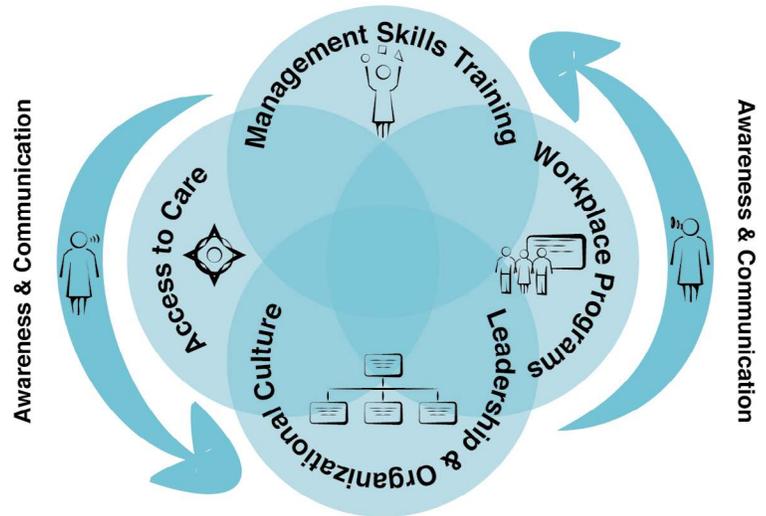
This toolkit shares high-quality, evidence-driven workplace mental health strategies that will guide employers towards creating a mental health friendly workplace that support the needs of your workforce. The toolkit is organized around five researched-informed priority areas in workplace mental health:

1. Access to Care
2. Leadership and Organizational Culture
3. Awareness/Communication
4. Programs
5. Management Skills

### Let us help you develop a strategy specifically for your organization.

We encourage employers to complete our Workplace Assessment, which will allow Thrive in Your Workplace to develop a tailored set of recommendations from this toolkit that reflect your organizational context. We will be happy to offer you free consulting services to help you select and operationalize the strategies and resources best-suited to your goals.

Workplace mental health includes 5 key priority areas:



Within each priority area, the toolkit presents strategies that help organizations shape their workplace mental health efforts. Each strategy is paired with a range of tactics and suggested resources for operationalizing a new workplace mental health support. Resources include links to expert reports or tools, such as lists of evidence-based digital health applications or health risk assessment surveys. We have indicated which resources are free or paid in the toolkit; however many of the paid options have pricing structures that vary according to organizational size and therefore cannot be represented accurately for all employers.

### Who is this toolkit for?

The Toolkit is designed for decision-makers within your organization who are responsible for, or involved in, establishing your organization's workplace mental health strategy.

Decision makers typically include staff from a variety of teams such as Leadership, HR, Benefits, Training, Operations and Employee Groups. As organizational structures often differ among employers, Thrive in Your Workplace staff will defer to our employer partners on this question, however we are available to confer with you on who best to empower with this responsibility.

To make this process as beneficial as possible, we encourage leadership to identify a program champion who is tasked with leading this effort. The champion is an individual who is in charge of the program and given authority to guide the day-to-day work, make strategic choices, and collaborate across departments to build support. While this individual does not have to be a membership of the leadership team, it is critical that they are able to make decisions and are trusted by other departments in order to effect change.

## Setting your organization up for success: Guiding principles for all employers

We suggest some general principles to guide every employer's efforts:

1. *Carefully plan before introducing changes:* Thinking through how you will implement new changes prior to launch can dramatically improve your chances of success.
2. *Introduce one change at a time:* Changing knowledge about mental health and creating new policies in the workplace can be complex. Narrowly defining an initial focus can streamline implementation and provide quick and early wins to lay the groundwork for future initiatives.
3. *Think about implementing recommendations that promote change at both the organizational and employee level:* Many workplace mental health interventions focus only on employee behavior (e.g. stress reduction strategies) instead of looking at root causes (e.g. policies, workload)<sup>x</sup>. While you should not introduce many new initiatives at once, creating a culture of mental health will ultimately require change at all levels of the organization.



4. *Consider the accessibility needs of your workforce:* When you select workplace mental health strategies, acknowledge how and where your workforce will interact with the new support or policies. If your workforce is dispersed or maintains irregular work schedules, you might focus on digital solutions – such as mental health apps – that employees can use on their own time, or provide recorded trainings that are accessible off-site.
5. *Involve all different levels of the workforce in the decision-making process:* Employees from different levels and divisions will bring unique perspectives on organizational priorities and challenges. Including employees early on in the process can spark innovation, provide valuable feedback, and/or ultimately increase take-up and reach of programs.
6. *Plan for broad dissemination and sustainability:* Once an intervention has demonstrated effectiveness on a small scale, develop a plan to both sustain the change in the current setting and to subsequently spread the change to other settings.
7. *Be nimble and adjust your approach as needed:* If your organization currently uses an existing model of process improvement, such as Lean or Six Sigma methodology<sup>x</sup>, use that framework to support implementation. However, if your organization does not have a current quality improvement process in place, TWP recommends using the *Model for Improvement* to guide this work. The *Model for Improvement*<sup>xi</sup> is a conceptually simple model that organizations can apply as they adopt a workplace mental health strategy. The two primary components of the Model for Improvement are (1) identifying small tests of change and (2) conducting Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycles that allow for organizational processes to proceed while a team applies small changes to processes. More information about the Model for Improvement is available to employers through Thrive in Your Workplace’s Technical Assistance.

One of the benefits of using the Model for Improvement is the ability to quickly test small changes and then decide to either keep the strategy, refine or drop it!

<sup>i</sup> New York City Office of the Comptroller. (2015). The Hardest Working Cities. NYC Economic Brief. Accessed from: [https://www.scribd.com/document/259163982/Longest-Work-Weeks-March-2015#fullscreen&from\\_embed](https://www.scribd.com/document/259163982/Longest-Work-Weeks-March-2015#fullscreen&from_embed)

<sup>ii</sup> Muenning, P., Goldsmith, J.A., El-Sayed A.M., Goldmann, E.S., Quan, R., Barracks S., Cheung J., Behavioral Health in New York City: The Burden, Cost, and Return on Investment. Unpublished Raw Data, 2015.

<sup>iii</sup> World Health Organization (September 2017). *Mental health in the workplace*. Retrieved from [https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/in\\_the\\_workplace/en/](https://www.who.int/mental_health/in_the_workplace/en/)

<sup>iv</sup> Center for Workplace Mental Health. *Making the Business Case*. Retrieved from <http://workplacementalhealth.org/Making-The-Business-Case>

<sup>v</sup> Mental Health America. *Recovery is a Journey*. Retrieved from <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/recovery-journey>

<sup>vi</sup> American Heart Association CEO Roundtable (March 5, 2019). *Mental Health – A Workforce Crisis*. Retrieved from <https://ceoroundtable.heart.org/mental-health-a-workforce-crisis-report/>

<sup>vii</sup> LaMontagne A. D., Martin A., Page K., Reavley N., Noblet A., Milner A., et al. Workplace mental health: developing an integrated intervention approach, *BMC Psychiatry*, 2014, vol. 14 pg. 131

<sup>viii</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *Workplaces that Thrive: A resource for Creating Mental Health-Friendly Work Environments*. SAMHSA Pub. No. P040478M. Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2004

<sup>ix</sup> LaMontagne et al, *Ibid*.

<sup>x</sup> Burgess, N. and Radnor, Z. (2013). Evaluating Lean in healthcare. *International J Health Care QA*, 26(3), pgs. 220-235.

<sup>xi</sup> Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (February 2015) *Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Directions and Examples*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/quality-resources/tools/literacy-toolkit/healthittoolkit2-tool2b.html>

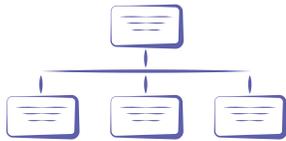
### III. Part 3

## Workplace mental health strategies: Implementation guide

The following chapter provides strategies, tactics, and resources to help organizations advance the five key areas of focus in workplace mental health:



#### Access to Care



#### Leadership and Organizational Culture



#### Awareness and Communication



#### Workplace Programs



#### Management Skills Training