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## GUEST ARTICLE: HEALTH ADVOCATE

**HealthAdvocate<sup>™</sup>**

### **Supporting Your Employees' Mental Health in Changing Times**

During the recent LVBCH Annual Conference, Bert Alicea, Executive Vice President of Health Advocate's Employee Assistance Program, had the opportunity to engage attendees in important discussions around mental health in the workplace. Employees' mental health and well-being is a top priority for LVBCH members and organizations across the country, and understanding the impact of ongoing issues is critical to providing the support and resources necessary to meet employees where they are.

While it is universally agreed upon that the pandemic has been a game changer for employee health and well-being, the resulting need for mental health support has been exacerbated by other challenging situations occurring simultaneously. Managing both these issues and situations that come up in daily life can take a toll, and as a result, employees are experiencing an increase in stress, anxiety, relationship issues and depression. For example:

- 1 in 10 adults in the U.S. have been diagnosed with an emotional illness
- 1 in 5 have been diagnosed with clinical depression
- Only 5% of individuals with a mental health issue seek treatment
- 68% of employees will experience "personal problems" severe enough to prevent them from coping with day-to-day responsibilities

Employees may be feeling unsettled and unsure of how to manage their emotional and mental health. However, employers can take steps to create a supportive environment with access to resources that can help employees and their family members navigate these challenges.

### **How Employers Can Help**

The stigma surrounding mental health continues to impede employees from reaching out to discuss concerns about their mental health. Whether afraid of being perceived as less capable or fearful of negative professional consequences, it's critical for employers to take steps to mitigate these concerns. Even though organizations have clear policies and laws to protect employees seeking help, establishing a culture that encourages employees to be comfortable reaching out can make a positive impact on the workforce.

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Employers can make an impact on reversing this stigma by communicating about mental health awareness and offering resources to help support employees:

- **Educate** and provide training to managers, supervisors and employees about the signs and symptoms of mental health disorders.
- **Encourage** associates to talk about stress, workload, family commitments and other issues. Let associates know, **“It’s OK not to be OK.”**
- **Communicate** that mental illnesses are real, common and treatable.
- **Discourage** stigmatizing language, including hurtful labels such as “crazy,” “loony” or “nuts.”
- **Invest** in mental health benefits.
- **Help** associates transition back to work after they take leave.
- **Consult** with your Employee Assistance Program.

In addition to internal initiatives, employers should consider partnering with other expert resources, including organizations in the local community and Employee Assistance Programs. Additionally, implementing mental health benefits that are easy to access in multiple ways (online, in-person, telephonic, etc.) meets employees where they are for counseling and other support. Finally, providing navigation support so employees can find the right resources to meet their needs ensures they get the help they need when they need it.

## How Health Advocate Can Help

LVBCH has partnered with Health Advocate to provide special rates and terms for coalition members to offer the Employee Assistance+Work/Life program to their employees. Health Advocate’s EAP+Work/Life program provides support for employees as well as managers/supervisors and human resources staff. Whether connecting individual employees to counseling services or providing managers with communications resources to raise awareness of mental health, Health Advocate partners with organizations to address a wide range of mental health and well-being concerns.

To learn more about how Health Advocate can support you and your organization, visit [www.HealthAdvocate.com](http://www.HealthAdvocate.com) or contact Suzanne Starker at 215-880-6364 or [sstarker@healthadvocate.com](mailto:ssarker@healthadvocate.com). As an employer, empathy is key. Everyone wants to be treated with dignity and respect. Helping employees understand that they are not alone and demonstrating a willingness to listen and provide support will go a long way toward reducing the stigma and getting people the help they need. Read more on Health Advocate’s blog about the importance of prioritizing mental health and well-being.