

# *The* **New Wave** — of —

## **HR AND BENEFITS**

Lessons learned, trends, and ways  
to support the future of work



## Introduction

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In March 2020, our favorite restaurants closed their doors, schools moved to virtual learning, and our physical workspaces seemingly shuttered overnight. We almost immediately fantasized the idea of our lives returning back to the normal that we had come to know and love.

But is that really what we want?

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While initially forced to take a few steps back, we quickly learned that most people actually like having a balance between their work and personal lives versus the status quo of an unstoppable pace. We know now that people need more support from their company to support their long-term health — especially with their mental health. And one of the greatest moments of reckoning of all: that we must focus on improving inequities within the workplace as we continue to recruit top talent and support the broader health needs of all workers.

We see companies bring back portions of their workforce to the physical workplace once again. They join an equal number of companies that support workers who never left their workplace to begin with — and even the workers who will never again return to one. Regardless of where your organization falls in that spectrum, we enter a new phase that will represent the future of work for decades to come and as an HR leader, you are the driver, speeding toward a more inclusive, innovative future.





# What have we learned?

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A strategic  
HR function is one  
that prioritizes  
**personalization**

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We're in a new era for HR and Benefits: one with personalization of benefits based on individual's needs so they can be empowered to lead a healthier life. Not only will workers choose different long-term work preferences (virtual, hybrid, or in-person), they will have different long-term health needs. Proactive personalization is foundational for employees to feel supported in both their health and professional development.

It's no secret that the pandemic negatively impacted many workers' mental health — especially among working parents and caregivers. In fact, 52% of working parents struggle to juggle their work and life, according to a [new analysis from the Pew Research Center](#). Sadly, the pressure to juggle both has disproportionately impacted working women leading around [69%](#) of them to stay home as full-time caregivers for the upcoming year.





Chronic workplace stress — often called burnout — also played a major role in the [300% increase in employees](#) reporting poor mental health as a result of the pandemic. That same study, conducted by Flexjobs, noted that 75% of workers experienced burnout last year, with 40% saying their burnout was specific to the pandemic.

**How will you ensure your people in the office and those at home receive the personalized support needed to prevent symptoms of burnout?**

Despite this gloomy picture, there is light at the end of the tunnel. You are best positioned as a primary resource for your workers and supporting them will not only make them healthier, but it will also make your company a healthier place to work. Companies who support people with their life experience (versus their employee experience) see a 20% increase in workers reporting better physical and mental health, according to a [recent study conducted by Gartner](#). Additionally, those organizations saw a 21% increase in high performers versus those that don't provide the same level of support for their people.

# Mental health has never been more top of mind



When your workers struggle with their mental health, so does your company. Stress in the office has led 1-in-3 workers to lose more than two hours a day of productivity. As an employer you can help improve access to the right care and reduce the stigma associated with receiving mental healthcare.

This past year alone, 88% of adults experienced at least one symptom of depression and nearly 61% of workers believe that their mental health has been negatively impacted directly by the pandemic. More Americans reached out for care than ever before as 1 in 6 started going to therapy in 2020 — joining the third of Americans already in therapy. For better or worse, the volume of those experiencing mental health fatigue as a result of the pandemic makes it nearly impossible to keep these discussions hidden under the rug.

**Our healthcare system cannot support current demand.** As of September 2020, the number of available licensed clinical therapists could only support about 27% of the necessary demand. Together, with employers, we can close this gap through other avenues of care. Everyone needs mental healthcare but not everyone needs to see a therapist to get the right level of treatment.

Improving access to care can only go so far in helping people get the treatment they need for their mental health. People can have all the access in the world to the right care but if they feel a stigma associated with it, they may never seek it out. **Unfortunately, 47% of people still believe that going to therapy is a sign of weakness.** Employers, through communications and more targeted strategy, can continue breaking the stigma to ensure that the people who truly need this care and have access to it don't leave a healthier future on the table.



## Virtual care is here to stay



Before the pandemic, about [20% of Americans](#) had been to a telehealth appointment. **That number increased to 61% by 2021, and 87% state they'll continue using telehealth services after the pandemic has fully ended.** Unsurprisingly, about the same percentage of people believe that telemedicine has made it easier to see their doctor. Just imagine how long it takes your employees to schedule appointments, drive or walk to the doctor's office and then ultimately get the care they need. Virtual care saves time and 31% of Americans believe it also helps save money.

There has long been a critical need for more accessible options for healthcare and, like it or not, the pandemic forced us into it. While this change was uncomfortable for many, it turned out to be exactly what we needed to deliver more accessible options for care — and it all rested on virtual care. Until this point, the biggest challenge with virtual care was the need to prove you could receive the same quality, or even higher quality care compared to in-person. The [data](#) shows people are just as satisfied and the outcomes prove virtual health can even deliver better than in-person solutions.



Last year, 52% of all telehealth claims were attributed to mental health visits. Given the current state of mental health in the U.S., access to quality care should be a top priority for your company. A virtual care solution will make it easier for you to increase access and engagement so that your people can feel more confident about their long-term mental health.



# What actions can you take now?

You are a key driver of the most strategic initiatives that will shape the future of work.

Here are six things you can do to build a happier, healthier workforce without pinching your bottom line:



# 01

## Create a true holistic care environment

People think about their health in a complete picture — not in the traditional silos that consumer products and employer benefits bucket them into. When thinking about chronic conditions, we know that each one incorporates elements of mental and physical health, but few think about mental health conditions the same way as they think about physical health conditions.

When people are asked to name a chronic condition, they'd likely say diabetes or COPD. The reality is depression, anxiety, and even stress stick with a person for a long time, require lifestyle changes, and need more than a quick fix to see lasting results. **It's time for industry leaders to recognize mental health conditions are also chronic conditions.**

Currently, **6 in 10** Americans suffer from a chronic condition and 4 in 10 suffer from 2 or more chronic conditions. People with depression also have a **40% higher risk** of developing cardiovascular and metabolic diseases than the general population — and those with severe mental illness are nearly twice as likely to develop these conditions. **A holistic care environment for your workers with chronic conditions breaks down those traditional health silos and delivers better outcomes for a healthier future — including medical cost savings.**



Individuals with diabetes saw a **full point** decrease in A1c while those with high risk diabetes saw a **two point** decrease<sup>1</sup>

**54% decrease** in their depression scores (PHQ-8) over a nine month period<sup>2</sup>

**12.5%**  
cost savings<sup>3</sup>

1. Silberman JM, Kaur M, Sletteland J, Venkatesan A (2020) Outcomes in a digital weight management intervention with one-on-one health coaching. PLoS ONE 3. Vida Health. (Aug 2020) Vida Book of Business, Medicare Polychronic Diabetes Population. 2. Venkatesan, A., Rahimi, L., Kaur, M., & Mosunic, C. (2020). Digital Cognitive Behavior Therapy Intervention for Depression and Anxiety: Retrospective Study. JMIR Mental Health, 7(8), e21304. 3. Evidation Health. (2017). UnitedHealth Group Vida Program: Preliminary Analysis. San mateo, CA.

## 02

### Leverage solutions that meet your people where they are

We live in a hyper-personalized world. You can order nearly anything at the touch of a button; even all your entertainment is curated based on the things you search, watch, and do. The healthcare experience that your workers use daily should be as personalized as the typical customer journey they see in their personal lives.

Why do you keep using the same apps every single day? It's highly likely they're easy to use, help you do something, and add value to your day. That simple principle holds true with a chronic care solution. When people have a solution they can easily find and use, they're more likely to be engaged in their treatment, leading to better outcomes. In-person solutions only offer in-the-moment care, and they require access and transportation, which can often be barriers to care for many populations.

To prevent such barriers, ensure that your chronic care solution leverages omni-channel communications such as a mobile app, over the phone support, text, and video — coupled with a real provider to ensure the highest quality of care for members. **Every generation has different needs when it comes to communication and that should never get in the way of receiving the proper treatment for their chronic physical and mental health conditions.**

85%

of consumers want a blend of digital and physical communication approaches

Source: [2019, CMO Council](#)



Top 4 channels:

- Email • Telephone
- Web • Text



# 03

## Encourage year-round engagement in healthcare

The cycle of healthcare in the U.S. has perpetuated the idea that we only reach out for help after our symptoms have worsened to the point of living uncomfortably. In other words: we're stuck in a reactive, not proactive model of care. This leads to the need for more immediate, expensive care options. There's a misconception that preventive healthcare is time-consuming and costly, when the reality is far from that.

As one of your company's leaders, you're positioned to help re-shape the future by rewriting this narrative. If your people stay more engaged in their health — if it becomes as intuitive as opening their favorite app daily — they'll see dramatic changes in their quality of life. And you'll see dramatic changes in the cost of care. This can begin with better communications around reaching out for care early, but it also requires a solution to complement those conversations. There are partners who can help you communicate solutions and help your people receive the care they need.

**You need a solution that is optimized to encourage engagement in preventive care. For example, a mental health coaching solution will give people easier access to a resource that can help reduce fatigue and offset the need for a long-term clinical solution like therapy.**

**20%**  
cost savings

Virtual mental health solutions can drive cost savings and better clinical outcomes



Greater engagement within Vida Health's mental health solution leads to a larger reduction in depression and anxiety scores

# 04

## Close access gaps in the workforce

In the United States, much of your experience with healthcare depends on where you live, the color of your skin, and even how much money you make. These determinants largely impact what conditions you may develop in your lifetime, and the type of care you'll receive to help manage them. We know that chronic physical conditions like obesity and diabetes disproportionately impact minorities and low-income individuals, and we also know that these communities are less likely to get adequate access to the care they need.

There may not be a silver bullet to solve these societal problems, but employers can begin taking actions to help promote better healthcare equity across their workforce. Offering your people access to a virtual care solution for their physical and mental health will begin to bridge some of those access gaps that currently limit certain parts of your workforce from receiving adequate chronic condition care.

Improving access to care is the first step and as an HR leader, you're uniquely positioned to have conversations with your workforce about reducing the stigma associated with receiving care for these conditions. Offering access is only the first step. If your people are hesitant to receive care, they won't be able to work towards a healthier future.

**Additional steps include offering people the care (or resources) they need in the language they speak. For example, only 6% of medical providers currently speak Spanish yet 13% of the American population cites Spanish as their primary language — with millions more falling on a scale of differing proficiencies.**

# 05

## Offer better benefits, not perks

A few years ago, the things that differentiated your company from other employers were perks such as free lunch, kombucha on tap, or even ping pong tables in the office. With many of our physical workspaces shuttered or slowly reopening, the lunches are no longer free, the drinks aren't flowing, and the paddles sat unused for 16 months. This is a new era in benefits. What prospective employees once valued in the form of perks are now replaced by more tangible benefits. Attracting and retaining top talent isn't about perks anymore, it's really about differentiated benefits.

The magnifying glass placed on personal health ushered in this new era of employee benefits. Your people are now used to making their own lunches, but they need help supporting their mental and physical health. In fact, 57% would willingly give up free in-office food in exchange for free mental health resources from their company.

A strong benefits offering is table stakes to attracting top talent in today's market. **Benefits such as easier access to virtual care, or even simply more affordable (or free) mental health resources, help you up the ante.**

# 06

## Build a better benefits ecosystem

We've previously discussed how important access is in ensuring you're building a future-forward workplace — from the ecosystem you create and the type of technology your solutions leverage, to the different people you hope to serve, and the various ways in which people use these benefits. Simply put, access to your care solutions is the most significant roadblock standing in the way of a healthier future for your workforce. Oftentimes the various point solutions that companies leverage are hard to find, navigate, or use — leading to lower engagement.

It's not enough to just pick solutions. You see how complex it can be to manage and encourage enrollment. Something that fits well within your current benefits ecosystem can help mitigate the potential engagement issues with these various solutions. All-in-one apps are increasingly popular in today's digital transformation, and many of your employees prefer to conduct their HR and benefits needs this way.

Employer-sponsored benefits can be complicated and as an HR leader, you're working diligently to make it easier for your employees to use the benefits they need. **Your people will be most engaged in their long-term health if all of the solutions related to their physical and mental health can be built into the same stack.**



Employees are **2.5x more likely** to have a positive attitude about their health and wellness if activities such as accessing their benefits information are easy to access and navigate

Source: [2021, Alight Solutions](#)



## The future of work is personal

The COVID-19 pandemic required organizations across the country to confront some very difficult questions about what the future state of work looks like. These questions will shape the HR and business landscape for decades. When it comes to employer-sponsored benefits, companies need to offer their people new resources to better support their long-term physical and mental health. It's time to think outside of the proverbial box that once included free lunches, happy hours, and ping pong tables for the office. We learned many difficult lessons, but one important takeaway is that your employees need more support when it comes to living a healthier life.

As a leader at your company, this is your opportunity to be a strong driver of change for the future. The time is now to reset your company's HR and benefits strategy. It's the perfect opportunity to evaluate your offered benefits, and to ensure that they create more equitable access to quality physical and mental healthcare, as well as true parity in the workforce.

**The future of work ensures that everyone can live a happy, healthy life without having to spend too much along the way.**

It's not easy juggling your company's bottom line while trying to focus on strategic HR initiatives that will build a happier, healthier workplace for your people.

But we can help!

Schedule a demo today to learn more about how Vida helps companies like yours.

[Schedule Demo](#)

