

A background image showing three business professionals in a meeting. A woman with braided hair stands in the center, looking down at documents. A man with glasses and a beard stands to her right, also looking down. A man is seated on the left, facing away from the camera. They are gathered around a table with papers, a laptop, and a coffee cup. The image has a blue tint.

7 Key Facts

The Impact of Behavioral Health in the Workplace

The Case for Making Behavioral Health a Business Priority

Until fairly recently, the medical profession evaluated a person's health primarily in terms of the physical body. Primary care physicians were often unaware or ill-informed about the link between emotional/mental health and disease. Fortunately, beginning in the later part of the 20th century and continuing into the 21st, the significant role that behavioral health issues play in the well-being of individuals has increasingly been recognized and now garners a significant amount of scientific study and attention.

Business organizations who understand that behavioral health can have a serious impact on the well-being of their employees are also taking a closer look at the issue.

In this white paper, we present a statistical portrait of the prevalence of stress, anxiety and mental illness in America and its impact on both productivity and medical costs. We'll also examine the obstacles that need to be overcome to address behavioral health issues more effectively and how wellness engagement platforms offer a unique opportunity to lower stress and anxiety in the workforce.

Defining Behavioral Health

For this paper, we define behavioral health as the emotional, psychological, social and spiritual well-being of a person. Behavioral health includes a wide range of conditions, from mental and substance abuse disorders to more common occurrences, such as stress and anxiety.

Understanding Behavioral Health: *The Seven Key Facts*

Key Fact #1

Behavioral health issues impact a large portion of the United States population.

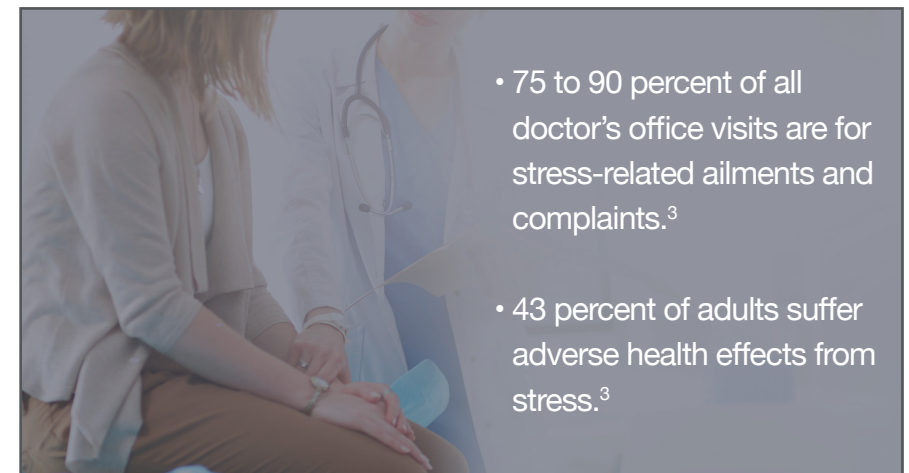
- 55 percent of American adults reported they had experienced stress during most of the previous day.¹
- 45 percent reported being worried or anxious during the previous day.¹
- Each year, more than 18 percent of American adults have an anxiety disorder, a group of mental illnesses such as a panic attack or social anxiety disorder, which hinder a person's ability to function normally.²

55% experience stress	
45% are worried	
18% anxiety disorder	

Key Fact #2

The impact of behavioral health issues on a person's physical health is pervasive.

For example, stress has a detrimental effect on almost all the systems of the body and can be a significant cause of headaches, high blood pressure, heart problems, diabetes, asthma, and arthritis.

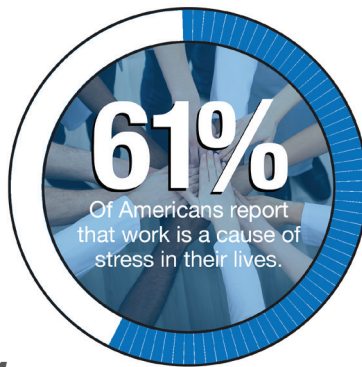


Because stress is the underlying cause for so many medical conditions and the #2 predictor of higher health care costs, Onlife Health has designated stress the #1 clinical priority when our coaches are working with members. For example, if a person's health assessment reveals that stress, weight loss and improved nutrition are the top three health issues, stress will be given clinical priority within the wellness program.

Key Fact #3

The workplace is a major contributor to stress and anxiety.

- 61 percent of Americans report that work is a cause of stress in their lives.⁴
- Anxiety in the workplace affects some 40 million Americans, and 56 percent of surveyed employees say that anxiety affects their job performance.⁵
- Job stress is more strongly associated with health complaints than financial or family problems.⁶

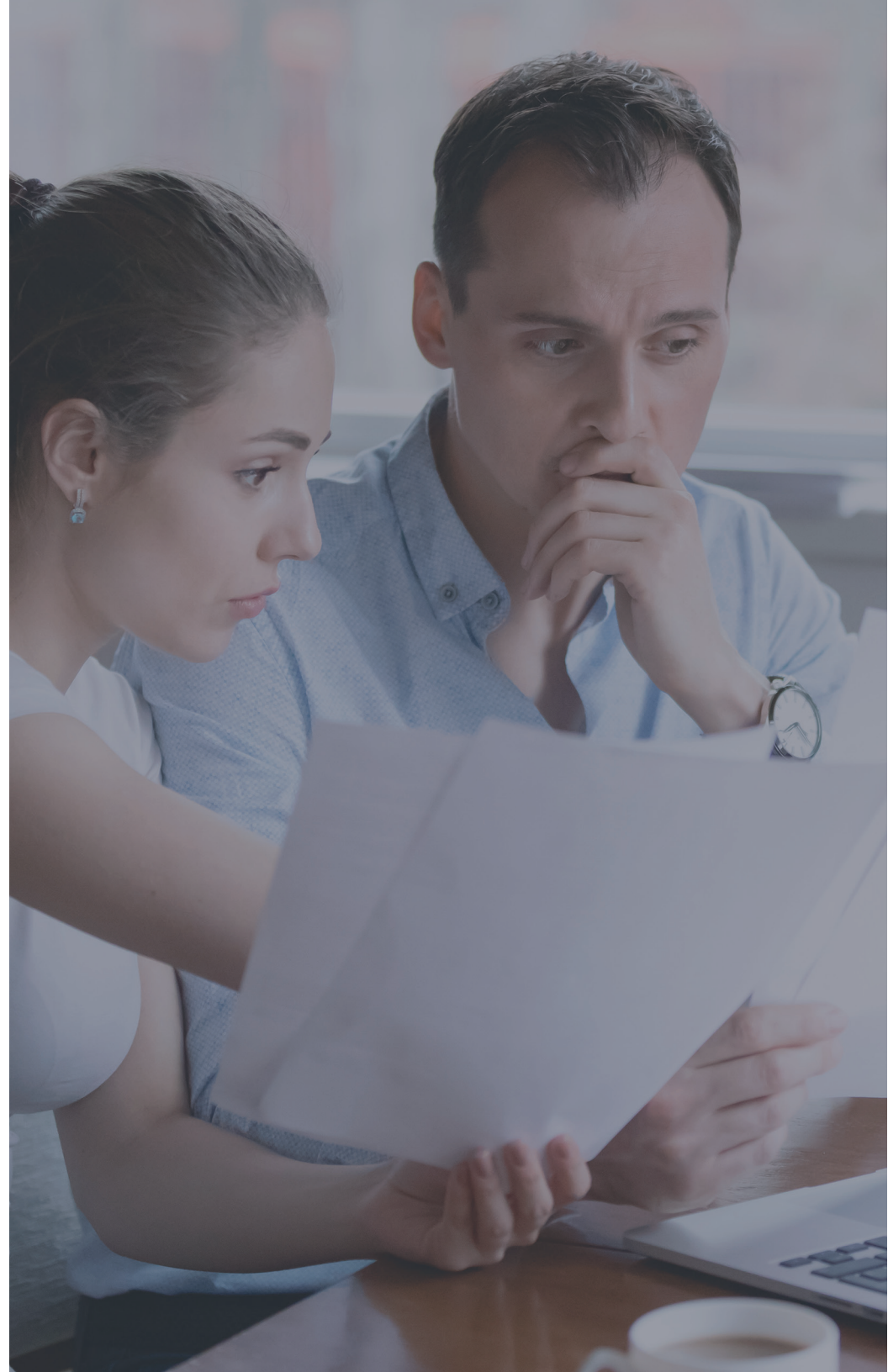


Key Fact #4

The economic costs of behavioral health for employers are significant.

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), stress costs American companies more than \$300 billion annually.⁶ Stress and anxiety also contribute to burnout, diminished productivity, an increase in absenteeism, a decrease in presentism and higher medical costs.

- Employees suffering from depression and stress have health expenditures that are 70 percent and 46 percent higher, respectively, than their healthier counterparts.⁷
- People with an anxiety disorder are three to five times more likely to go to the doctor.⁸
- People suffering from depression submit an average of \$14,967 per year in claims, compared with \$5,929 a year for the total population.⁹



Key Fact #5

Employees want access to behavioral health services.

- 76 percent of Americans believe mental health is as important as physical health.¹⁰
- Nearly half say they need help in learning how to manage stress and 42 percent say their coworkers need such help.¹¹

Unfortunately, the social stigma associated with behavioral health issues still has an adverse effect on people seeking help. About 31 percent of Americans are still worried that they might be judged negatively when they tell someone they sought behavioral health services, and 21 percent avoided telling or have actually lied about seeking mental health services.¹²

Key Fact #6

Many employers are now making the treatment of behavioral health a top priority.

- In a survey of 687 companies, 57 percent said they plan to focus on mental and behavioral health to a “great or very great extent” over the next three years.¹³
- The amount of money companies spend on the mental health of their employees has been rising rapidly — with annual costs increasing twice as fast as all other medical expenses in recent years.¹⁴

Key Fact #7

Addressing the issue of behavioral health is challenging.

- **Lack of Availability:** There is only one health provider for every 198 people who need mental health services in the United States.¹⁵
- **Lack of Access:** 77 percent of U.S. counties have a severe shortage of mental health providers.¹⁶
- **High Cost and Insufficient Insurance Coverage:** For 42 percent of the population, high cost and poor insurance coverage are the top barriers for accessing mental health care.¹⁷ And if care is provided, the high cost is exacerbated by the fact that behavioral care is four to six times more likely to be provided out-of-network than medical or surgical care.¹⁸



76%

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57%

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Meeting the Challenge

For organizations who understand the importance of addressing behavioral health issues, a host of workplace health tools are available, from offering educational materials, seminars and workshops to providing subsidized clinical screenings. Unfortunately, the investment in these services can be considerable and time-consuming. But there is a more economical solution available. Companies that already provide their employees with a wellness engagement program have a ready-made platform to address behavioral health issues in a way that requires little or no additional costs.

4 Ways a Wellness Engagement Program Can Address Behavioral Health

1 Identify the Problem

Through its Health Assessment, a wellness engagement program can identify employees who are having behavioral health issues. For example, the health assessment can include questions about how often a person feels stressed at work or whether they have been “feeling blue” lately. Using this information, the wellness platform can then be personalized to provide each employee with the information and support that addresses the specific behavioral health issues that have been identified. Assessing potential areas of risk can also lead to earlier interventions, when needed.

2 Promoting Regular Exercise

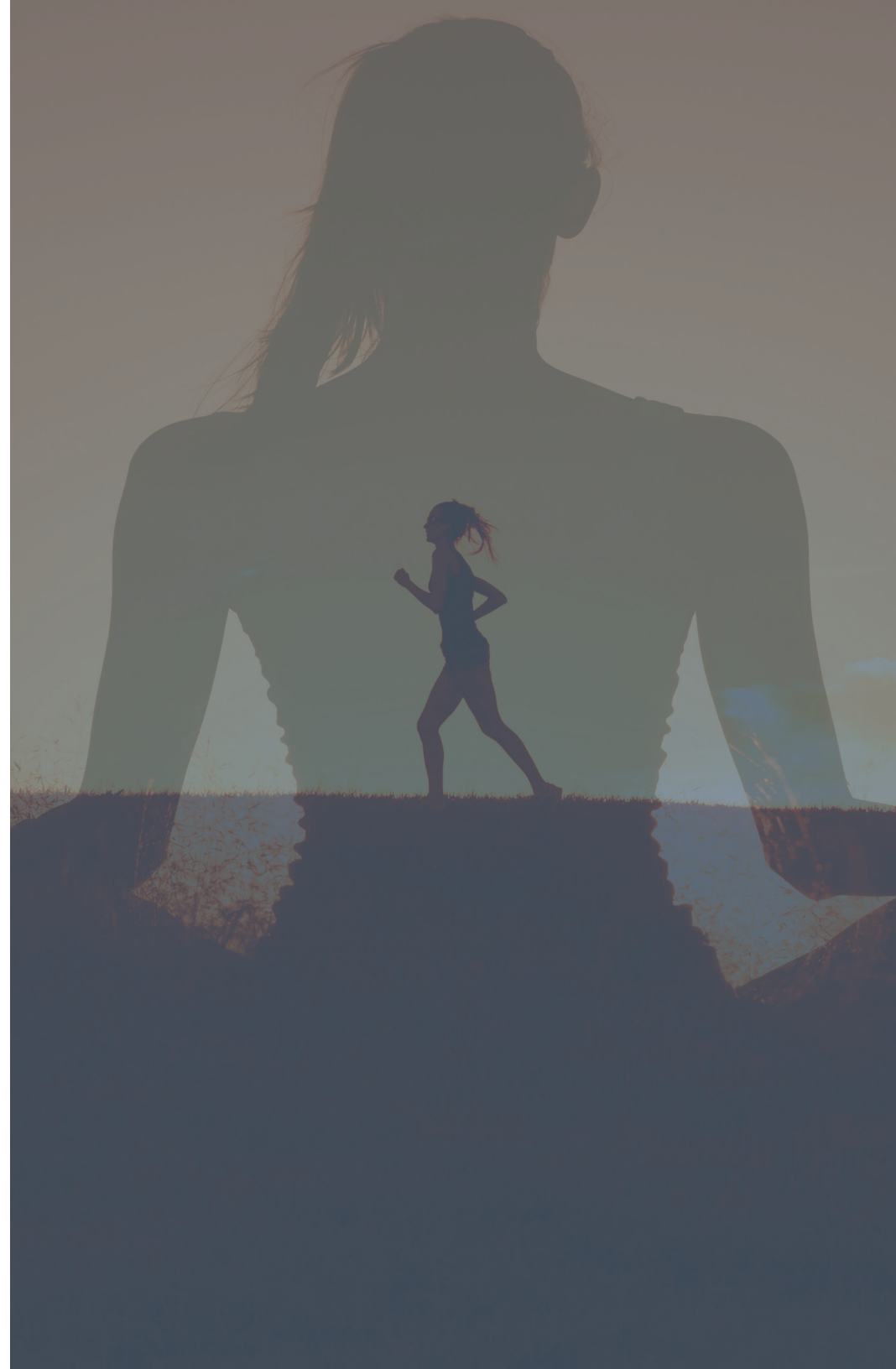
By using challenges, a wellness program can promote increases in regular exercise such as walking, which is a proven way to reduce stress. At Onlife Health, for example, participants in a challenge for one client walked 1.1 miles more each week than non-participants and reduced their average weekly sedentary time by 117 minutes compared to non-participants. In addition to reducing stress, walking can also decrease overall health care costs. In another Onlife study, employees who walked at least 5,000 steps a day had 20 percent lower health care costs compared to employees who did not exercise.

3 Sharing the Power of Meditation

A recent meta-analysis of 47 scientific studies found that meditation programs had a moderately strong impact on improving the anxiety level of participants.¹⁹ A wellness engagement program offers a convenient platform for employees and members to access a library of meditation programs that they can use anywhere and anytime through a mobile app.

4 Health Coaching

If health coaching is part of the wellness program, it can offer a more holistic approach to wellness, integrating mental health with physical health. Employees are more likely to share their behavioral health concerns with a person they already have a relationship with, such as a health coach. Coaches also can provide ongoing support and help alleviate the stigma that often is associated with seeking help for some behavioral health issues. They can check on medication adherence, refer the client to helpful educational materials, including those available on the wellness engagement platform, and identify changes in behavior that may indicate professional help and additional resources are needed. Health coaches can also refer employees to Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), when they're available. Initially designed for alcohol and drug abuse, these programs have expanded their services to include other behavioral health issues.



Transforming the Future of Behavioral Health Services

Innovations, new best practices and creative implementations of existing technologies are redefining the field of behavioral health. Here are three examples.

Telephonic Services Now Addressing Behavioral Health

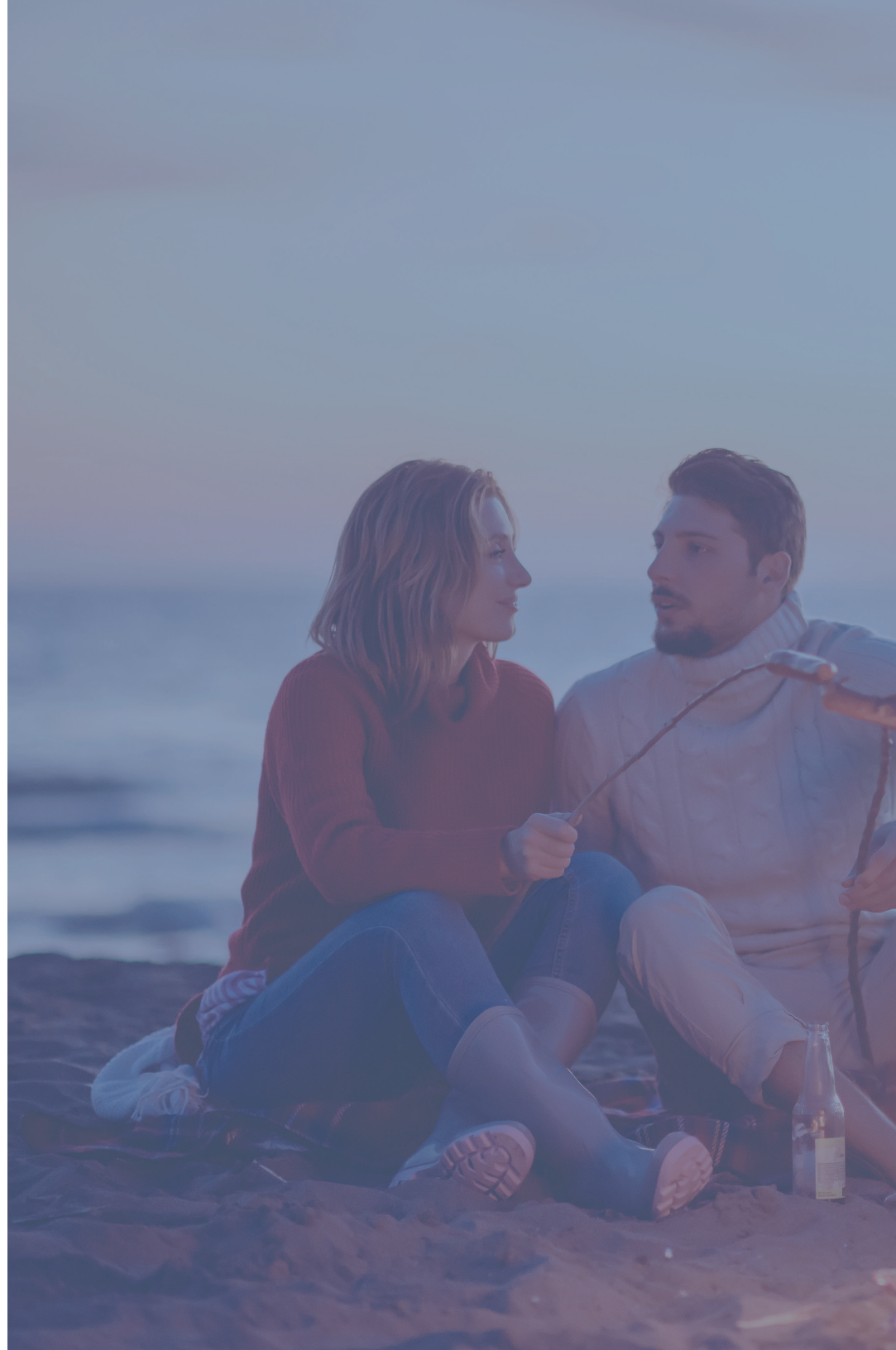
Because of the high costs associated with conventional behavioral health care, some companies are exploring the use of telehealth services such as telephone, video-conferencing and secure messaging. The results are promising. According to Teladoc, for example, its behavioral health services have reduced depression symptoms by 32 percent, anxiety symptoms by 31 percent, and stress symptoms by 20 percent.²⁰

Meditation for the Many

Some organizations are offering their employees free subscriptions to meditation apps such as Headspace and Calm. Tech companies such as Google and LinkedIn have been early adopters. Headspace already has 250 companies that cover the costs of their employees' subscriptions, and the response has been positive. At Genentech, a biotechnology company headquartered in San Francisco, more than 2,500 of its 14,000 employees use the Headspace meditation app four times per week, on average.²¹

Stressbusters

Understanding that lower stress levels can lead to higher productivity and less burnout, some organizations are taking an innovative approach to create a more relaxing work environment. Employees at Airbnb can take free yoga classes. Relaxation rooms are available to workers at Nike. And Apple employees have the freedom to meditate 30 minutes a day.





Key Takeaways

- The past few decades have seen a growing awareness within the scientific and medical communities concerning the impact behavioral health has in the workplace on the productivity of employees, their well-being and the medical costs associated with their employment.
- Because of this increased awareness, employers are investing more and more resources to address behavioral health issues, but they face a number of challenges, including lack of access to mental health professionals and lack of adequate insurance coverage.
- Wellness engagement programs offer employers the opportunity to identify and address behavioral health issues by using an existing platform that is easily accessible and cost-effective.

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