DMEC
2026 ANNUAL
CONFERENCE

2026 DMEC Annual Conference

From Policy to Practice: How Employers Are Turning Workplace Mental Health Strategies into Real Solutions

Our Presenters

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Learning Objectives

- Identify key trends in employer mental health policies and practices based on national research findings from the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability (EARN)
- Describe practical strategies employers are using to support mental health within disability management, accommodation, and return-to-work/stay-at-work programs
- Apply evidence-informed approaches to improve workplace mental health supports while balancing operational and compliance considerations



Presentation Approach

- Highlights of select key focus areas, related resources, and research by Cornell University for the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability (EARN) funded by the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy
- Perspectives on workplace policies and practices promoting mental health well-being from the employer and provider perspectives
- Q & A



Susanne M. Bruyère, PhD, CRC, Academic Director, Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability, ILR School, Cornell University



Workplace Mental Health

- The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability (EARN) is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy https://askearn.org/
- Workplace mental health (MH) is a key component of establishing a supportive, productive and sustainable work environment. When MH needs are supported at work, employers experience lower medical and disability costs. EARN Workplace Mental Health Toolkit https://askearn.org/page/mental-health-toolkit



Workplace Mental Health

- There are known good practices which promote workplace mental health (awareness, accommodations, assistance, and access).

  EARN Create a Mental Health-Friendly Workplace https://askearn.org/page/create-a-mental-health-friendly-workplace

- Under these broad categories there are many good practices

  EARN Checklist for Mentally Healthy Workplaces https://askearn.org/publication/checklist-for-mentally-healthy-workplaces

- There are several companies who have been leading the way

  EARN Workplace Mental Health: Learn About Successful (Mental Health) Programs https://askearn.org/page/learn-about-successful-programs



Workplace Mental Health

- These practices can also extend to smaller workplace settings as well.
  - EARN Small Business Guide for Supporting Employees with Mental Health Conditions or Substance Use Disorder in the Workplace https://askearn.org/page/small-business-guide-mh-sud
- Health care plans are certainly one of the considerations that you will hear about today.
  - EARN Checklist: Health Care Plans that Support Mental Health https://askearn.org/publication/health-care-plans-mental-health-checklist
- Substance use can be a co-occurring disorder with mental health issues.
  - EARN Opioid Use and Mental Health in the Construction Industry: The Importance of Workplace Supports https://askearn.org/page/opioid-use-and-mental-health-in-construction



EARN Current Research

Phase I

Environmental Scan: Workplace Mental Health Interventions Preliminary Report

Phase II

Mental Health Interventions in the Workplace: Phase 2: Environmental Scan (Scoping Literature Review)

Phase III

Mental Health Initiatives in the Workplace

Phase 3: Interviews with Initiative Employer and Provider Implementers

Preliminary Key Findings

Facilitators of successful selection and implementation include:

- Leadership buy-in
- A dedicated champion
- Strong partnerships
- A strong organizational culture
- A clear understanding of organizational needs
- Established pathways for conversations about MH
- Effective internal and external communication
- Adequate training and resources



Summer Martin, MBA, GBA, SHRM-CP, Employee Benefits Specialist, Octave Federal



Octave Federal

Octave Federal focuses on delivering public safety, geospatial intelligence and mission-critical security solutions to the **U.S. Government and partners**. With 40 years of experience, we empower agencies and industry partners to operate with speed, precision and greater confidence.

Workforce composition: 70% male, 30% female

- Employees located across 25 states
- Primarily engineering and technical support roles
- Operates as a government contractor
- A division of Octave, global SaaS and enterprise software organization

Federal.octave.com

Turning Mental Health Strategy into Everyday Practice

Strategies

- Create a leadership-driven culture of mental-health transparency
- Strengthen manager responsibility for employee well-being
- Build peer and community support networks
- Increase visibility and awareness of mental-health resources

Real Solutions Implemented

- Mental Health First Aid training enabled staff to recognize crises early and connect employees to appropriate emergency resources
- Peer-support and Duty of Care training equipped employees to intervene sooner, reducing leave and operational disruptions
- Routing EAP access through a real person ensured employees received timely, human-centered assistance



Real Outcomes of Mental Health Strategy in Practice

- Shortened extended absences by delivering rapid, early support
- Provided fast access to live, human assistance instead of only self-service tools
- Strengthened response protocols for mental-health emergencies
- Enabled employees to remain on the job safely while receiving needed support
- Minimized workplace disruptions through proactive, human-centered intervention



Lana Joiner, MBA, CBP, Benefit Administration Manager, Lee Company



Lee Company



- Family-owned business since 1944
- Serving homes and facilities
  - Services include heating, air conditioning, plumbing, and electrical
- Headquartered in Franklin, TN
  - Offices in TN, KY, AL, GA
- 1,800 employees
  - 90% male
- 300 Employees based at HQ
  - Rest of population widely dispersed



Lee Company: Our Approach

- Secure Buy-in at the Top
- Establish Corporate Chaplain Program
- Provide Accessible Care
- Supply an Employee Advocate
- Promote Mental Health Awareness (Year-Round)
- Reduce Mental Health Stigma



2026 Thrive Fair

Lee Company: Communication is Key

- **May: Mental Health Month**
  - Post Card to Home
  - L&E Videos
  - $5 for picture on how you “De-stress”

- **Thrive Fairs**
  - Employee Advocate Talk
  - Review Resources

- **Year-Round Campaign**





Lee Company: De-Stigmatize

Lee Company Recognition recognized **Lana Joiner** with **5 Points** June 1



Thanks for sharing how you de-stress and for participating in Mental Health Awareness Month!



+ REACTION

LJ Add comment

- Talk about it
- Make a Connection









Wendy Coduti, PhD, CRC, Regional Director, Heath & Productivity Analytics & Consulting Prudential Group Insurance



The Case for Action: Mental Health is a Business Priority

For every **$1** invested in employee mental health, employers can see a return of **$4**[1]

12 billion workdays lost yearly to depression and anxiety globally, costing **$1T** in productivity[1]

70% of individuals with a substance use disorder are employed[2]

50% of people worldwide will develop a mental health disorder at some point in their lifetime[3]



Prudential's Benefits & Beyond Research[4,5]

63% of employees said they have mental health concerns for themselves/family in currently or in the past (New Workforce Expectations: Address mental health to help get employees needed support)

40% of employees are scared to bring up their mental health at work due to negative consequences

45% of employees said financial concerns had increased their mental stress (The Future of Work: Building financial resilience)



Mental health is increasingly treated as a workforce strategy issue, not only a clinical benefit issue.



Financial strain, medical-cost inflation, burnout, and stigma are converging and shaping benefit expectations.



Evidence-based responses emphasize psychological safety, manager capability, flexible work design, and clearer benefit navigation.



Solutions: Industry Insights

- Understand your workforce
  - Gather detailed data
- Mental health trainings
  - Peer support/Mental health champions
- Create flexibility where you can
- Provide workplace supports
- No-questions asked PTO
- No-meeting days
- Mental health days
- Leadership messaging
- Manager check-In
- Create a well-being policy statement
- Employee Resource Groups
- Partner with vendors and suppliers
- Establish return-to-work and stay-at-work programs
- Review benefits and communication strategies across employee demographics
- Promote leave and time off resources
- Consider caregivers
- Education
- Develop an ongoing mental health strategy
- Create connection

References

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[3]McGrath, John J., et al. "Age of onset and cumulative risk of mental disorders: a cross-national analysis of population surveys from 29 countries." The Lancet Psychiatry 10.9 (2023): 668-681.

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Related Resources (1)

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Related Resources (2)

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Questions?

