



Gartner Says Two-Thirds of Organisations Have Introduced New Wellness Benefits to Support Employees' Mental and Emotional Well-being

HR Leaders Should Consider Three Strategies to Support Employees' Holistic Health During the COVID-19 Outbreak

ARLINGTON, Va., June 16, 2020. Sixty-eight percent of organisations introduced at least one new wellness benefit by late March 2020 to aid employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Gartner, Inc. As employees struggle to live within today's new normal, leading to an increased amount of stress and anxiety, HR leaders must support employees holistically. "The COVID-19 pandemic has led more employees worldwide to seek assistance with their emotional and mental health," said Carolina Valencia, director in the Gartner HR practice. "Organisations that are able to meet these new needs will become employers of choice for prospective job seekers." Even before the pandemic, Gartner research revealed that 45% of well-being budget increases were being allocated to mental and emotional well-being programs, indicating organisations were prioritizing employee needs in this area. To further support employees' mental health and emotional well-being during the COVID-19 outbreak, HR leaders should consider incorporating the following strategies:

- Focus on A Holistic Approach** Although most employees report heightened threats to their emotional well-being, their social, physical, and financial well-being should not be overlooked. Limited access to gyms and other self-care services, plus concerns around contracting the virus, are leading individuals to feel isolated. Job insecurity, layoffs and furloughs, coupled with the effect the COVID-19 crisis has had on the economy, is also causing feelings of distress. Supporting employees' overall emotional and mental health requires HR leaders to provide holistic benefits packages.
- Maximise the Impact of Existing Offerings** As organisations determine how to best support their employees' mental and emotional health, HR leaders must leverage and maximise existing well-being offerings (e.g., ensuring employees are aware and can access existing benefits, expanding benefits to virtual channels, etc.) and identify areas that might require additional support (e.g., increasing PTO days for employees impacted by COVID-19). In doing so, organisations should:
 - Take an employee-centric approach.** HR leaders should survey their employees to understand how their needs have changed during the pandemic and where current offerings may be lacking.
 - Progressive organisations are crowdsourcing ideas and guidance on how to support the emotional well-being of their employees.**
 - Secure leaders buy-in.** Steering the emotional and mental health of employees requires leaders to lead by example with simple actions. For instance, leaders can share weekly testimonials, explain how they are coping with the effects the COVID-19 crisis has on them and their loved ones, or announce when they are about to go for a walk to stay ahead in company fitness challenges.
 - Communicate to the workforce.** Before the pandemic, employee participation rates in well-being programs were generally low due to employees being unaware of the available benefits and how to access them. HR leaders can use virtual events and message boards to communicate new messages to reinforce the current benefits available and help employees navigate them easily. It is important that companies refocus their communications strategies to create and produce messages that can have an impact during this crisis and support employees.
- Look Beyond Employee Assistance Programs** A 2019 Gartner Well-Being Benchmarking survey showed that of the organisations that offer mental and emotional well-being programs, all provide employee assistance programs (EAPs), while 48% of those organisations offer counselling services and 21% supply mental health assessments. HR leaders can help their organisation look beyond EAPs and into less common but more successful offers to create efficient mental and emotional well-being programs. A 2019 Gartner Total Rewards Survey showed although support groups are the least common mental and emotional well-being offering, they are the most effective benefit that organisations can offer as they can increase employee engagement 5.5%. Gartner research also found that employee engagement improved 3.1% when organisations offered mental health assessments to employees. "Organisations are working to provide the support that employees need, whether that be emotional, mental or even financial," added Ms. Valencia. "Investing in employee well-being will enable organisations to have a more productive and engaged workforce – and to better retain and attract talent – now and as the pandemic subsides and employees return to the workplace." Learn more about how to lead organisations through the disruption of coronavirus in the Gartner coronavirus resource centre, a collection of complimentary Gartner research and webinars to help organisations respond, manage and prepare for the rapid spread and global impact of COVID-19. About the Gartner HR Practice The Gartner HR practice brings together the best relevant content approaches across Gartner to offer individual decision makers strategic business advice on the mission-critical priorities that cut across the HR function. Additional information is available at <http://www.gartner.com/en/human-resources/human-resources-leaders>. Follow news and updates from the Gartner HR practice on Twitter and LinkedIn using #GartnerHR.

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