

# Kaiser Permanente Mid-Atlantic States

## Employer Playbook

### Compassionate Leadership and Mental Health as an Organizational Priority

#### **Introduction and purpose**

Many organizations, across all industries, are focusing on supporting the mental health of their workforce. Recently, the need for mental health support and services has shifted from the strictly clinical setting to work, school, and the community. Several factors have contributed to the change, including decreased stigma around talking about mental health; rising environmental, interpersonal, financial, and societal stressors; and limited mental health resources. There are many different programs and approaches to implementing a comprehensive approach to mental health in the workplace.

Creating a culture of trust within an organization is crucial to support the emotional health of the workforce, and organizations must communicate mental health as a policy priority. At Kaiser Permanente Mid-Atlantic States, we have consulted with industry and clinical experts to develop this playbook. The playbook is designed to support organizations who want to establish and implement a comprehensive and sustainable program to support leaders and organizational mental health and wellbeing.

#### **Disclaimer**

This playbook is meant to be informative and assist organizations in developing preventive approaches and sustainable practices to support the needs of their staff and employees. This playbook does not replace urgent or emergent crisis care interventions. If you or your organization are facing immediate mental health challenges, please consult your mental health providers, reach out to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and/or call 911.

# Employee Mental Health & Safety At a Glance



**Figure 1.** This chart illustrates a step-by-step process for implementing a mental health program and offers examples of activities within each program component. The following pages provide additional detail for each step.

## Components of a successful mental health strategy and program:

1. **Collect baseline data and assess the workforce's current state of wellbeing, awareness of, and use of existing resources through an anonymous employee mental health survey.**
  - a. Identify existing mental health strengths and opportunities - programs, services, resources, and supports within the organization.
  - b. Acknowledge existing gaps and opportunities and recognize the critical need to address them for the organization's sustainability and health.
  - c. Evaluate survey results and report findings to leadership and appropriate staff.
  
2. **Engage, train, and support executive leadership.**

The decision and execution of a successful and meaningful mental health program for the workforce starts with the executive leaders. For this program to be successful, there needs to be executive leadership buy-in and support.

  - a. Conduct mental health, compassionate leadership, and suicide prevention training for leaders:
    - i. Mental Health Training: Increase awareness of the impact of mental health and wellness in the workplace; increase leadership readiness to support mental health
    - ii. Compassionate Leadership Training: Learn how to have difficult and compassionate conversations and support employee wellbeing
    - iii. Suicide Prevention Training: Improve understanding of suicide first aid and prevention
  - b. Invest time and resources to develop and maintain a strategy to address employee mental health needs.
  - c. Cultivate a culture of trust -
    - i. Clearly communicate expectations with employees about engaging with available resources, e.g., specific HR policies, occupational environments, etc.
    - ii. Consistently reinforce commitment to the mental health and wellness of teams through formal and informal conversations, inclusion of mental health check-ins with team, and open discussion of mental health in department and staff meetings.
  
3. **Proactive Employee Resources and Training: Offer a wide range of easy to access and up-to-date mental health solutions, services, and supports that are embedded into the workday to improve job performance, readiness, and decrease absenteeism and presenteeism.** Consider a multidisciplinary approach, as one size does not fit all.
  - a. Create safe spaces for staff and employees to share open, honest, and ongoing feedback and concerns anonymously.
    - i. Continue to utilize anonymous employee surveys and other feedback mechanisms and report out findings

- b. Provide ongoing staff education and awareness that is woven into operational activities.
  - i. Safety meetings and trainings (e.g., initial onboarding training, mental health awareness training, fatigue training, peer support trainings)
    - 1. Organizational risk considerations - HR considerations, presenteeism/absenteeism, organizational safety standards, occupational safety standards, access to firearms
    - 2. Personal risk considerations - Loss of security access, loss of access to firearms, inability to perform job duties
  - ii. Ongoing communication through newsletters, emails, department meetings
  - iii. Health promotion announcements and health fairs
- c. Employee Resource Group alignment and resource education
- d. Engage staff in Employee Wellness Program events and activities.
  - i. Onsite biometric screenings - blood pressure, blood glucose, blood cholesterol, etc.
  - ii. Wellness challenges to promote healthy behaviors - moving more, eating healthier, building social connections, etc.
  - iii. Group exercise - yoga, Pilates, Tai Chi, dance, etc.
  - iv. Stress management - mindfulness, meditation, breathing exercises, etc.
  - v. Access to onsite gym or discounted gym membership
- e. Consider creating a “mental health task force” or “peer support and mental wellness committee” to help create and maintain a system-wide culture of wellbeing and support.
- f. Partner with community organizations and local network - Hotlines, non-profits, Veteran-specific organizations, etc.

**4. Reactive Employee Resources and Training: Have support in place when additional help is needed.**

- a. Volunteer Veteran Peer Support Specialists - Dedicated and credentialed peer support specialists (civilians & vets) who have been recruited, vetted, and certified (ongoing). Training covers:
  - i. Impact of disclosure of mental health issues on ability to perform essential duties of a job
  - ii. Education on what can and cannot be discussed/disclosed
  - iii. Protection for the organization for having these programs
  - iv. Protection for the individual employee for disclosing issues
- b. Employee Assistance Program (EAP) - Work-based program that offers free and confidential assessments, short-term counseling, and referrals for employees.
- c. Behavioral Health - Treatment of behaviors that affect an individual's wellbeing.

- d. Crisis Response (e.g., CISM): Peer-driven stress management program that combines pre-crisis preparation, stress education and post-event response to help people recover from abnormal stressful job-related incidents and trauma.
5. **Evaluate and measure program impact and sustainability.**
- a. Conduct another anonymous Employee Health Survey
  - b. Use other assessments that evaluate workplace health promotion programs
  - c. Provide continuing education for leadership and staff

## Appendix.

### 1) Surveys and Evaluations - Steps 1 & 5

- [CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard](#)
- [Worksite Health Survey](#)
- [Employee Interest Survey](#)

### 2) Leadership Resources

- [Leading Inclusively Guide](#)
- [Employee Burnout Guide](#)
- [Mental Fitness Guide](#)
- [Supporting Mental Health in the Workplace](#)

### 3) Proactive Employee Resources & Training

- [Veterans and First Responders Resources Microsite](#)
- [Veteran Health Care at Kaiser Permanente](#)
- [Mid-Atlantic Kaiser Permanente Military and Veterans Health Care Webpage](#)
- [Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training \(ASIST\)](#)
- [How to Become a Peer Support Specialist \(Civilian\)](#)
- [How to Become a Peer Support Specialist \(Veteran\)](#)
- [Mental Health Awareness Training \(General Population\)](#)

### 4) Reactive Employee Resources

- [Critical Incident Stress Management \(CISM\)](#)
- [Peer Support Specialist Training Program](#)

### Additional Resources, Toolkits, and Guides (Veteran-Specific):

- [Veterans Employment Toolkit Home \(va.gov\)](#)
- [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\) Providers - Veterans Employment Toolkit](#)
- [Information for Employers - Compensated Work Therapy - Veterans Health Administration](#)
- [Addressing VHA Employee Burnout and Well-being || FORUM](#)
- [Reduce Employee Burnout and Optimize Organizational Thriving \(REBOOT\) \(va.gov\)](#)

### Additional Resources, Toolkits, and Guides (General Population):

- [Finding Balance Stress Management Toolkit](#)
- [Wellness Committee Toolkit](#)
- [Starting a workforce well-being program](#)