



THE BUSINESS CASE FOR EMPLOYEE  
**Well-Being Interventions**



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*With 20% of our employees gone as a direct result of the pandemic, and 1 in 3 clinicians considering leaving their current role in healthcare, Life Plan Communities are desperately scrambling to keep their staff.*

One solution is to increase engagement among employees and their supervisors. Almost a quarter of the non-supervisor workforce is currently disengaged and 40% of supervisors are not fully engaged, according to the Holleran national benchmark. This does not bode well for the field.

To improve engagement scores, organizations and senior living leaders must focus on creating humanistic workplaces that emphasize well-being. Especially important are interventions aimed at reducing burnout and enhancing mental health. There are so many variables affecting the mental well-being of individuals, that sometimes it is a challenge to know where to begin. And while each individual staff member's burnout stress and anxiety may be caused by a varying and diverse set of factors, Holleran's research on this topic has identified the 4 biggest stressors, according to our employee well-being database:

- Workload at work
- Household bills
- Personal mental health
- Cost of healthcare

These four stressors are compromising the well-being of the aging services workforce like never before. Below are some best practices to address each of these identified sources of burnout.



## WORKLOAD AT WORK

Workload issues were cited by 41% of employees as a huge cause of stress. One of the most important strategies for those who supervise and manage departments is to model the behavior of self-care. Leaders who never take a break, delay, or shorten their vacations, or leave work way past the designated time, send a signal to others that overwork is an acceptable practice. Giving permission to take care of oneself starts with the behaviors of the leader.



Putting simple norms in place within a department works well: everyone takes multiple breaks during the day, no after-hours texts or e-mails, crying “uncle” when tasks become overwhelming and help is required, setting clear and realistic expectations.

Creating environments at work which encourage rest and renewal such as quiet rooms, meditation spaces, and relaxing break rooms will also take some of the pressure off the staff.

## HOUSEHOLD BILLS

About 37% of employees said managing household bills is a major stressor for them. With inflation at an all-time high, workers are struggling to put food on their tables and gas in their tanks. This is especially challenging for those employees with school age children at home and long commutes to work. One suggestion is to catalogue workers who fall into those two categories and hold focus groups with both to identify solutions.

Many campuses have increased the salaries and hourly rates of their employees, in advance of minimum wage legislation requiring it. Yet, hourly wage increases are not always welcomed by all employees, particularly those receiving government assistance. Sometimes a wage increase actually can decrease a household's monthly income, instead of hiking it. Asbury, a multi-site Life Plan Community in Maryland, found this to be the case after it raised its workers' minimum wage. Simply increasing pay, although a welcomed relief to some, is not necessarily a one size fits all solution.

Employers wishing to address the household bill-paying challenge experienced by many workers might instead consider creating a fund to help with one-time unforeseen emergencies (such as a car repair invoice) to mitigate the effect of living paycheck to paycheck. Another approach some organizations are adopting is financial seminars and counseling for employees who need assistance with budgeting strategies.

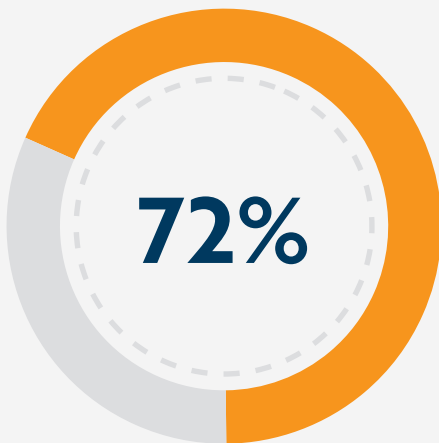
## PERSONAL MENTAL HEALTH



Managing personal mental health is a challenge for almost of third of employees. Stress often leads to a lower sleep quality, especially for shift workers who sleep while the rest of the world is awake. The pandemic has taken a toll on the physical health of employees and their family members, and physical health issues can lead to mental health issues. People have not kept up with their routine preventative care during COVID. A decline in physical health can lead to a decline in one's mental health, which in turn, affects worker productivity. To counteract the effects of stress on the body, some employers allow their employees

use of fitness and aquatic offerings at certain times when residents aren't using those facilities. Employee wellness programming is becoming more popular and giving employees time off to go to the doctor or dentist.

Nutrition and food scarcity are a concern. Statistically, those employees with lower incomes are disproportionately affected. Consider utilizing nutritionists on your staff to help educate workers about healthy food choices. Good nutrition plays a key role in our mental health. Communities have also started to freeze nutritious family meals and offer these to employees so they can have a meal ready to serve once they return to their homes.



*Studies show that 72% of employees want their employers to champion mental health in the workplace.*

One of the most effective strategies leaders use to reduce stress is to encourage a humane workplace, where friendships are celebrated and encouraged. Sixty percent of workers in a recent survey stated that having a good friend at work makes them more eager to show up and better cope with any challenges that may exist throughout the day.

## COST OF HEALTHCARE



30%

*About 30% of senior living employees cite the cost of healthcare as a stressor.*

Social workers are employed by many Affordable Housing communities to assist residents with negotiating the healthcare system to apply for special assistance around healthcare costs. Why not offer the services of these knowledgeable social workers to employees? In addition to government sponsored programs, hospital and outpatient costs are sometimes covered by charity care if the client is low-income.

Many Life Plan Communities now have dental and medical clinics on-site for residents—why not include employees so they are eligible for these services at discounted cost?

And, a most obvious solution is to have Human Resources investigate the best EAP programs available, instead of automatically defaulting to the existing plan. One provider, Shenandoah Valley Westminster Canterbury in Winchester, Virginia, conducted Holleran's



employee well-being survey, discovering from the feedback that access to mental health counseling through an existing EAP was especially challenging to its workers. A change was implemented to correct the issue.

## THE BOTTOM LINE



*The most effective way that organizations and their managers can help reduce stress and burnout is to acknowledge that well-being of individual employees is a priority.*

This requires creating a workplace where there is psychological safety, meaning that people feel “it’s OK not to be OK” some days. In a psychologically safe workplace, people feel supported and accepted when they are having wellbeing struggles. They feel confident that if they go to their supervisor to talk, they will find an empathetic ear.

Some organizations are encouraging learning circles and open conversations around the importance of well-being at work. Others are going above and beyond for employees who have challenges at home. One supervisor in a Mississippi senior living community discovered that her direct report was experiencing domestic violence, and helped this employee find shelter and resources for her and her children.

Human Resources is being renamed “People Operations” throughout corporate America, with the emphasis on people, not paperwork. The paperwork still needs to get accomplished, but it is secondary in importance to making sure employees are

heard, solutions to their issues are found, and that fear of retribution is eliminated. Making work a “safe” place is the priority. In places such as these, turnover is reduced and engagement increases. Engaged employees are three times less likely to leave their campuses than those who are disengaged, which saves the organization on average \$20,000 per employee in turnover costs. The business case for investing in employee well-being is clear. With turnover as high as 40% in some senior living communities, the cost is staggering. Reducing turnover by half as a result of implementing a “well-being friendly” workplace culture would be a worthwhile goal for any senior living community.

There are clearly new rules emerging in our workplaces as a result of the pandemic. Finding ways to take the pressure off of employees and providing empathy and emotional intelligence training to supervisors is more important than ever.

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*Let's imagine a new type of workplace that people would gravitate to...*

## WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE?

For more than two years our employees have struggled in many different ways during the pandemic. As employers, it's hard to know what the first step to assisting our employees should be.

Holleran's research shows that we should begin by opening up the once-taboo topic of mental health/well-being, and making it a safe topic for discussion. Holleran developed a quick 18-question survey where you'll be able to discover whether your employees think the campus places importance on mental health, feel supported by their supervisor, the three biggest stressors, and what the most important factors are when accepting a job.

Armed with this feedback, campus leaders can put together action plans which lead to short and long-term solutions. Shenandoah Valley Westminister-Canterbury, a Life Plan Community based in Winchester, Virginia, completed the Holleran Well-Being Survey a few months ago, which led to the discovery that employees could not readily access services offered by the campus' Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

This information proved vital to making systemic changes throughout the organization, including offering more targeted wellness resources and better accommodation of employee schedules. Interested in learning more about this survey? Email Katelyn McCauley at [kmccauley@holleranconsult.com](mailto:kmccauley@holleranconsult.com) or call (717) 478-5211.



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