

Top CEOs offer strategies to improve workplace mental health

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More than 40 leading CEOs from around the country have issued a step-

by-step plan to improve mental health in the workplace.

The executives released a report Tuesday called "Mental Health: A Workforce Crisis" as part of a leadership collaborative called the American Heart Association CEO Roundtable that includes executives from Johnson & Johnson and Bank of America, among others. The report offers seven strategies—certified by an [expert panel](#)—that employers can use to help workers manage depression, anxiety and other [mental health](#) conditions.

"We need to take care of our mental [health](#) with the same attention we take care of our physical health," said the report's chair, Jennifer Bruno, Vice President of Global Health Services at Johnson & Johnson.

"Building a culture of workplace health takes time and commitment, but it can be done, and it needs to be done."

The report comes at a time of growing concern about mental health in all parts of society. Roughly 45 million U.S. adults experience [mental illness](#) each year, according to a 2016 National Institute of Mental Health nationwide survey. Three out of four U.S. employees reported struggling with issues related to their mental health, according to a recent survey commissioned by the AHA CEO Roundtable.

Darcy Gruttadaro, director of the American Psychiatric Association Foundation's Center for Workplace Mental Health, said the new report is a valuable tool at a pivotal time.

"Global rates of depression, anxiety and suicide are increasing each year, but less than half of people with [mental health conditions](#) receive treatment that would benefit them," said Gruttadaro, a member of an expert panel that helped develop the seven strategies. "It's a problem that impacts everyone – from employees in the front lines to those in the executive suites."

The "actionable strategies" urge employers and business leaders to focus on seven areas to make improvements: leadership; organizational and environmental support; communications; programs and benefits; engagement; community partnership; and reporting outcomes.

Gruttadaro said top [business leaders](#) are uniquely positioned to raise mental health awareness.

"Stigma continues to be a major barrier, and having a CEO or someone at a high level speak openly about mental health really opens the door for people to feel safe to come forward and get help," she said.

According to the AHA CEO Roundtable-commissioned survey, 63 percent of employees diagnosed with a mental health disorder said they didn't disclose it to their employers.

Supervisors at all levels need training and resources to tackle the issue, Gruttadaro said.

"They have to know how to address employee needs and help them get care," she said.

Yet finding the right mental health professionals can be a daunting task.

"There is a shortage of specialists, which can place a tremendous burden on individuals if there's a three- to five-month wait for a psychiatrist," Gruttadaro said.

She said it's up to employers to be diligent in finding the best health plans with the widest array of care.

Bruno said supporting mental health in the workplace isn't simply about productivity; it's the right thing to do.

"We have a responsibility to support employees and provide tools and resources for them to be their personal best," she said. "Mental well-being is not a nice-to-have. It's a must-have."

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