

Surgeon general says 'Toxic workplaces' take big toll on workers' health

October 21 2022, by Cara Murez



Just about anyone who's ever dealt with a [toxic work environment](#) can

tell you about the toll it takes on your physical and mental health.

Now, the U.S. government is backing that perception up with some evidence.

U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy released a [report](#) on Thursday that links [low wages](#), discrimination, harassment, overwork and long commutes to physical health conditions, including cancer and heart disease. Depression and anxiety can also result from these toxic workplaces.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the nature of work, and the relationship many workers have with their jobs. The link between our work and our health has become even more evident," Murthy said in the [report](#).

He cited five components of a healthy workplaces, which are protection from harm, connection and community, work-life harmony, mattering at work and opportunity for growth.

Growing a [work culture](#) to emphasize these principles can help promote inclusion, fair wages and opportunities for employees to advance, the Surgeon General's office said.

Instilling those values "will require organizations to rethink how they protect workers from harm, foster a sense of connection among workers, show them that they matter, make space for their lives outside work, and support their long-term professional growth," Murthy said. "This may not be easy. But it will be worth it, because the benefits will accrue to both workers and organizations. A healthy workforce is the foundation for thriving organizations and a healthy community."

The report comes at a time when the pandemic and shifts to working at

home helped workers find a [work-life balance](#).

"These [work and home] role conflicts can magnify [psychological stress](#), increase the risk for health behaviors such as [smoking](#), unhealthy dietary habits, [alcohol and substance use](#), and medication overuse, and cause disruptions to relationships both at work and at home," the report found.

"When people feel anxious or [depressed](#), the quality, pace and performance of their work tends to decline," the report said.

Gabriella Kellerman, chief product officer at corporate coaching platform BetterUp, agreed with the theory that employee well-being equals good business, *CBS News* reported.

"In this day and age, given the nature of work, there is a tremendous amount of uncertainty from companies and the [external environment](#) that is inherently challenging to our mental well-being and role, and companies have a role to play in supporting their employees for moral reasons, but also because it's good for the bottom line of their businesses," Kellerman said.

"The fact that this is actually recommended by the Surgeon General is extremely important as a statement," she added. "They are giving employers concrete recommendations on what matters most to support employees' well-being. Getting this granular and prescriptive is a new level of involvement, and of guidance, that is novel."

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [mental health](#) in the workplace.

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