The U.S. Surgeon General's Framework for

Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being

2022

This Framework is dedicated to all workers who lost their lives during the pandemic and to their families. May this serve as a call to action to lift up the voices of workers, particularly those most vulnerable, and to protect their health and well-being.

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Introduction Letter from Dr. Murthy



Growing up in Miami, I often spent my after-school hours and weekends in the small clinic that my father and mother ran. As I watched my immigrant parents work, I could see that their jobs provided them with not only a paycheck, but also purpose, dignity, and community. The connection between their work and their mental health and well-being was clear. And they knew it. For all the financial hardships and social struggles they faced during those years, their work allowed them to support their family, connect with others, and find meaning. Their work helped them thrive.

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.

Today, more and more workers are worried about making ends meet, dealing with chronic stress, and struggling to balance the demands of both work and personal lives. The toll on their mental health is growing. The pandemic also sparked a reckoning among many workers who no longer feel that sacrificing their health, family, and communities for work is an acceptable trade-off. Organizations are also increasingly aware of another trade-off: when the mental health of workers suffers, so does workplace productivity, creativity, and retention.

The pandemic has presented us with an opportunity to rethink how we work. We have the power to make workplaces engines for mental health and well-being. Doing so 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. 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.

My parents, like so many others, were drawn to this country by the opportunities it offered: to work, learn, and grow; to be happy and healthy; to belong and to matter. Workplaces have the power to provide such opportunities, and when they do, everyone is better off. Revitalizing our workplaces to support mental health and well-being is how we can turn a moment of crisis into a moment of progress. The Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being shows us how to begin that journey.



Vivek H. Murthy, M.D., M.B.A.
Vice Admiral, U.S. Public Health Service
Surgeon General of the United States

Workplaces Can Be Engines of Mental Health and Well-Being

There are more than 160 million people who are a part of the U.S. workforce today.[1] Work is one of the most vital parts of life, powerfully shaping our health, wealth, and well-being.[2] At its best, work provides us the ability to support ourselves and our loved ones, and can also provide us with a sense of meaning, opportunities for growth, and a community. When people thrive at work, they are more likely to feel physically and mentally healthy overall, and to contribute positively to their workplace.[3] This creates both a responsibility and unique opportunity for leaders to create workplace environments that support the health and well-being of workers.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic may have accelerated the evolution of work and the conversation around workplace mental health and well-being, broad recognition and appreciation for the relationship between the work environment, culture, community, and our health preceded the pandemic.[4, 5, 6, 7] While many challenges outside the workplace may impact well-being—from economic inequality, food insecurity, and housing insecurity to household, educational, and medical debt—there are still many ways that organizations can function as engines for mental health and well-being.[8, 9] Organizational leaders, managers, supervisors, and workers alike have an unprecedented opportunity to examine the role of work in our lives and explore ways to better enable all workers to thrive within the workplace and beyond.

The Case for Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being

> *"Mental health in the workplace: It's not a nice-to-have, it's a must-have."*
>
> Human Resources Leader and Business Consultant

Workplace mental health and well-being is a critical priority for public health. It has numerous and cascading impacts for the health of individual workers and their families, organizational productivity, the bottom-line for businesses, and the U.S. economy. The U.S. has a long history of labor organizing that has, over the years, established protections for workers through federal and state laws. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) was established "to foster, promote and develop the welfare of working people, to improve their working conditions, and to enhance their opportunities for profitable employment."[10] Since then, laws including the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Civil Rights Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act have all established crucial worker protections including the minimum wage, overtime regulations, standards for youth employment, and protections from discrimination, across government and private organizations.[11, 12, 13, 14] While Federal and state laws represent a minimum floor of protections for workers, organizations and employers can do more.[15] Consensus scientific bodies and professional societies like the National Academy of Medicine and the American Psychological Association, along with U.S. government agencies such as the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) at DOL, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Institutes of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), have called national attention to the effects of the workplace on health.[7, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21]

Workers manage daily stress that affects their health and organizational performance. These stressors arise from heavy workloads, long commutes, unpredictable schedules, limited autonomy, long work hours, multiple jobs, low wages, and a variety of other work-related challenges on top of responsibilities outside of the workplace.[22, 23] Some workers may face other challenges in the workplace, such as hostile or dangerous working conditions, harassment, and discrimination.[24] Research suggests that five workplace attributes are most predictive of whether workers refer to their organization's culture as "toxic": disrespectful, non-inclusive, unethical, cutthroat, and abusive.[24]

Chronic stress leads to overactivation of the "fight or flight" response, among other responses, and can have negative effects on numerous organ systems in the body.[25] Elevated stress hormones disrupt sleep, increase muscle tension, and impair metabolic function.[26] Stress can increase one's vulnerability to infection, the risk for diabetes, and the risk for other chronic health conditions.[27] In fact, chronic stress has also been linked to a higher risk of developing diseases such as high blood

pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, obesity, cancer, and autoimmune diseases.[25] Such stress can also contribute to mental and behavioral health challenges, including depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and substance misuse, and can have negative impacts on the mental health of the children and families of workers.[27, 28, 29, 30, 31]

Competing work and personal demands can also negatively impact the health and well-being of workers in a variety of ways. These 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.[32, 33]

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the relationship between work and well-being into clearer focus.[5] Workers across the world reported feeling more stressed in 2021 than they were in 2020.[34] In a separate 2021 survey of 1,500 U.S. adult workers across for-profit, nonprofit and government sectors, 76% of respondents reported at least one symptom of a mental health condition, an increase of 17 percentage points in just two years.[35] Furthermore, 84% of respondents reported at least one workplace factor (e.g., emotionally draining work, challenges with work-life balance, or lack of recognition) that had a negative impact on their mental health. In a survey of more than 2,000 workers conducted by the American Psychological Association by 2022, low salaries, long hours, and the lack of opportunity for advancement were commonly reported as key workplace stressors.[36] Among these same workers, however, **seven in ten reported that their employer is more concerned about the mental health of workers than before.**

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While the pandemic did not create these work conditions, it worsened many of them. Rates of anxiety, depression, social isolation, job burnout, and insecurity related to food, housing, and income rose between March 2020 and mid-2022.[5, 37, 38] The Kaiser Family Foundation found that 62% of health workers surveyed reported that pandemic-related worry and stress negatively affected their mental health, while 49% of health workers reported the pandemic negatively impacted their physical health, including sleep issues and frequent headaches.[39] In a 2022 survey, the CDC found that nearly half of the 26,069 U.S. public health workers they surveyed experienced at least one symptom of a mental health condition during the COVID-19 pandemic, including anxiety, PTSD, and depression, and one in twelve experienced suicidal thoughts.[40] *Addressing Health Worker Burnout: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Building a Thriving Health Workforce,* released in May 2022, further highlights this crisis that has been exacerbated in the setting of the COVID-19 pandemic.[38]

Workers are still finding it challenging to address these burgeoning negative impacts on their mental health and well-being. Mental Health America assessed the perceptions of over 11,000 workers across 17 industries in the United States in 2021.[33] They found that nearly 80% of workers surveyed report that their workplace stress affects their relationships with friends, family, and coworkers, and only 38% of those who know about their organization's mental health services would feel comfortable using them. Organizational leaders must prioritize mental health in the workplace by addressing structural barriers to seeking help and decreasing stigma around accessing mental health support in the workplace.

It is important to note that workers face different challenges based on their occupation, setting, organizational structures, and personal characteristics such as race, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), immigration status, national origin, age, disability, or genetic information. Workforce demographics in the U.S. are shifting, with increases in racial and ethnic minority workers, including foreign-born workers.[41] This population is highly concentrated in non-standard work arrangements (including day-labor, seasonal workers, etc.) which pose unique occupational health safety risks. As the workforce changes, it is imperative that workplaces be intentional in preventing institutionalized bias due to organizational design, work arrangements, technologies, or global climate change.

In addition to the many impacts on the health and well-being of workers themselves, **workplace well-being can affect productivity and organizational performance.** When people feel anxious or depressed, the quality, pace, and performance of their work tends to decline.[42] Workforce shortages are also exacerbated due to early exit from the workforce or missed workdays due to health concerns, work-life conflicts, or burnout.[38, 43] All of these challenges have been magnified by many factors over the years, including the rise in chronic diseases, growing mental health concerns, and more recently Long COVID, a post-COVID-19 infection syndrome that can affect multiple organ systems, leading to persistent shortness of breath, fatigue, and impaired concentration.[44, 45, 46, 47]

In addition to the many impacts on the health and well-being of workers themselves, workplace well-being can affect productivity and organizational performance.

All workers are part of larger communities, and their well-being is also impacted by external socio-economic, political, and cultural factors that may be outside of an organization's control. These include what is known as the "U.S. health disadvantage": poorer health, shorter lifespans, higher health care costs, and less access to health care compared with other wealthy countries.[48, 49]

Even so, organizational efforts to invest in workplace well-being, as well as in local organizations and community development, can in turn support the development of a happier, healthier, more productive workforce and contribute to the success and economic well-being of an organization.[37, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54]

Chronic diseases and injuries in the U.S. workforce costs employers more than half a trillion dollars in lost productivity each year.[55] Decades of research have also shown that prioritizing and investing in efforts that address workplace well-being can have significant returns impacting the bottom line. Workplace well-being efforts have notable effects on organizational costs—for example, those associated with reductions in absenteeism and annual health care claims. Organizations that focused on worker well-being have also reported higher productivity and retention rates.

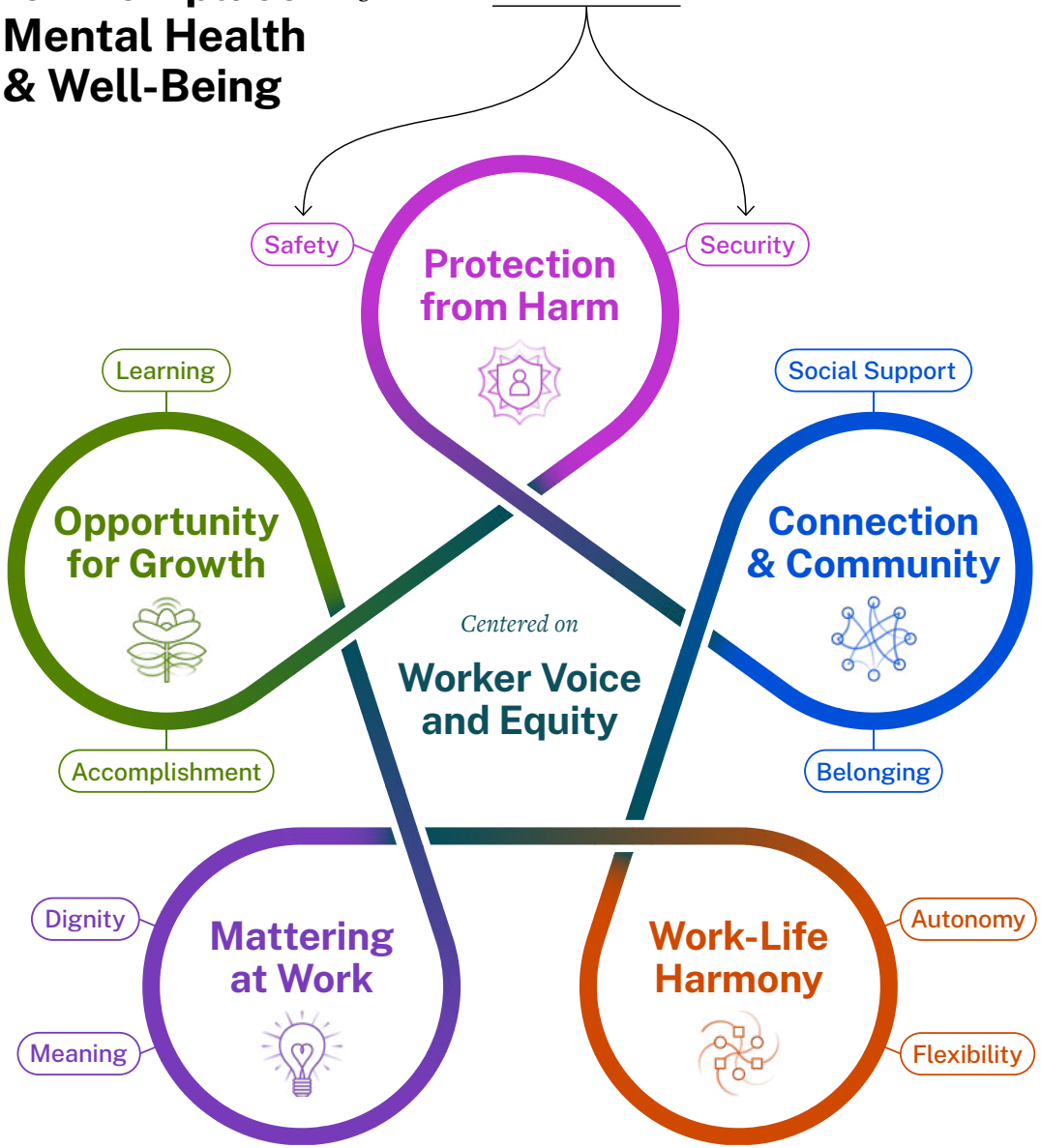
Work is an important social determinant of worker health. Improving the work environment to support workplace mental health and well-being calls for workers at the table. The U.S. labor movement has improved worker well-being by advocating for health care and occupational health and safety regulations and protections, especially in eliminating workplace hazards and preventing accidents.[56] Many components in this Framework have been successfully fought for and won in workplaces across the U.S. by workers themselves, including paid sick and family leave, living wages, and social support at work.[57, 58] Creating an environment where workers' voices are supported without fear of job loss or retaliation is an essential component of healthy organizations.[59, 60]

Creating an environment where workers' voices are supported without fear of job loss or retaliation is an essential component of healthy organizations.

The Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being is intended to spark organizational dialogue and change in the workplace. It can also catalyze areas for further research, strategic investment, and broader policy advancement. Centered around the foundational principles of equity and the voices of all workers, it includes five Essentials and necessary components for addressing workplace mental health and well-being based on human needs (see Figure on following page). Organizations can use this Framework to support their workplaces as engines of mental health and well-being.

Five Essentials for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being

Centered on the worker voice and equity, these five Essentials support workplaces as engines of well-being. Each Essential is grounded in two human needs, shared across industries and roles.



Components

Creating a plan with all workers to enact these components can help reimagine workplaces as engines of well-being.

Protection from Harm

- Prioritize workplace physical and psychological safety
- Enable adequate rest
- Normalize and support mental health
- Operationalize DEIA* norms, policies, and programs

Connection & Community

- Create cultures of inclusion and belonging
- Cultivate trusted relationships
- Foster collaboration and teamwork

Work-Life Harmony

- Provide more autonomy over how work is done
- Make schedules as flexible and predictable as possible
- Increase access to paid leave
- Respect boundaries between work and non-work time

Mattering at Work

- Provide a living wage
- Engage workers in workplace decisions
- Build a culture of gratitude and recognition
- Connect individual work with organizational mission

Opportunity for Growth

- Offer quality training, education, and mentoring
- Foster clear, equitable pathways for career advancement
- Ensure relevant, reciprocal feedback

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility*

Office *of the* **U.S. Surgeon General**

Framework Development and Application

This Framework contributes to decades of public health, economic, sociological, and organizational psychology research. It is informed by the voices of many workers and unions based in a variety of occupations and sectors, including retail, childcare, education, hospitality and travel, agriculture, construction, manufacturing, grocery, technology, finance, utilities, government, and health care. It is also informed by conversations with workplace leaders, as well as academic and industry experts. While not an exhaustive literature review of the evidence base, the Framework was developed based on desk research as well as numerous conversations and expert roundtables.
The framework includes Five Essentials for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being:

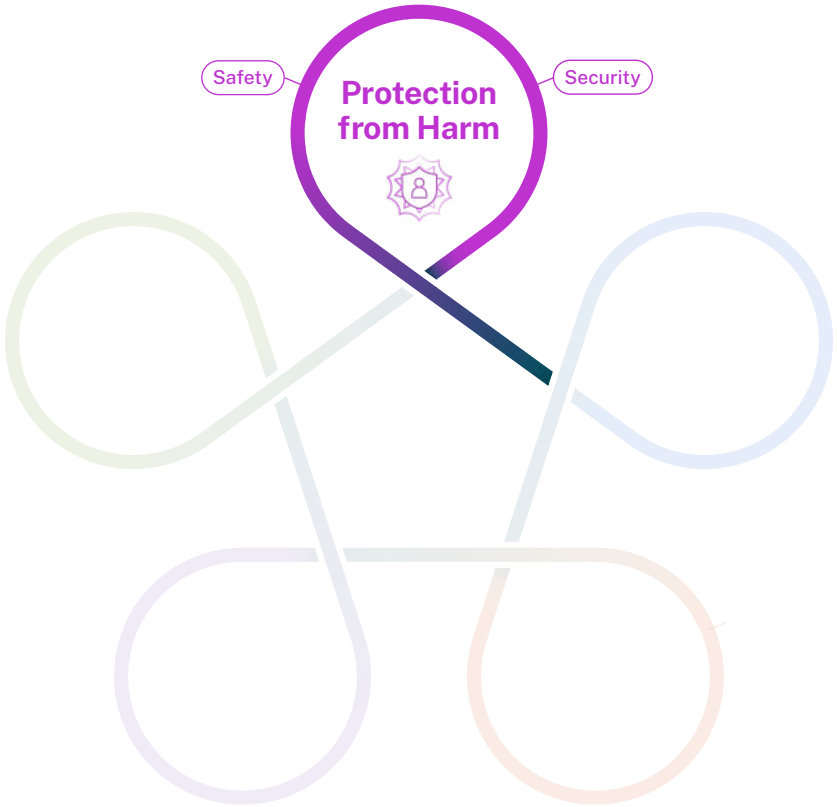


The Framework can be viewed as a starting point for organizations in updating and institutionalizing policies, processes, and practices to best support the mental health and well-being of workers. Ensuring workplace well-being requires an intentional, ongoing effort by employers and leaders across all levels, with the voices of workers and equity (i.e., a more equitable policy and practice environment) at the center.[61]
The Five Essentials can guide leaders, managers, and supervisors, as well as empower workers, to identify and communicate about priority organizational changes needed. Workplace leaders and supervisors across all industries can have a powerful impact on worker well-being by setting organizational culture, shaping the day-to-day experiences of workers, and prioritizing workforce engagement. The most effective leaders express compassion, empathy, and generosity; communicate openly, often, and clearly; and practice human- and wellness-centered leadership by recognizing the connection between individual strengths, growth, and organizational change.[62, 63, 64]

The Five Essentials can be adapted across different workplaces with the recognition that some components may be adapted more extensively for organizations with access to greater resources. Organizations should build in systems for accountability, review existing worker engagement survey data to better understand the needs among disproportionately impacted groups, utilize validated tools for measuring worker well-being, and ensure processes for continuous quality improvement.[65, 66, 67] These systems are critical to sustain workplace structures and practices that advance rather than harm the health and well-being of all workers long-term.[68, 69, 70, 71]

Essential 1:
Protection from Harm

> *"The leaders of a company set the tone, and if they're willing to talk about mental health, that trickles all the way down."*
>
> Workplace Wellness Leader, Technology Sector



The first Essential of this Framework is **Protection from Harm**. This Essential rests on two human needs: **safety** and **security**. More than two-in-five workers surveyed by the American Psychological Association in 2022 reported that health and safety concerns negatively affect their stress level at work.[72]

Workplace safety means all workers are in a safe and healthful work environment, protected from physical harm, injury, illness, and death.[73] This is done through continued efforts to minimize occupational hazards and physical workplace violence, as well as psychological harm such as bias, discrimination, emotional hostility, bullying, and harassment.[74, 75] Security builds on safety to include financial, and job security, given the negative effects that layoffs and job loss can have on the workers and their families.[76] (Discussed further in Essential 4).

Protection from Harm
Components

- Prioritize workplace physical and psychological safety
- Enable adequate rest
- Normalize and support mental health
- Operationalize Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) norms, policies, and programs

Prioritize workplace physical and psychological safety

The first component of this Essential is to *prioritize workplace physical and psychological health and safety.* People cannot perform well at work if they feel physically or psychologically unsafe.[77, 78, 79] When workers feel psychologically safe, they speak up without the risk of being punished, retaliated against or humiliated, and without fear of these risks. Racial and ethnic minority workers are at higher risk for workplace injuries, which has led to an increased frequency and prevalence of work-related disabilities for non-Hispanic Black and foreign-born Hispanic workers.[80] Workers such as migrant and seasonal agricultural workers, who are often foreign-born Hispanic workers, may also be disproportionately affected by climate change and subjected to extreme heat stress.[81] They may also face discriminatory practices such as living in fear of potential deportation or losing their job if they report injuries.

To fully address workplace violence, organizations must take all steps to comply with regulations and regularly improve related policies and programs.[79, 82, 83] Workplace violence is disproportionately experienced by women, whether it comes from a customer, a coworker, or partner who threatens or harms them at work.[84] Between fiscal years 2018 and 2021, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission received a total of 98,411 charges alleging harassment (e.g., race, national origin) under any basis and 27,291 charges alleging sexual harassment.[85] Of these, 43% were concurrently filed with a retaliation charge. 62% of all harassment charges were filed by women, and 78% of the sexual harassment charges were filed by women. Of the 1,945 sexual harassment charges filed concurrently with a race charge, 71% were filed by Black/African women. Importantly, the majority of individuals who say they experience harassment never take formal action. Organizational leaders can do more to encourage reporting by protecting workers from harassment and potential retaliation.[85] Certain industries are also at greater risk for workplace violence, including health care, law enforcement and correctional officers, education, and service providers, with taxi drivers being more than 20 times more likely to be murdered on the job than other workers.[86, 87, 88]

Mitigating harmful impacts in the work environment begins with a review by employers of all existing occupational health and safety legal requirements, and their own workplace policies and conditions to ensure standards and regular compliance.[89] There are numerous resources and validated tools from the CDC and OSHA that organizations can use to guide these efforts (see resources on page 16). Organizations can request technical

assistance, education, and training from OSHA for information on legal requirements, and periodic guidance on and monitoring of implementation of policies and measures to protect worker health and well-being.

Leaders at all organizational levels can collaborate with workers to examine and eliminate workplace hazards, then design, implement, and regularly evaluate programs for workplace safety.[62] Efforts can include, but are not limited to, workstation redesign to prevent injury, including work-related access to lethal means (a risk factor for suicide among workers); ensuring policies for infection prevention and control, and prevention of heat-related illnesses. In addition to specific efforts to prevent physical injury, leaders can collaborate with workers to promote total worker safety. Efforts can include, but are not limited to, increasing access to workplace training and job tools in multiple languages, examining workload and adequacy of resources to meet job demands (e.g. staffing, coverage), reducing long working hours, and eliminating policies and productivity metrics that cause harm (e.g. limiting worker rest or bathroom breaks).[8, 90, 91, 92, 93]

Enable adequate rest

The second component is to *enable adequate rest.* Insufficient rest, whether lack of sleep or lack of quality rest, or from long work hours, night shift work, stress, anxiety, pain, health conditions, medications, caffeine, alcohol, or possibly from lack of refresh breaks or working multiple jobs, can impair the physical, emotional, and mental health of workers.[94] One meta-analysis found that workers who did not get adequate sleep were 1.62 times as likely to have a workplace injury than those who did.[95] Long work hours have been shown to raise workers' risk for exhaustion, anxiety, and depression.[96] Fatigue diminishes productivity as the risk of burnout soars.[97, 98] When workers have adequate rest at work, they are less vulnerable to workplace mistakes and injuries.[96, 99] Workplace leaders can consider the length of working hours, overtime shifts, and opportunities for offline rest and refresh time.

Normalize and support mental health

Third, organizations can further *normalize and support mental health* while decreasing stigma at work by validating challenges, communicating mental health and well-being as priorities, and offering both support and prevention services. Leaders and managers throughout an organization must be supported to create a culture of inclusivity and to normalize mental health care. This culture includes modeling, communicating, regularly promoting, and supporting workers' access to services throughout all channels of worker engagement. This should also include training and support for supervisors at all levels with resources, including on-call services such as workplace Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) which remain significantly underutilized.[100, 101] Organizations can regularly evaluate EAP utilization, and strive to promote, improve, and supplement them based on worker needs. Employers should review benefits packages and provide comprehensive health care coverage that includes access to mental health and substance use care and treatment. Organizations can further make mental health care more easily accessible while ensuring confidentiality by facilitating access

to both on-site and off-site after-hours care, encouraging time off for mental health care, and supporting access to quality and affordable mental health care services, including telehealth. Workplace leaders can further normalize mental health by supporting organizational and local efforts to address stigma, such as by signing on to the National Alliance for Mental Illness StigmaFree Company Pledge.[102]

Operationalize Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) norms, policies, and programs

The fourth and final component is to *operationalize DEIA norms, policies, and programs.* Prioritizing DEIA norms means operationalizing relevant policies and programs in ways that ensure safety. This includes confronting structural racism, microaggressions, ableism, and implicit bias.[103, 104] In inclusive workplace cultures, all workers, including those with disabilities and from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, feel safe to be authentic and express their feelings because they trust that their coworkers welcome and value their unique perspectives.[33, 105] When diversity is celebrated as a source of strength, workers experience less stress and anxiety as bias and prejudice is not tolerated.[106, 107] Inclusive leadership is vital for fostering diversity among teams and is required to support a work environment where all team members feel valued and represented.[33, 108]

DEIA also includes considerations for people with disabilities to ensure equitable access to employment, as well as workplace participation, accommodations, and modifications. People with disabilities face discrimination and steep employment disparities. As of 2021 U.S. data, only 19% of persons with a disability were employed, compared to 63% of persons without a disability.[109] Employers are required to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities. Job Accommodation Network (JAN) and Administration for Community Living's Americans with Disabilities Act National Network provide free training and resources for employees, employers, and job applicants.[110] The White House Executive Order 14035 on DEIA, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy also offer additional resources in these areas.[111, 112, 113]

Box 1

Protection from Harm
Resources

Manuals, Guidebooks, Training

- Americans with Disabilities Act National Network
- Fundamentals of Total Worker Health® Approaches Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) / National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)
- "What is a Safety Climate?" CDC/NIOSH Webinar
- Sleep: An Important Health and Safety Concern at Work CDC Workplace Health Resource Center
- Workforce GPS Guide: Beyond the Record, a Justice-oriented Approach to Background Checks John Jay College Institute for Justice and Opportunity
- Resources and Technical Assistance DOL Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)
- Workplace Violence Program Resources DOL
- Training Resources for Employers to Protect Workers DOL / Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
- Spanish-Language Compliance Assistance Resources DOL/OSHA
- Safety & Health Improvement Program Oregon Healthy Workforce Center
- Mental Health Toolkit Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN)

Mental Health and Substance Use Recovery Support

- Workplace Supported Recovery CDC/NIOSH
- CDC Mental Health Resources
- Recovery for Every Worker, Every Employer DOL
- What can YOU do?: The "Mental Health at Work: What Can I Do" PSA Campaign DOL
- Drug-Free Workplace Resources Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Suicide Prevention

If you or someone you know is experiencing emotional distress or thoughts of suicide, help is available. Call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline 24/7 at 988. Or in a crisis, text 741741 for 24/7, confidential, free crisis counseling. Or call the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) Helpline at 1-800-950-6264, Monday-Friday, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., ET.

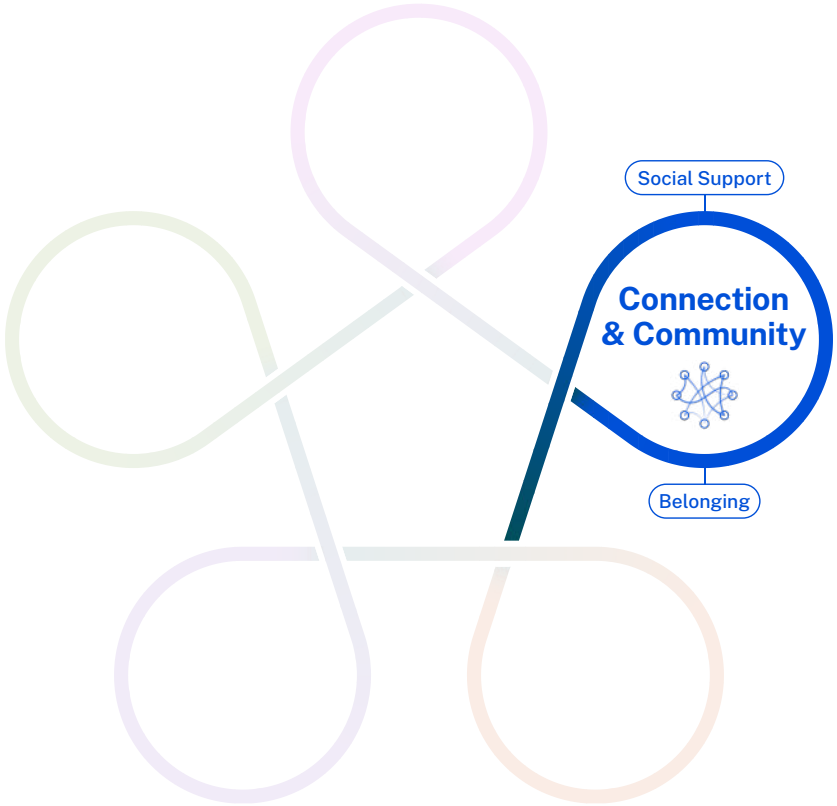
- Preventing Suicide: A Technical Package of Policy, Programs, and Practices CDC
- Comprehensive Blueprint for Workplace Suicide Prevention National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988

Other

- Helping Small Businesses DOL/OSHA
- On-Site Consultation DOL/OSHA
- Stigma-Free Company National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI)
- Resources for Prioritizing Staff Wellness Office of Head Start
- Wellbeing In The Workplace Guidebook U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- Advancing Health Equity The Community Guide
- Guidelines on Mental Health at Work World Health Organization (WHO)

Essential 2:
Connection and Community

> *"I don't want to just feel like I know how to perform to belong. I want to feel like I can be exactly who I am and still belong... that's very different."*
>
> Mid-career Mental Health Worker



The second Essential is **Connection and Community**. Organizations that create opportunities for social connection and community can also help improve health and well-being.[8, 114] This Essential rests on two human needs: **social support** and **belonging**.

Human beings have an innate need for social connection and the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the health and well-being impacts of isolation.[115, 116] The need for social connection extends to the workplace, as supportive relationships are not limited to intimate networks of close family or friends.[114, 117] Given the amount of time people spend in the workplace, the relationships and connections we build there can have a variety of impacts. Having social support, or relationships and networks that can offer physical and psychological help, such as emotional support, informational support, and advice, can mitigate feelings of loneliness and isolation.[118] Belonging is the feeling of being an accepted member of a group, or of connectedness given one's interpersonal relationships.[48] Fostering a sense of belonging and connection within the broader communities they are a part of has the potential to improve the health and well-being of workers and communities, and the prosperity of organizations themselves.[48]



Connection and Community
Components

- Create cultures of inclusion and belonging
- Cultivate trusted relationships
- Foster collaboration and teamwork

Create cultures of inclusion and belonging

The first component of Connection and Community is to *create cultures of inclusion and belonging.* Organizations can begin to build social connections and community at work by encouraging what scientists call prosocial behavior, while guarding against practices, policies, or behaviors that may be barriers to social connection.[119] Prosocial behavior promotes positive social relationships through welcoming, helping, and reassuring others. Organizational cultures that promote belonging can also foster a powerful protective force against bias, discrimination, and exclusion in the workplace.[8, 120, 121, 122] Organizational leaders should cultivate environments and cultures where connection is encouraged, and workers of all backgrounds are included. This may also include support, without fear of retaliation, for workers to have their voices and concerns heard for local policy and program change, such as through associations, cooperatives, and unions.

Cultivate trusted relationships

The second component of this Essential is *cultivating trusted relationships.*[119] Leaders can create structure and opportunities for workers to build trust and better understand one another as whole people and not just as skill sets.[123, 124] This mitigates loneliness and helps workers across all levels value and empathize with each other, while helping each other cope with stress and uncertainty.[122, 125] Having supportive work relationships can improve performance and is associated with worker engagement and innovation.[115] Many workplace relationships can positively affect worker health and well-being, including those between leaders and workers, among workers collaborating on teams, and between workers and their consumers and customers.[8, 126]

Having clear and consistent communication between workers and leaders is foundational in building trust.[127] Trust can be difficult to foster if workers feel disconnected from their leaders and organizations.[123] Promoting trust among leaders and workers begins with listening to worker concerns and explaining why key decisions are made within an organization.[128] Leaders can build trust through small, everyday interactions such as modeling and inviting others to share important moments of their daily lives with each other.



Foster collaboration and teamwork

The third component is to *foster collaboration and teamwork.* The future of work includes both remote and hybrid work, in a variety of full-time and part-time arrangements, so there is even more need to be intentional about how to build teams, communicate, and collaborate.[129, 130, 131] Organizational leaders, supervisors, and project managers can communicate the importance of teamwork, encourage regular communication, model authenticity, provide teams with effective collaboration tools, and include time for non-work connection such as community service.[132] Across organizations and within their communities, leaders can also consider community liaisons or Asset-Based Community Development to address issues like racial injustice, LGBTQ+ inequities, and other social determinants of health to support worker well-being and foster connection in the broader community, while improving the bottom line of businesses.[48, 133, 134]

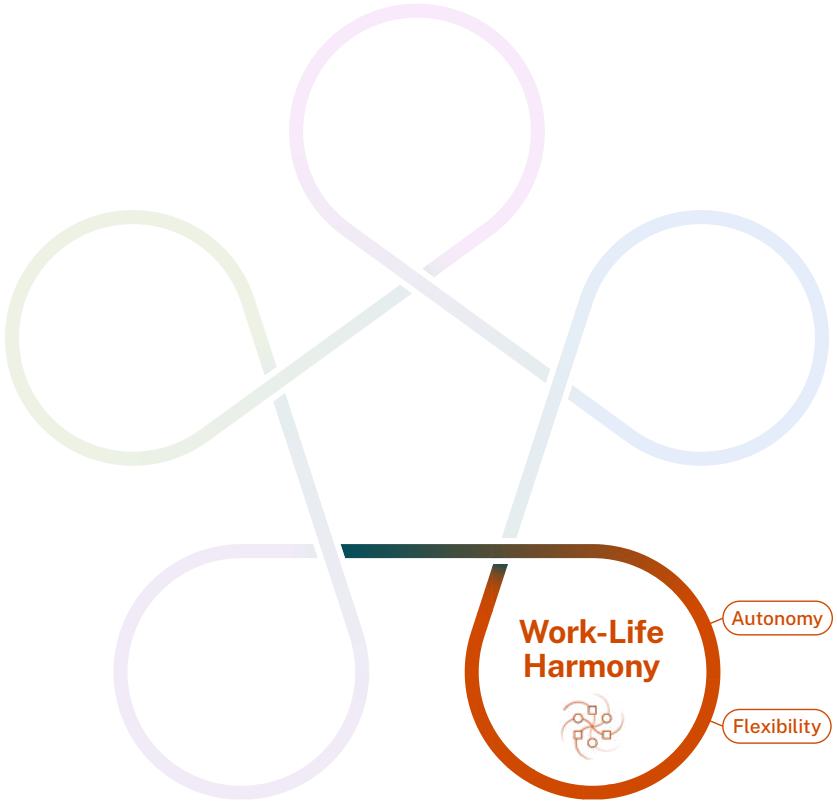
Box 2

Connection and Community
Resources

- Worker Resource and Organizing Center U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)
- Disability Inclusion in the Workplace: Why It Matters Employer Assistance and Resource Network (EARN)
- Empower Work Text Line
- Work Design Principle #3: Improve Social Relationships in the Workplace The Work and Well-Being Initiative (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health / MIT Sloan School of Management)
- A to Z of Disabilities and Accommodations Job Accommodation Network
- Center for Peer Support Mental Health America
- Find Local Assistance and Network of Partners U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)

Essential 3:
Work-Life Harmony

> *"I felt powerless in the position. I felt like there was never any freedom to choose things or make decisions [for myself]."*
>
> Mid-career worker, currently unemployed, with numerous prior low-wage service sector jobs



The third Essential is **Work-Life Harmony**. Professional and personal roles and responsibilities can together create work and non-work conflicts.[8, 135] The ability to integrate work and non-work demands rests on the human needs of **autonomy** and **flexibility**.[136] Organizations that increase worker autonomy, or how much control one has over how they do their work, and whose workplaces provide greater flexibility, or the ability to work when and where is best for them, see workers who are more likely to succeed and retain staff for longer.[8] The expansion of remote and hybrid work opportunities, driven by the needs of the COVID-19 pandemic and enabled by advances in technology, has a number of impacts on worker mental health and well-being that merit additional research. While some reporting has shown the positive impacts of remote and hybrid work on flexibility, others have indicated negative impacts of blurred work-life boundaries.[137, 138]

Organizations must see workers not only for their work roles, but as whole people. They may have many needs, roles, and responsibilities outside of work, whether it is time needed for routine physical and mental health care, an unexpected family issue that requires urgent attention, or for regular time and space for rest, exercise, educational pursuits, and hobbies. Workers who are experiencing, or who care for family members who are experiencing, acute or chronic illness, mental health challenges,

or a disability may also need additional time to manage their conditions, responsibilities as a caregiver, and care for themselves. This may include having the flexibility to attend multiple regular or unplanned appointments. Many workers may also have caregiving responsibilities for children, older parents, or other dependents.[139, 140, 141, 142] Notably, these responsibilities disproportionately fall on women.[143]

The overload and interference that can arise between work and life roles have been linked to negative health outcomes, including an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, digestive issues, poor sleep quality, and substance use.[144, 145, 146] On the other hand, workers who feel they can better harmonize their professional and personal needs report greater satisfaction with their work and life and experience fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety.[147, 148] In a recent survey by the Society for Human Resource Management, many human resource professionals reported that they recognize the importance of workplace mental health and well-being, but some feel they lack the resources to meet the needs of workers, and others are unsure of which benefits to provide.[149]

Young workers today represent more than one-third of the U.S. workforce and play an important role in shifting societal attitudes and perceptions around work-life harmony.[150] According to a 2022 Deloitte survey among 23,220 Gen Z and Millennial workers (born between 1996-2010 and 1980-1995, respectively) across 46 countries globally, low compensation was the number one cited reason for leaving their jobs in the last two years, and 44% of Gen Zs and 43% of Millennials say many people have recently left their organization due to workload pressure.[151, 152] When asked about their priorities in choosing an employer, workers ranked "good work-life balance and learning and development opportunities" highest; workers also wanted more flexibility in where they worked, with 75% preferring hybrid or remote work options.[152] Another group to consider are older adults (aged 65 years and up), for whom organizations can examine work environments and policies to enable them to remain in the workforce longer, while promoting their healthy longevity and well-being.[153]

Work-Life Harmony
Components

- Provide more autonomy over how work is done
- Make schedules as flexible and predictable as possible
- Increase access to paid leave
- Respect boundaries between work and non-work time

Provide more autonomy over how work is done

The first component of work-life harmony is to *provide more autonomy over how work is done.* Organizations that increase opportunities for worker control over how, when, and where work is done can mitigate work and life conflicts, engender more trust in workplaces and coworkers, and improve health.[8, 154, 155, 156]

When possible, increased worker control over scope of work, process for accomplishing projects, and scheduling and location (e.g. condensed hours or work weeks and remote or hybrid work arrangements), can help reduce turnover as workers report greater productivity and increased satisfaction with work.[8, 157, 158, 159] Employers must clearly and frequently communicate with workers to address tensions between the flexibility that staff may want and need, alongside organizational needs.

Make schedules as flexible and predictable as possible

The second component of Work-Life Harmony is to *make schedules as flexible and predictable as possible.* Many workers are subject to variable and unpredictable work hours and scheduling demands.[160] A Brookings Institute analysis found that, in the leisure and hospitality industry, three-quarters of all workers receive their schedules less than one-month in advance, with most receiving notice less than two weeks in advance.[161] In the construction industry, nearly 40% of workers report receiving their schedules less than one week in advance. Unstable and unpredictable scheduling is linked to increased income volatility and an increased risk of economic hardship, which can degrade physical and mental health.[162] For example, while it may not always be possible to predict job needs and schedules, unstable schedules can make it difficult to obtain childcare and transportation. Workers with disabilities who need accommodations for transportation or personal care at the workplace may not have access to those accommodations on demand, and this instability fuels psychological distress and burnout.[163, 164, 165]

Workers subject to irregular schedules are more likely to report a higher likelihood of psychological distress and poor sleep quality, which is linked to a host of negative health outcomes.[166] Schedule irregularity among workers can also lead to work-life conflicts that adversely affect relationships both in and out of the workplace, including behavioral and mental health challenges in children of working parents.[163, 164, 167, 168] Employers can implement family-friendly policies such as flexible start and end times to work days, and not penalizing workers with lost wages when personal, family needs, or emergencies arise.

Increase access to paid leave

Third, organizations should *increase access to paid leave*—paid sick leave; paid family and medical leave, including paid parental leave for pregnancy and post-partum care; and paid time off for vacation.[169, 170] The U.S. remains the only advanced economy in the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development that does not require paid medical and family leave be provided to its workforce.[171] While paid sick leave was available to 79% of U.S. civilian workers in March 2021, there are significant disparities among wage categories. 95% of workers whose average hourly wage placed them in the top 10% of civilian workers had access to paid sick leave, compared to only 35% of those in the bottom 10% of all civilian workers, disproportionately impacting Black and Hispanic workers. Paid family leave remains the least accessible paid leave benefit, available to 23% of civilian workers overall but only 7% of workers in the bottom 10% wage category.[156, 172] Unequal and limited access to paid sick, family, and medical leave, can contribute to a higher percentage of individuals working while

sick (or "presenteeism") and the spread of infection at work, as well as decreased productivity, burnout, and labor shortages.[173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178] Increasing access to paid sick and other types of leave (e.g., family, medical, school) can reduce the likelihood of lost wages by 30%, positively affect the physical and mental health of workers and their children, improve retention, and reduce the costs associated with turnover.[135, 156, 179, 180]

Respect boundaries between work and non-work time

The fourth component of work-life harmony is to *respect boundaries between work and non-work time.* When leaders and supervisors set, respect, and model clear boundaries between time on and off the job, without penalizing workers for this flexibility needed, workers report a greater sense of well-being.[181] This also helps workers have the critical time needed for rest to optimize their health, productivity, and creativity, while alleviating anxiety or fears of missing work demands. One study among 2,000 faculty and staff across 40 public universities in Australia from June to November 2020 found that staff who had supervisors that expected them to respond to messages after work reported higher levels of psychological distress and emotional exhaustion, including headaches and back pain, than groups whose supervisors did not.[182] Workplace leaders and supervisors across all organizational units can establish policies to limit digital communication outside of work hours, such as after a specific evening hour and on weekends.[183]

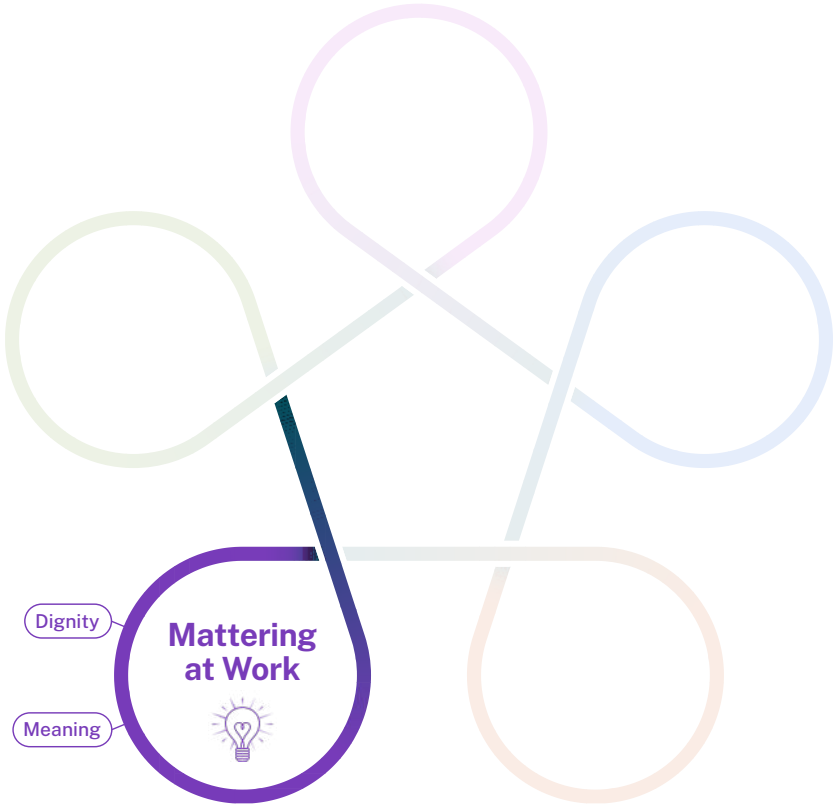
Box 3

Work-Life Harmony
Resources

- Work Design Principle #1: Give Employees More Control Over Their Work The Work and Well-Being Initiative (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health / MIT Sloan School of Management)
- Work and Life: A Behavioral Approach to Solving Work-Life Conflict Ideas42
- How Can We Grant Employees More Flexibility in Their Job Positions Mental Health America
- Five Ways Leaders Can Support Remote Work MIT Sloan Management Review
- National Business Group on Health
- Paid Leave National Partnership for Women & Families

Essential 4:
Mattering at Work

> *"We are real people. We go home, we have real issues... workers need to know that their employers don't see them as robots."*
>
> Mid-career Emergency Medical Technician



People want to know that they matter to those around them, and that their work makes a difference in the lives of others. Knowing you matter has been shown to lower stress, while feeling like you do not can raise the risk for depression.[184, 185]

The fourth Essential is **Mattering at Work**. It rests on the human needs of **dignity** and **meaning**. Dignity is the sense of being respected and valued.[186] When the dignity of workers is affirmed and supported in the workplace, it enhances well-being. Conversely, being made to feel disrespected or not valued may lead to an increase in stress and feelings of anger, cynicism, hostility, and withdrawal.[187] Meaning in the workplace can refer to the sense of broader purpose and significance of one's work. Studies have shown that having meaning and purpose reduces the risk for health complications such as heart attacks and stroke, and when connected to work, can lead to improved productivity and innovation.[186, 188, 189, 190]

Mattering at Work
Components

- Provide a living wage
- Engage workers in workplace decisions
- Build a culture of gratitude and recognition
- Connect individual work with organizational mission

Provide a living wage

The first component of this Essential is to *provide a living wage.* Nearly one-third of U.S. workers earn less than $15 an hour, which is broadly recognized as insufficient to meet the cost of living in many parts of the country.[191] Work and income are critical social determinants of health and well-being.[192] The American Psychological Association's 2022 Work and Well-Being Survey found that workers who worried about their compensation not keeping pace with inflation were more likely to report work as having negative impacts on their mental health.[36] Another recent survey conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers of 3,000 workers across several industries found that more than half of respondents (56%) reported feeling stressed about their finances, and among "financially-stressed" workers, 49% said that money worries had a severe or major impact on their mental health in the past year.[193] Organizations should review all work resources to meet job demands, including compensation, to offer workers a living wage as well as access to benefits that further promote and protect their health and well-being. This should include mental health supports and, where feasible, retirement plans, workers' compensation, financial and legal services, and caregiving supports (e.g., childcare).

A recent study funded by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities found that every $1 increase in the minimum wage of U.S. states could reduce the suicide rate among people with a high school education or less by nearly 6%.[194] Increases in the minimum wage across a range of sectors in the U.S. have been shown to improve parent-reported health among young children and reduce racial and ethnic disparities in income.[195, 196] Performing uncompensated work, unpaid overtime, or routinely making self-sacrifices for organizations may affect worker health and well-being.[197] Aligned with the Good Jobs Principles outlined by DOL and the U.S. Department of Commerce, organizations must ensure that all workers are paid an equitable, stable, and predictable living wage before overtime, tips, and commission, and that these wages increase as worker skills increase.[93]

Engage workers in workplace decisions

The second component of Mattering at Work is to *engage workers in workplace decisions.* Employers must ensure that they are equitably engaging and empowering all workers to improve workplaces.[198] Employee or worker engagement is the extent to which organizational leaders and supervisors involve workers in developing organizational mission statements, values, goals, and objectives, as well as the level of enthusiasm and commitment



that workers have in their work and workplace.[65] A 2022 Gallup State of the Global Workforce Survey found that worker engagement in the U.S. and Canada is low at 33%, yet it is among the highest globally.[34] To identify and respond to their workers' priority well-being needs, leaders can utilize existing engagement surveys, add measures to executive dashboards, and use other validated tools to regularly measure well-being.

Build a culture of gratitude and recognition

Third, in addition to recognizing workers through compensation, workplace leaders can *build a culture of gratitude and recognition* where workers feel seen, respected, needed, and valued. Supervisors hold a powerful role in shaping organizational culture and worker well-being. Regardless of their position, when people feel appreciated, recognized, and engaged by their supervisors and coworkers, their sense of value and meaning increases, as well as their capacity to manage stress.[199, 200] Researchers have also found that staff who received frequent appreciation at work from colleagues and supervisors were more likely to recognize and appreciate others, and that this culture had positive effects on their sense of feeling valued, as well as on team performance.

Connect individual work with organizational mission

The fourth component is to *connect individual work with organizational mission* and the impact of their work. Shared purpose, or a collective sense of working toward a common goal, assigns further meaning to work, generates pride, and fuels motivation, all while reducing stress.[186] Organizations can help workers see the connection between their day-to-day work and the organizational purpose and mission. Leaders can also reinforce these connections by acknowledging the different roles of individuals, teams, and departments in achieving organizational goals.[201]

Box 4

Mattering at Work

Resources

Manuals, Guidebooks, Toolkits

- Job Quality Toolkit U.S. Department of Commerce
- Tool for Conducting a Pay Analysis to Understand Whether Full-time Hourly Employees Earn Enough Money to Support Their Household Good Jobs Institute
- The Power of Four Words: "What Matters to You?" Institute for Healthcare Improvement
- Addressing Burnout in the Behavioral Health Workforce through Organizational Strategies, Chapter 3- Planning Processes Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- Healthy Workplace Participatory Program Toolkit University of Massachusetts Lowell
- "Who is Engaged at Work?" Article (2019), American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine
- "6 Job Quality Metrics Every Company Should Know" Article (2021), Brookings

Measurement Tools

- NIOSH Worker Well-Being Questionnaire Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) / National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)
- Workplace Health Promotion CDC
- Valid and Reliable Survey Instruments to Measure Burnout, Well-Being, and Other Work-Related Dimensions National Academy of Medicine (NAM)

Essential 5:
Opportunity for Growth

> *"What makes work hard is when I don't see or sense that the people who are right directly above me, like my boss, advocate for my growth. They don't even have a sense of what's next for me."*
>
> Entry-level Worker, Non-profit Sector



The fifth and final Essential is **Opportunity for Growth**. This Essential rests on the human needs of **learning** and **accomplishment**. Learning is the process of acquiring new knowledge and skills in the workplace, which provides opportunities for individual intellectual, social, professional, and emotional growth.[202] Learning helps workers meet deadlines and reach goals at work, while promoting healthy social interactions.[203, 204] Without learning or working towards shared goals, workers can start to feel stagnant, frustrated, and ineffective.[202] While learning is the process of growth, accomplishment is the outcome of meeting goals and having an impact.[205] Accomplishment confers a sense of competence that reduces stress, anxiety, and self-doubt.[206] When organizations create more opportunities for learning, accomplishment, and growth, workers become more optimistic about their abilities and more enthusiastic about contributing to the organization.[207]

Opportunity for Growth
Components

- Offer quality training, education, and mentoring
- Foster clear, equitable pathways for career advancement
- Ensure relevant, reciprocal feedback

Offer quality training, education, and mentoring

The first component of Opportunity for Growth is to *offer quality training, education, and mentoring.* A recent survey of executives at 129 large and midsize U.S. companies found that only 59% of companies surveyed have prioritized worker learning and growth over the past three years.[208] Training to increase skills may also be coupled with opportunities for education outside of work to build knowledge in their own work, or in other areas of interest. Employers can informally promote growth opportunities by showing genuine interest in workers through personal encouragement, coaching, and mentorship.[209, 210]

Foster clear, equitable pathways for career advancement

The second component is to *foster clear, equitable pathways for career advancement.* When organizations provide transparent career pathways and advancement opportunities for all workers, this also fosters inclusion and diversity in the workplace. This should include resources and tools that can better support workers over time and address systematic barriers in the workplace. Opportunities might include accessible professional training programs, career navigation support, tuition reimbursement for classes outside of the workplace, English language courses, and promotion opportunities. For other workers this may take the form of rotations through other departments or organizations, sabbaticals, or being offered new types of responsibilities or assignments that give them an opportunity to stretch their skills or learn new ones. It is critical to ensure an equitable and fair distribution of opportunities and eliminate barriers for advancement among workers of color. With more remote and hybrid work, organizations must also ensure that these work arrangements do not limit access to growth or other career advancement opportunities.[211]

Ensure relevant, reciprocal feedback

The final component is to *ensure relevant, reciprocal feedback.* Leaders and managers can provide an appropriate level of guidance to help workers by considering their strengths and growth opportunities.[33] Organizations can create more opportunities for genuinely engaging with their workers, especially in a way that is positive, collaborative, and outcome-oriented. This should include equipping all leaders, especially new or mid-level supervisors and managers, with the supportive training, tools, and resources they need to engage, manage, lead, and coach others.[65]

Box 5

Opportunity for Growth
Resources

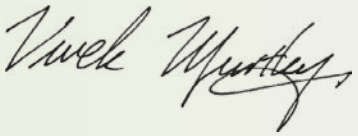
- Resource Leveraging & Service Coordination to Increase Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Federal Joint Communication to State and Local Governments
- Toolkits to Achieve Workplace Change Harvard University Work, Family & Health Network
- Bridging the Advancement Gap: What Frontline Employees Want—and What Employees Think They Want McKinsey & Company
- What Professional Development Opportunities Can We Offer? Mental Health America
- 4 Tools to Help Managers Connect With Remote Teams MIT Sloan School of Management
- President's Executive Order on Diversity Equity Inclusion and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce
- 7 Tips for Making the Most of Your Check-Ins The Management Center
- Learning at Work and Wellbeing What Works Centre for Wellbeing

Conclusion

As we recover from the pandemic and rebuild our economy, leaders across organizations, together with workers, have an opportunity to reinvest in the mental health and well-being of our nation's workforce. We can build workplaces that are engines of well-being—showing workers that they matter, that their work matters, and that they have the support necessary to flourish. In doing so, we will foster more resilient, productive, and successful organizations and communities.

This Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being underscores the inextricable connection between the well-being of workers and the health of organizations. It offers a foundation and resources that can be used by workplaces of any size, across any industry.

Ultimately, sustainable change must be driven by committed leaders in continuous collaboration with the valued workers who power each workplace. The most important asset in any organization is its people. By choosing to center their voices, we can ensure that everyone has a platform to thrive.



To learn more about this framework and to find shareable resources, visit our webpage at **surgeongeneral.gov/workplace**

*Practice Examples**

*This list is not comprehensive, nor does including an example indicate endorsement. Rather, these examples are intended to serve as a starting point for organizations and organizational leaders as they apply the Framework in their workplaces.

Kent State University[212]

Kent State University (KSU) is a public, higher-education institution with approximately 6,000 employees across eight locations in Ohio and New York. In 2012, KSU leadership committed to addressing employee well-being, work-life balance, and mental health. After surveying staff, holding focus groups, and creating an inventory of campus resources, KSU administration confirmed that mental health and work-life balance were top employee concerns and developed a Workplace Mental Health and Wellness Initiative.

In addition to efforts to build trust and workshops to help supervisors identify and respond to signs of depression among staff, the team at KSU focused on normalizing mental health by minimizing stigma around accessing support services. This included improvements to and communication around their comprehensive EAP program, with online and telephone options, and support with stress, anxiety, depression, child and older adult caregiver needs, as well as assistance with financial, legal or identify theft. The EAP is available to all staff, household members, and dependents of staff. They also focused on increasing time and opportunities for connection, including 'walk and talks' which gave workers an opportunity to be together, be physically active, and find peer support.

In the first six months following the launch of the campaign, KSU found a notable increase in EAP utilization and increased web traffic to their EAP website on mental health issues. For the 12-month period after the launch of the campaign in 2012, KSU saw a reduction in claims dollars spent for covered employees diagnosed with depression of $4,861.93 per employee per year, resulting in more than $1 million in savings. Following the implementation of the program, positive responses to employee surveys asking if workers believed their organization cared about their health and well-being more than tripled. Their continued efforts to cultivate a positive working environment for employees has led KSU to be recognized as one of the "Great Colleges to Work For" among 212 institutions for the 11th time since the implementation of the initiative.[213] This has included recognition for their efforts in the following areas: Compensation and Benefits; Confidence in Senior Leadership; Shared Governance; Faculty Experience; and Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging.

Gap, Inc[214]

Many retail workers will not know their schedules until a few days in advance of work, or are "on-call", forcing them to be available without any guarantee of a paid shift. Gap, Inc, a global clothing-retail company, participated in an intervention in 2015-2016 to study the effects of stable schedules on their workforce and business. Initiatives to stabilize working schedules included posting workers' schedules two weeks in advance and eliminating "on-call" shifts. Alongside these baseline initiatives, some managers at different stores implemented additional interventions, such as:

- Instituting standard start and end times for shifts
- Allocating extra staff during times when there is expected to be a sales increase
- Guaranteeing a minimum of 20 hours of work each week for workers
- Allowing associates to swap shifts with other associates without managerial approval

This example shows that making schedules as predictable as possible, while ensuring adequate staff resources to meet high work volume, can reap benefits for the worker and organizations alike. Twenty-eight Gap stores implemented stable scheduling initiatives, which impacted the schedules of nearly 1,500 workers. The total costs of these interventions were low—approximately $31,200. In the stores that implemented stable scheduling initiatives during the 35-week measurement period, Gap saw a 5% increase in worker productivity and a 7% increase in sales. An analysis of the intervention estimated that these stores saw $2.9 million in increased revenue due to the stable scheduling practices.[215] Individual-level impacts included sleep quality improving by 6–8% on average among staff surveyed.

9-1-1 Dispatchers[216, 217]

9-1-1 dispatchers experience a high rate of burnout due to the inherently stressful and traumatic nature of their job as first responders. For example, more than 40% of surveyed emergency dispatchers operating within the Los Angeles Police Department, the third largest police force in the U.S., reported high levels of burnout. Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley hypothesized that burnout and turnover among emergency dispatchers can be decreased by fostering a sense of belonging, support, and positive professional identity.

To test this hypothesis, a group of more than 500 dispatchers across nine U.S. cities received a weekly email for six weeks that featured a story of a dispatcher's work experience. These emails also included a prompt to encourage workers to reflect on their experiences, in hopes that they would share positive stories their coworkers might resonate with. The stories were collected and stored in an easily accessible online database for future emails. For example, one email featured the story of a dispatcher who saved the life of a woman experiencing intimate partner violence in the community. The email concluded with a prompt asking dispatchers to share similar stories about peers and name who would be great mentors and why. Responses were then featured in the following week's email.

By sharing stories, dispatchers were able to highlight the challenges of the job and find commonality while supporting their peers. This fostered a greater sense of belonging as more dispatchers were able to empathize with the stories and challenges shared by colleagues. Approximately two-thirds of participants asked that the weekly emails continue. Moreover, dispatchers who received these emails reported a decrease in burnout. One model suggested this intervention can reduce turnover by 50%, resulting in cost savings for organizations. For instance, according to the model, a city with 100 emergency dispatchers could save more than $400,000 in recruitment and training costs from turnover. These findings suggest that low-cost interventions for building social connections, helping workers feel valued, and creating a platform for trusted work relationships can mitigate burnout and contribute to worker well-being.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Sacramento, CA[218]

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is a major Army command with approximately 37,000 civilian and military personnel, one of the world's largest public engineering, design and construction management agencies. The district of Sacramento has over 900 workers who manage some of the largest and most complex construction projects in the United States. Their leadership has emphasized the need for a robust and positive workplace safety culture, one that includes physical and psychological health and well-being. Their motto, "Building strong AND Taking care of people" reflects this.

There is a clear commitment from leadership across all levels to prioritize physical and psychological safety at work. The agency meets staff to support their well-being wherever they are, from office settings to government vehicles to construction sites. They utilize engagement surveys and awards so workers feel empowered to prevent and stop unsafe acts, while fostering a sense of ownership over their safety program and culture. Leadership provides early and ongoing communication and improvement opportunities, from new staff orientations to openly and publicly discussing workplace mental health and well-being. These communications also include safety expectation setting through district-wide letters to all staff, a quarterly council to highlight successes on workplace safety, and a district-wide employee council for troubleshooting challenges.

Panels with workers on workplace well-being through the pandemic and training on "Mental Health First Aid" for staff have also helped to normalize struggles and address stigma, while increasing access to mental health care and support. When it comes to workplace mental health and well-being, with this supportive safety culture, one worker reported feeling "more open to sharing my own challenges" with peers and "more supported to address them by my supervisor," especially alongside other disabilities for which he also needs support. The benefits of this program appeared to spill into the community as well, as at least one worker responded to efforts at work by taking on additional speaking engagements in their community to continue confronting stigma, including joining a city stigma association and sharing their story with local high schools, colleges, and teachers. One more worker shared, "Speaking out has helped others to also speak out and know they won't be punished… Having flexibility was (also) a life-saver for me—being able to make my doctor's appointments, adding flexibility to scheduling meetings—it's made a huge difference in my work life."

DTE Energy[219]

In response to survey results indicating low performance and creativity among their workforce, leadership at DTE Energy, a Detroit-based energy company, were eager for solutions. They were inspired after visiting a local call center where, contrary to expectations, they noted "positive, fully engaged employees collaborate and go the extra mile for customers." The secret: "connecting the people to their purpose."

One of DTE's first related initiatives was to film a video articulating the importance of each worker. They highlighted truck drivers, plant operators, corporate leaders, and many others to recognize the impact of their work in the company and on the community. Workers reported being moved by the videos because their work had never before been framed as a meaningful contribution. This newfound meaning was ingrained in the organizational culture itself, as the company adopted a new statement of purpose: "We serve with our energy, the lifeblood of communities and the engine of progress." This statement was woven into company leadership activities, onboarding and training programs, corporate meetings, and teambuilding efforts.

This example demonstrates one way to make an explicit connection between individual's work and the functioning of an organization and its surrounding community. After centering the importance of mattering in the workplace, DTE Energy received a Gallup Great Workplace Award five years in a row.

For more practice examples:

- Center for Workplace Mental Health American Psychiatric Association
- Total Worker Health® Case Studies Oregon Healthy Workforce Center
- Job Quality Case Studies U.S. Department of Commerce

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Department of Health and Human Services

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Administration for Community Living (ACL)
Administration for Children and Families (ACF)
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE)
Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Office of the Director
- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

National Institutes of Health (NIH)
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH)
Office for Civil Rights (OCR)
Office of the General Counsel (OGC)
Office of the Secretary (OS)
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Additional Partners across the U.S. Government

Department of Commerce (DOC)
Department of Labor (DOL)
Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA)
- Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
- Women's Bureau (WB)

White House Domestic Policy Council (DPC)
U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM)
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