

Enhancing Parity, Benefits and Equal Treatment in the Workplace

A Mental Health Matters National Online Dialogue



Hosted by: The State Exchange on Employment & Disability (SEED), an initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy.

Dates: March 10 - April 14, 2023



This national online dialogue was one of four in a series designed to inform the *Mental Health Matters: National Task Force on Workforce Mental Health Policy*. Through these dialogues, ePolicyWorks engaged targeted audiences and key stakeholders on four main priority areas, including:

- Parity, benefits and equal treatment in the workplace,
- Workplace care and supports,
- Underserved rural, racial and ethnic communities, and
- Behavioral health care workforce shortages and state resource systems.

Participants submitted ideas regarding how to ensure policies meet the needs of workers and jobseekers with mental health conditions. The following is a summary of recommendations on enhancing parity, benefits and equal treatment in the workplace, as well as participant demographics, that can now be used to inform the task force's development of resources and policy frameworks.

Participant Recommendations

Broaden disability-focused workplace policies to include employees with mental health conditions.

Dialogue participants noted that, similar to employees with on-the-job injuries or other disabilities, those with mental health conditions may need to take leaves of absence, short- or long-term disability leave or request workers' compensation.



Review workplace benefits and leave policies to ensure they cover and support employees with mental health conditions.

Consider strategies to educate employers on their responsibilities and employees on their rights in order to create a mental health-friendly workplace.

Consider ways to provide financial assistance to cover mental health care costs.

Participants shared that many individuals simply cannot afford to access mental health care due to its cost, disparities in mental health care insurance coverage and a lack of providers who accept public or private insurance.



Create a mental health tax credit to assist lower- and middle-income individuals in paying for care.

Encourage the coverage of telehealth at the same reimbursement rates as in-person and increase access to mental health care providers that accept insurance.

Expand telehealth options to include out-of-state providers through interstate licensing compacts in order to increase access to coverage.

Foster a psychologically safe workplace culture and environment.

Participants referenced elements of sample legislation titled the “Workplace Psychological Safety Act,” including the following:



Give victimized employees legal recourse to challenge employers who are complicit in mentally unhealthy work environments and behaviors.

Encourage employers to acknowledge, monitor, detect, prevent, discourage and adequately address incidences of psychological abuse.

Require employers to adopt and implement policies and training and conduct an annual anonymous workplace climate survey to monitor the prevalence of psychological abuse in workplaces.

Participant Recommendations

Support parental leave coaching for managers and employees.

Participants expressed that employers know that the year-long parental leave process (preparing for leave, on leave, returning from leave) is both professionally and personally complex for employees and can often lead to new or increased symptoms of mental health conditions. As a result, they suggested that employers should demonstrate their investment in talent, create stronger parity and equity across the workforce, and cultivate an inclusive workplace culture by offering parental leave coaching.



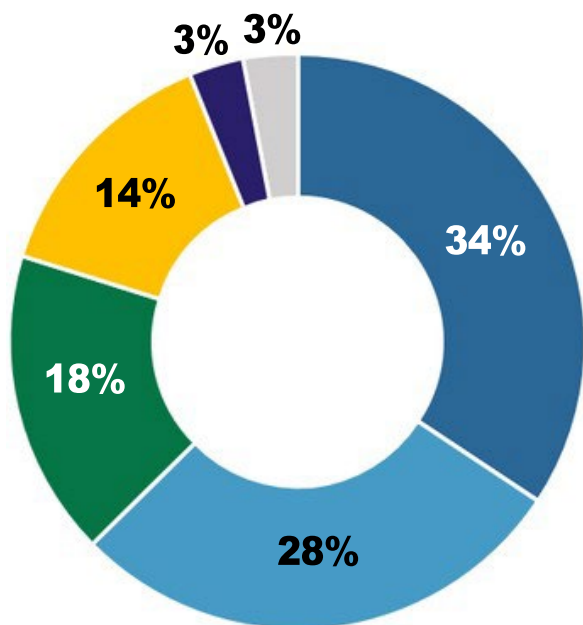
Fund the development and distribution of parental leave coaching curriculum for managers and human resource representatives that incorporates strategies for supporting mental health and well-being of employees during the parental leave process.

Incentivize businesses to provide parental leave coaching and conduct research to determine its effectiveness.

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Participant Demographics

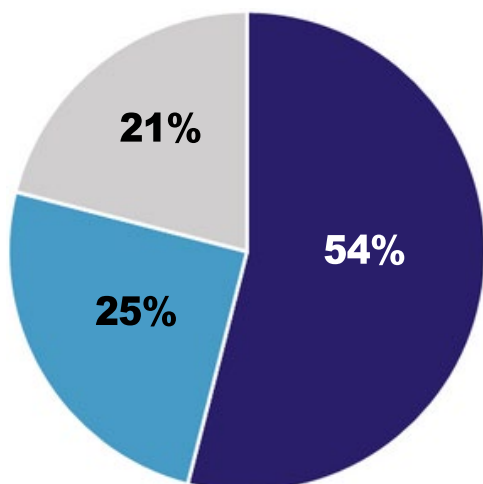
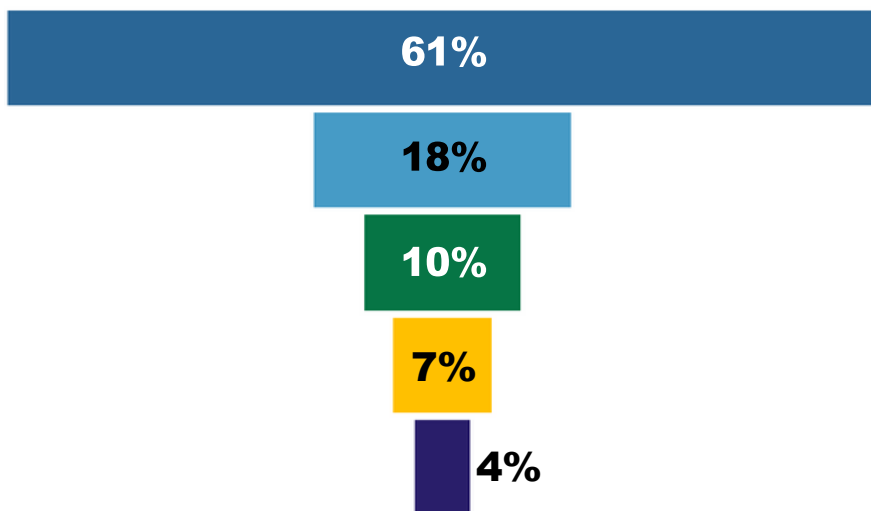


Stakeholder Group*

- Employee - 34%
- Policymaker - 28%
- Other - 18%
- Employer - 14%
- Student - 3%
- Unemployed - 3%

Race/Ethnicity*

- White - 61%
- Black/African American - 18%
- Other - 10%
- Asian - 7%
- Middle Eastern - 4%



Mental Health Condition

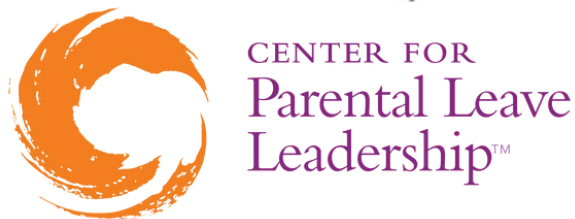
- Yes - 54%
- No - 25%
- Did Not Disclose - 21%

*Respondents could select all that apply.

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Many leading organizations, agencies and advocacy groups helped promote the dialogue and shared ideas and resources. These included, but are not limited to:



Connect with ePolicyWorks to learn more about policies, programs and upcoming dialogues.

