

# Workplace Mental Health: Application of a Population Health Approach of Proactive Screening to Identify Risk and Engage in Care

## Background

- Mental illness affects approximately 1 in 5 adults each year in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Though most mental health conditions are treatable, less than a third of people with a mental health condition receive treatment.<sup>2</sup>
- Traditional employee assistance programs are available but generally underused, as ≤5% of employees take advantage of them.<sup>3</sup> Thus, proactive approaches that aim for early detection and treatment are needed.
- Evidence suggests population-based screening can identify individuals who may benefit from mental health care.<sup>4</sup> However, this approach has not been well studied in the context of annual employer-sponsored health screenings, which offer a way to regularly assess mental health.
- **Objectives:** In this study, investigators evaluated whether an employer-sponsored mental health program could identify at-risk individuals and facilitate their connection to care resources.

## Methods

- A retrospective analysis was conducted of anonymized participants in a pilot-phase, voluntary, mental-health and well-being program (ie, the Balance program).
- The Balance program involved a mental health risk assessment, calculation of a risk score, and contact by a mental healthcare clinician.
  - The mental health risk assessment (implemented February-August 2019) was a web-based survey with 48 questions directed at identifying the risk level of perceived stress, traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, alcohol use, illicit substance use, sleep disturbance, financial stress, and social support.
  - A risk score was calculated using an algorithm.
  - Survey respondents who consented were connected to a mental healthcare clinician who provided support, created a care plan, and facilitated connection with care resources.
- Baseline demographics and frequency of social determinants of health during 6 months of follow-up were compared among those with risk who did and did not meet with the Balance mental health clinician.

## Results

- Of 3,003 employees offered participation in the Balance program, 344 (11.4%; median age: 44 years; 80% female) completed the online mental health assessment.
- Among the 344 survey respondents:
  - 99 (29%) had a score indicating no to low risk for mental health conditions
  - 245 (71%) had a score indicating moderate to high risk
    - 189 (77%) agreed to the offered outreach session
    - 66 (27%) met with a Balance mental health clinician
      - Among the 66 participants who met with a Balance mental health clinician, 59 (89%) were connected to additional care.
- Compared to individuals with moderate to high risk who did not complete a session (n=179), participants who met with a Balance mental health clinician
  - more frequently reported a financial crisis (68% vs 51%,  $P=0.020$ )
  - less frequently reported verbal abuse (9% vs 20%,  $P=0.035$ ) or difficulty meeting daily needs, such as food or shelter (12% vs 25%,  $P=0.019$ )

## Conclusions

- In this workplace setting, a proactive mental health risk assessment program helped identify individuals at risk for mental health conditions and connect those individuals to care resources.

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