



Three Ways to Support Your Employees' Mental Health During the Coronavirus Outbreak



The global COVID-19 (coronavirus) crisis is a source of stress, anxiety and other behavioral health challenges for many people—including, most likely, some of your employees. At Tufts Health Plan, we're committed to helping you support their wellbeing.

The reverberations of the coronavirus pandemic are being felt in every aspect of our lives right now, from work to socializing to finances to health. Working from home and practicing “social distancing” can lead to feelings of loneliness and boredom, and employees with children at home are feeling the stress of juggling work and childcare or homeschooling. Many people are feeling anxious or fearful about the uncertainties that lie ahead and worry about the health of their loved ones. For people with behavioral health issues like depression, anxiety or substance use disorders, the coronavirus pandemic may be triggering or worsening their symptoms.

Some people may experience actual psychological trauma as a result of this crisis, which could have lasting repercussions on their mental and physical health.

Whether your employees are working from home or, in the case of essential services professions, still coming to work, there are things that you can do to proactively support their mental health. First and foremost, acknowledge the emotional and psychological strain of the current situation, and let employees know that they're not alone. Leading with empathy and compassion and reminding employees that there are resources available to support their mental health is helpful in and of itself. Moreover, it helps break down the stigma and silence surrounding mental health issues, making it more likely that people will seek out the support they need.

1

Making it easy to get help from behavioral health professionals

During times of crisis like the one we're in now, talking with a counselor, therapist or other behavioral health professional can be extremely valuable, even for members without any underlying mental health issues. Professionals can validate members' feelings, offer concrete strategies for coping and direct them to other resources if needed. In-office visits are, of course, not currently an option. But as always, Tufts Health Plan members can schedule a video appointment or phone call seven days a week for support with anxiety, depression and other behavioral health issues, using our telehealth solution powered by Teladoc^{®1}. Members who

¹ Teladoc is available to our Commercial members (not including Direct), allowing them to access U.S.-based, board-certified providers for behavioral health and general medical needs and diagnoses from anywhere in the world and for \$0 copay for plans issued or renewed in 2020. Members can contact a Teladoc doctor 24/7 if they're concerned about their symptoms or have questions about the Coronavirus. Until further notice, there will be no member cost for this service for our members, including members of self-funded groups that have elected this benefit and have not opted-out of cost sharing modifications.

have behavioral health professionals they regularly see in person should check in with their providers, as many are offering telehealth or phone appointments. The Tufts Health Plan Behavioral Health team can provide information and education on telehealth services available and provide support, navigation and assistance with locating other network providers who can provide access to remote telehealth services.

2 Providing support for substance use challenges and disorders

One of the biggest behavioral health risks of the current situation is that people will increase their use of alcohol or drugs in response to feelings of stress, isolation or boredom. For members in recovery, relapse is a real danger. Community support is an important part of recovery, and members used to attending group meetings don't have that option right now. Fortunately, some organizations are now offering virtual recovery groups. The Behavioral Health phone line at Tufts Health Plan is also available to help members get support, connect with resources and find telehealth providers for substance use issues. Members can call 800-208-9565 Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday between 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., and Thursday between 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.



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Promoting self-care

If nothing else, this is a time to encourage your employees to take time each day for self-care. Simple practices like journaling, exercise, yoga and meditation can help employees stay centered, positive and productive. Meditation, in particular, has been shown to alleviate stress and improve mood. Tufts Health Plan is proud to offer commercial plan members² access to several mindfulness resources perfect for this time of social distancing, including discounted online yoga and meditation classes and a free 10-part audio series, “Meditation 101.”

It's unclear how long the changes brought on by the COVID-19 outbreak will persist, but one thing is clear: We're all in it together. Tufts Health Plan is here for you, ready to support your employees' mental and emotional wellbeing in whatever way we can. Contact us today or visit our COVID-19 Resource Center for more information.

tuftshealthplan.com/covid-19/employer

² Excluding Tufts Health Direct members