

Rethinking your mental health benefits strategy?

6 strategies to unlock utilization



Mental health has become a major directive for organizations everywhere.

In recent years, HR leaders moved quickly to put support systems in place—from adding point solutions to expanding traditional EAPs—but few had the luxury of time to design them for long-term success. Now, many are assessing whether these solutions have truly paid off.

Despite meaningful progress, data shows employees continue to struggle. [Half report](#) feeling burned out in the past year due to their job, and 37% say they've felt so overwhelmed that it made it hard for them to complete work. Meanwhile, employer health insurance costs are projected to rise by [9.5% in 2026](#)—the fastest increase since 2011—while traditional EAP programs still experience low utilization rates (2-5%) despite their widespread availability.

This leaves many HR leaders confronting similar dilemmas:

- **High investment, low engagement.** Despite expanded benefits, utilization remains flat.
- **Increased offerings, inconsistent outcomes.** More programs don't always translate to healthier, more engaged teams.
- **Disconnected benefits, disengaged employees.** Siloed benefits lead to missed care opportunities.
- **Complex access, limited awareness.** Employees struggle to find or navigate to the right care.
- **Initial momentum, dwindling participation.** Barriers to continuous care stop short of employees' needs.

To maximize results, HR leaders must step back and rethink their approach. "Organizations continue to look for ways to get people access to the care they need for a greater sense of well-being within the workplace," explains Matt Sopcich, the SVP of Mental Health Services at Teladoc Health. "Now's the moment to reexplore the new mental health benefits out there, like a new class of EAPs, that can better meet employees where they're at and drive engagement."

The good news is that doing so may be easier and more cost-effective than leaders think. This guide outlines the six actionable strategies employers can implement to overcome low utilization and deliver measurable outcomes for their employee population.



6 strategies to unlock utilization at your organization

- 1 Simplify access to care
- 2 Provide timely intervention
- 3 Deliver full-spectrum support
- 4 Keep care continuous
- 5 Enable inclusive connections
- 6 Track meaningful outcomes



1 Simplify access to care

A benefit is only valuable if it's within reach. Yet one study found that [53%](#) of employees didn't use an EAP due to access challenges. According to Nicole Stec, the VP of Wellbeing & Engagement at Lockton, access is the top barrier to a successful mental health program. She explains how traditional EAPs often required calling a 1-800 number, receiving a list of providers, and then calling each to find an appointment, a process that could take weeks due to low provider availability. If employees needed additional support, they often had to start over, increasing the risk of disengagement.



THE NEW DIRECTIVE:

To increase utilization, remove friction.

Stec has seen a growing effort to consolidate and streamline mental health solutions to solve access issues. By having a single ecosystem where employees receive clear guidance and continuous support, employers can help simplify access and increase utilization.

"Services could be extensive, but they don't have to be complicated for employees to access," adds Sopcich. He explains how those services can work together in an intuitive, unified way. With Wellbound, Teladoc Health's EAP program, members use a single access point to connect with a licensed clinician who helps them find an in-network provider accepting new patients and is aligned to their needs. While members who prefer autonomy can easily self-schedule appointments through the app.

Take those navigating chronic conditions, for example. These employees are more likely to need mental health support, explains Sopcich. Instead of navigating separate systems or repeating their story to numerous providers, Teladoc Health connects care across the benefits ecosystem. "When everything works in unison, employees are more likely to get care, and they feel more cared for by their employer," adds Stec.

2 Provide timely intervention

The speed of response across mental health solutions varies—and delays can mean the difference between early intervention and hitting a crisis. Yet about [one in five workers](#) say it's hard to find mental health care through their employer that is affordable, in-network, and **available in a timely manner**. Long wait times can derail utilization, leading employees to give up, skip appointments, or, [in some cases](#), see their well-being worsen while waiting for care.



THE NEW DIRECTIVE:

To increase utilization, fast-track connection.

Whether after a traumatic event or during everyday stress, it's critical to help employees access care in the moment they have the courage and conviction to seek it. "For employees, it's already hard enough to make the call, especially when it comes to mental health," explains Stec. "Being able to get care within a timely manner is important in sustaining engagement and addressing core issues." When access is fast, employees are far more likely to follow through, stay engaged, and see progress, driving higher overall utilization.

Timeliness is where virtual care makes the difference. "Virtual care allows employees to get connected faster—sometimes saving individuals weeks of waiting," says Sopcich. At Teladoc Health, for example, users are matched with a therapist in as little as 48 hours or immediately speak with a Care Advocate—a licensed clinician who offers in-the-moment support and guides individuals to appropriate services. The average response time is just nine seconds, and same-day support is available when emergencies arise.

3 Deliver full-spectrum support

Many employees seek mental health care when challenges feel most acute, but lasting progress depends on supporting the whole person—and doing so proactively. Therapy and psychiatry are a start, but they can't address every aspect of well-being. To Stec, an influx of employers are realizing clinical-only approaches, without subclinical support, fall short of sustaining engagement and driving better outcomes.

THE NEW DIRECTIVE:

To increase utilization, go beyond intervention.

Organizations are increasingly recognizing that employee mental health is multifaceted—shaped by work, personal life, and an individual's physical health and overall wellness. Deploying a more well-rounded solution can help employees tackle daily stressors and subclinical conditions early—preventing progression to more severe symptoms that can harm both health and productivity. "While therapy was the go-to service historically, we're finding people get value in different modalities," explains Sopcich.

That value can take many forms:

- ✓ A 24/7 crisis line can provide immediate help when needed most.
- ✓ Care for elders and children can help ease caregiving pressure.
- ✓ Coaching can help individuals navigate specific stressors or transitions.
- ✓ Financial consulting can help alleviate money-related anxiety.
- ✓ Connections to primary care can help manage chronic conditions or prevent future health issues.
- ✓ Self-guided tools can teach coping techniques employees can apply anytime.

Previously limited to a small subset of needs, the new class of EAPs are stretching, explains Sopcich, by orchestrating an ecosystem of services that empower individuals to be proactive about their health. He describes how Teladoc Health members gain access to a range of work-life resources and health services—on top of comprehensive mental health support.



4 Keep care continuous

Employees' mental health needs differ greatly. While some benefit from short-term support, others have more complex needs that can't be resolved in just a few sessions. Yet, traditional EAPs have long capped care at only a handful of visits, forcing individuals to restart their journey through their health plan. That disruption in care interrupts progress, creating a poor experience and poor outcomes.

THE NEW DIRECTIVE:

To increase utilization, keep the connection.

Enable continuity of care by allowing employees to continue seeing their therapist or provider beyond what's covered under a traditional EAP. According to Sopcich, this gives people the best chance to reach their goals without worrying about how many sessions they have left. When employees know that care won't be cut short, they're more likely to start and stay engaged with care.

At Lockton, Stec and her team encourage employers to offer at least six sessions, ideally closer to eight. "It's really important to ensure employees get the appropriate amount of care they need to resolve their issues," says Stec. "And if it's not resolved in that time, integrating the EAP with the health plan to continue behavioral health care becomes critical."

5 Enable inclusive connections

Even if employees can connect to a provider quickly, that doesn't mean they'll connect *with* them. In fact, [one in three](#) employees who've attended therapy say they feel misunderstood by their therapist. When employees don't feel comfortable, they're less likely to continue treatment, often stopping after one session or hesitating to try again.

THE NEW DIRECTIVE:

To increase utilization, offer personalization.

Networks with diverse providers and personalized matching help employees find someone who reflects their background and experiences—building trust and improving outcomes from the start. “We all come from different backgrounds, cultures, and identities. It's important that all of that is understood when individuals receive mental health support,” explains Russell DuBois, PhD, Vice President, Clinical Quality, Operations & Innovations at BetterHelp.

Employees may seek connection based on cultural or personal affinities such as:

- Birth gender
- Self-identified gender
- BIPOC
- LGBTQ+
- Multilingual
- Political orientation
- Religion
- Life stage

To Stec, matching is a key component to better, timelier outcomes. “When there's a good connection, members aren't wasting time with clinicians who don't understand their lived experience,” she says. “That connection saves time, cost, and leads to better health outcomes.”

DuBois agrees: outcomes depend on the quality of care *and* the personal fit between individual and provider. He explains how, through Teladoc Health's connection with BetterHelp, members can access a broad and diverse network to find the best match based on their background, interests, and life experiences. Ninety-seven percent of employees continue with the same provider after their first session.

Women, LGBTQ+, and young employees are often more likely than their counterparts to report that it is hard to access mental health care through their employer.

6 Track meaningful outcomes

Employers are increasingly investing in wellness, with [41%](#) of employers stating that their investment in wellbeing will increase over the next two to three years. Yet participation alone doesn't equate to success. Many organizations still rely on engagement metrics (like logins or session counts) to gauge effectiveness, but participation isn't the same as progress.

THE NEW DIRECTIVE:

To increase utilization, track outcomes from participation.

"It's important to know not only if employees use benefits, but what impact they have on employee populations," says DuBois. Stec agrees, noting that [nearly half of employers](#) use outcomes-based data to measure the success of their wellbeing programs, and nearly one-third track it for recruitment and retention purposes.

By understanding outcomes, employers can drive meaningful utilization by tailoring solutions to real needs and optimizing offerings based on what works. Better yet, partner with vendors who can help you prove it. At Teladoc Health, for example, clinicians measure progress using validated measurement tools, like [PHQ-9 and GAD-7](#) assessments, throughout treatment.

This data helps quantify clinical improvement, program impact, and ROI. Consider tracking outcomes like:

Workplace outcomes

- Fewer disability claims
- Higher engagement & satisfaction
- Higher productivity
- Lower turnover
- Reduced absenteeism
- Reduced presenteeism

Clinical outcomes

- Better sleep quality
- Fewer crisis interventions
- Higher treatment completion rates
- Improved medication adherence
- Lower stress levels
- Reduced PHQ-9 / GAD-7 score





Bonus: Immerse mental health in your culture

Even the best-designed mental health benefits can go underutilized if workplaces don't normalize their use. Today, [one in four employees](#) is dissatisfied with their workplace culture, and improving mental health adoption could change that.

Most employees agree that mental health plays a defining role in a positive culture: [92%](#) say mental health coverage is essential, and [83%](#) say well-being and mental health training is, or would be, important.

To immerse mental health into your organization, consider these levers:

- ✓ Empower managers with education.
- ✓ Let leaders go first to model participation.
- ✓ Share personal stories to reduce stigma.
- ✓ Designate advocates to make connections.
- ✓ Weave well-being into everyday rituals.

What your mental health benefits *could* look like

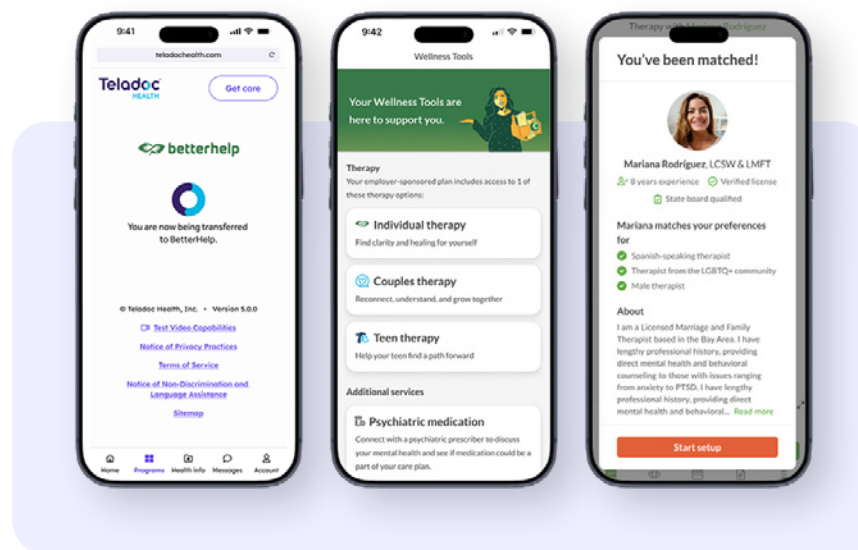
High enrollment and high satisfaction—without a higher price.

“Employers can get a much greater level of outcomes, satisfaction from their employee base, and return on investment without having to pay what they might think,” says Sopcich. Wellbound, a new type of EAP from Teladoc Health, is designed to boost utilization, improve care continuity, and provide seamless, personalized support.

With Wellbound, employees have access to a one-stop shop for mind, body, and work-life well-being. It's a holistic approach uniquely designed to drive measurable results:

- Enrollment rates are **2-3x higher** than traditional EAPs¹
- **More than 70%** of members report a reduction in mental health symptoms within just 12 weeks of care²
- Average satisfaction rating of **4.9 out of 5**³

And through Teladoc Health's connection with BetterHelp, Wellbound connects employees to a diverse, extensive network of licensed providers, making it easier than ever to match employees with the right provider.



1 BetterHelp Business BoB user data of all covered lives, Jan. 2023-May 2025.

2 BetterHelp clinical quality metrics are based on client data in 2024. BetterHelp currently assigns clients PHQ9 and/or GAD7 assessments upon starting therapy and every 45 days thereafter. Our inclusion criteria for measurement of clinical outcomes requires clients to complete a minimum of two assessments; not every client will complete two assessments. A client is considered 'in treatment' once they complete a live session or exchange messages with their therapist (whichever is earlier). We survey the clients two weeks after they are in treatment and every four weeks thereafter.

3 Based on 1.7M+ user ratings; BetterHelp Platform Quality & Outcomes Report. Published 2024.



Make your move, boost the mood

Data shows [nearly one in five employers](#) cite a lack of bandwidth or resources as their greatest challenge to creating, deploying, or maintaining a comprehensive wellbeing strategy. You don't have to tackle it alone. With Teladoc Health, employees aren't the only ones who get personalized guidance—you do, too. Our experts partner with HR leaders to design mental health strategies that truly pay off.

Discover how Teladoc Health can help you unlock utilization and foster a healthier, happier workforce. [Schedule your demo today.](#)

LEARN MORE: TeladocHealth.com | engage@teladochealth.com

About Teladoc Health: Teladoc Health (NYSE: TDOC) is the global leader in virtual care. The company is delivering and orchestrating care across patients, care providers, platforms, and partners—transforming virtual care into a catalyst for how better health happens. Through its relationships with health plans, employers and health systems, Teladoc Health fuels clinical excellence and applies the power of technology to help people live their healthiest lives.

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