



WCWI 

STATEWIDE SURVEY:  
SUPPORT FOR THE MENTAL HEALTH OF  
WISCONSIN'S WORKFORCE

**Well Practice**

WCWI Member Resource  
May 2020

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## INTRODUCTION: MENTAL HEALTH IS AN EMPLOYER PRIORITY

A work culture that supports mental health is on the minds of leaders, managers, human resources professionals, and wellness practitioners now more than ever amid the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in recent years, we've come to learn several statistics from the national landscape that describe mental health with paramount importance at all times, such as:

- **1 IN 5 ADULTS WILL EXPERIENCE A DIAGNOSABLE MENTAL ILLNESS IN ANY GIVEN YEAR.** [CENTER FOR WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH]
- **DEPRESSION IS THE #1 CAUSE OF DISABILITY IN THE U.S. YET MOST EMPLOYERS LACK A STRATEGY TO EFFECTIVELY ADDRESS IT.** [AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION]
- **UNMANAGED MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS COST THE U.S. ECONOMY \$200 BILLION IN LOST EARNINGS EACH YEAR THROUGH DECREASED WORK PERFORMANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY.** [NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS]
- **PEOPLE WHO REPORTED THAT IT WAS UNSAFE TO DISCUSS THEIR MENTAL HEALTH AND WORKPLACE STRESS IN THEIR COMPANIES HAD THE POOREST OUTCOMES FOR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND WELLBEING.** [2019 MIND THE WORKPLACE REPORT]
- **AND ALL TOO OFTEN, PEOPLE AVOID OR DELAY REACHING OUT FOR HELP. ONLY 1 IN 3 PEOPLE WHO NEED HELP GET IT.** [CENTER FOR WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH, WORKING WELL TOOLKIT]

And statistics aside, there is the foundational recognition that *all people have mental health* and like physical health, it can be impacted or changed for the better or worse. People take their mental health everywhere, including the workplace. Some experiences and environments may be mental health-promoting, while others may unfortunately detract from or negatively impact mental health. And there is an undeniable stigma with providing mentally healthy work environments with true emphasis on care, compassion, open communication, and psychological safety. Employers must acknowledge that mental health is a foundational component of overall wellbeing, a priority in the workplace, and that they have a responsibility to be proactive in developing multifaceted strategies to support their people.

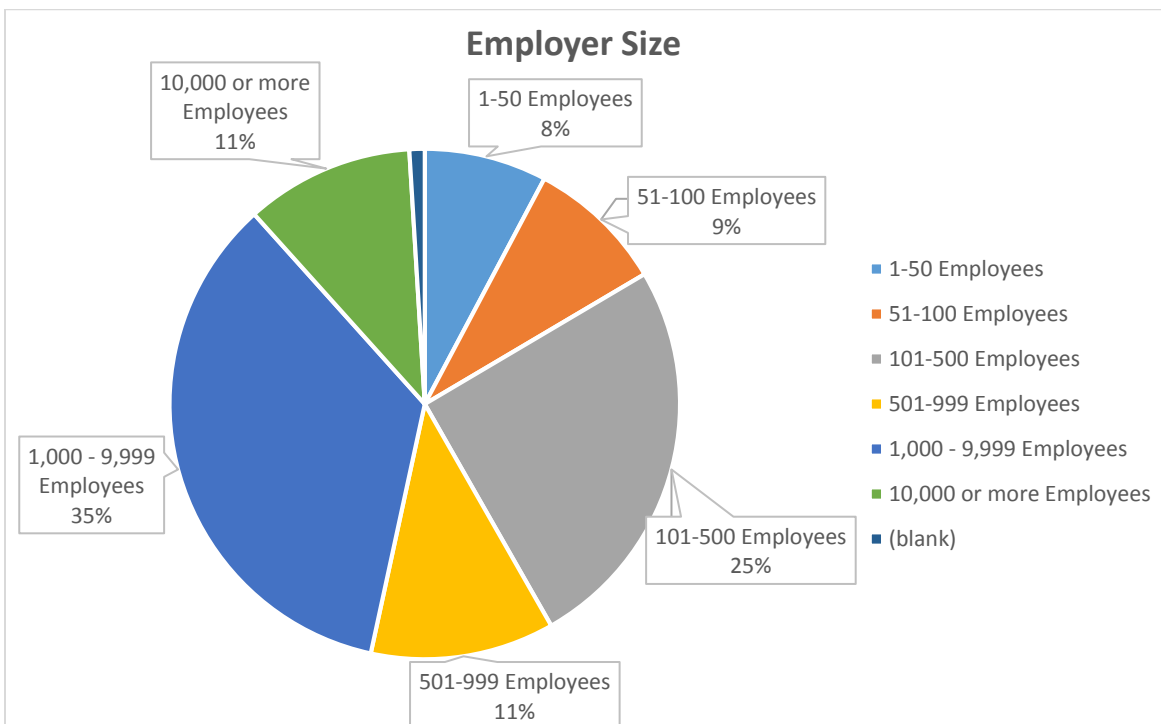
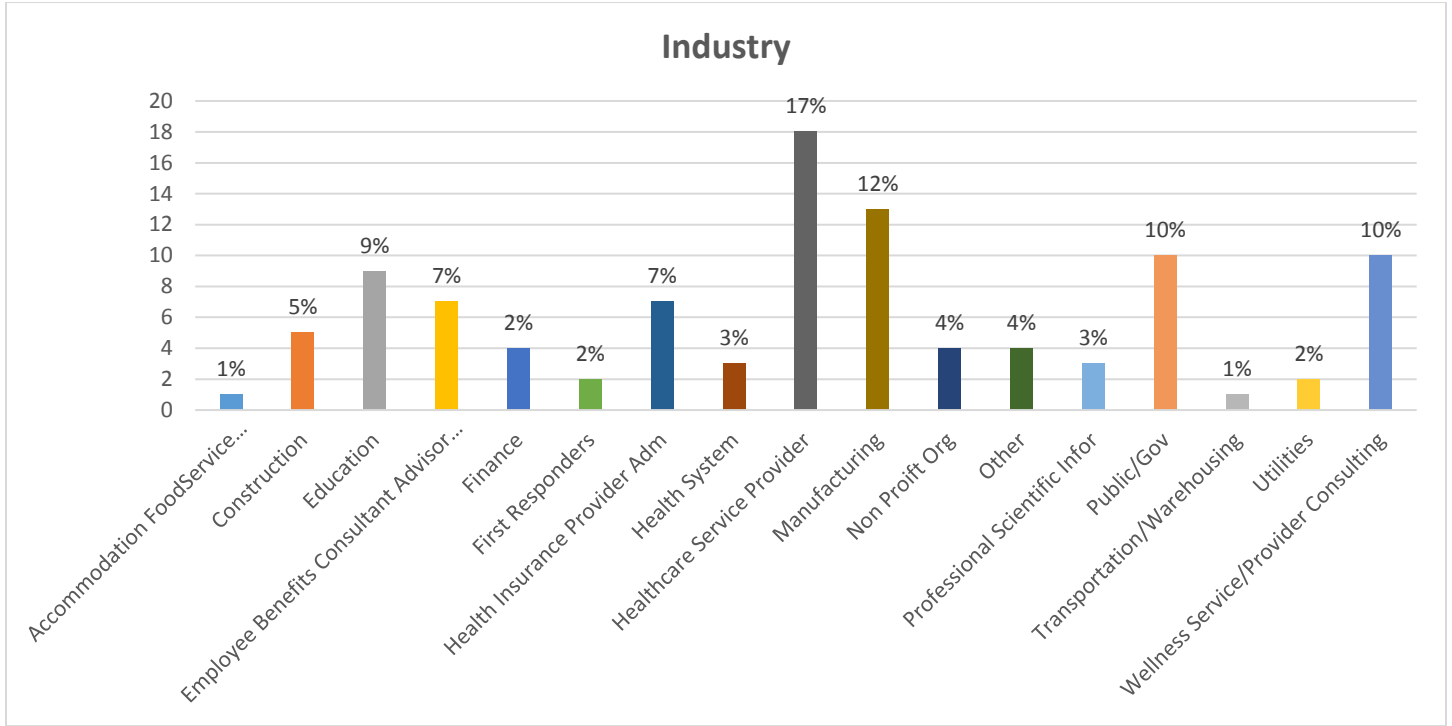
In April-May 2020, the Wellness Council of Wisconsin (WCWI) launched a statewide survey to ask Wisconsin employers what they are currently doing to support their employees' mental health, and to better understand what their challenges and needs are to further develop their strategies. With a response rate representing 27% of our member employers, we are energized by the engagement and interest in this important topic and happy to share the results. As WCWI works toward shifting the narrative of employee wellbeing, we are hopeful this opens a continuous and evolving dialogue highlighting actionable ideas for supporting the mental health of Wisconsin's workforce.



## SURVEY SUMMARY: SUPPORT FOR THE MENTAL HEALTH OF WISCONSIN'S WORKFORCE

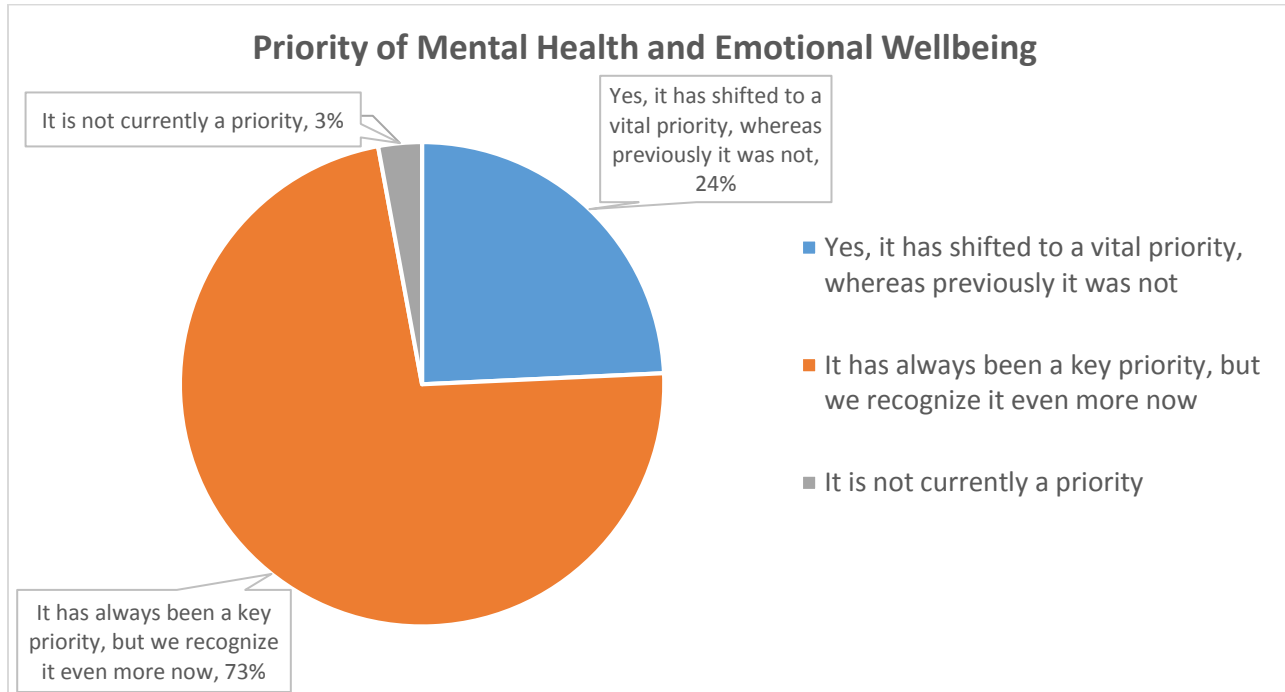
### SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The survey respondents represent the insight, experiences, and needs across 27% of WCWI's member employers from a variety of industries and employer sizes. The top industries represented include: Healthcare Service Provider, Manufacturing, Public Entity/Government, Wellness Service Provider/Consultant, and Education. And 36% represent employers with 101-999 employees, and 35% have 1,000-9,999 employees.

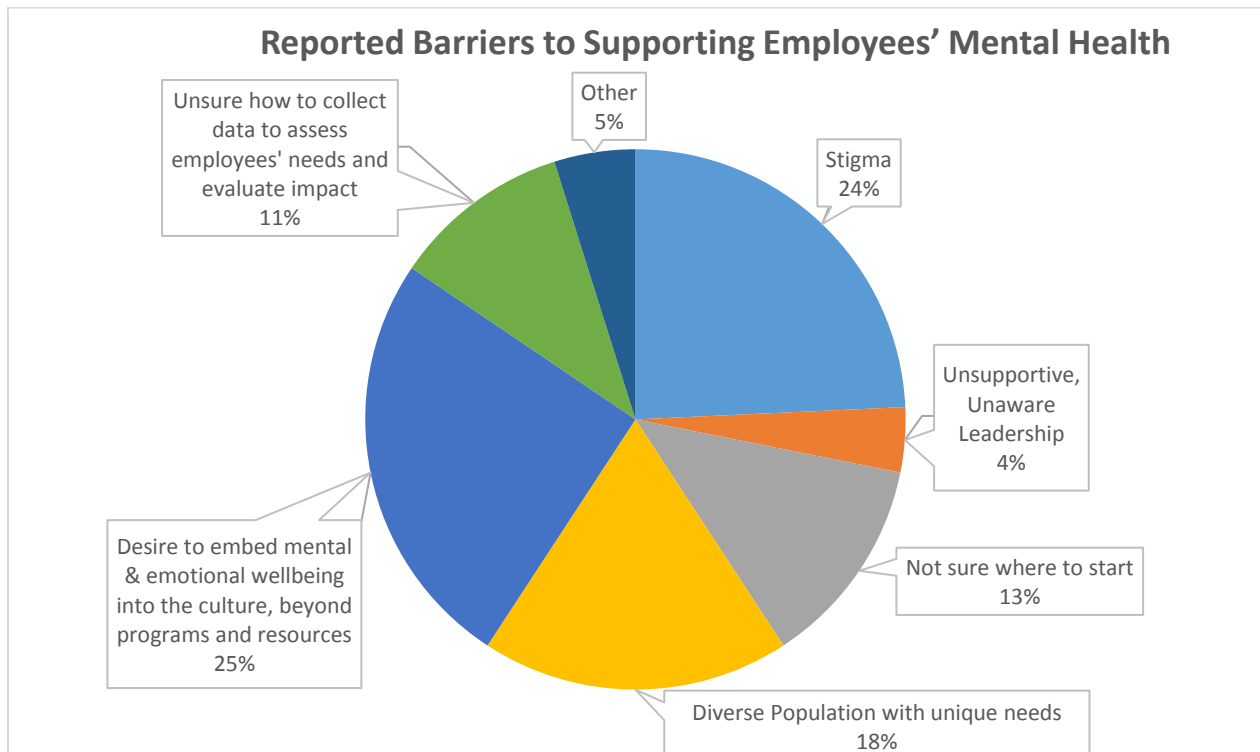


## SUMMARY OF IMPORTANCE & LARGEST BARRIER

During the unprecedented and tumultuous time of the COVID-19 pandemic, we asked Wisconsin employers how they are prioritizing the mental health and emotional wellbeing of their employees. Optimistically, 73% responded that it has always been a priority but they recognize it even more now, and 24% shared that it has recently shifted to a vital priority whereas previously it was not.



25% of respondents shared that their largest barrier as they work toward supporting mental health, is the desire to embed mental and emotional wellbeing into the culture of their organization beyond what they provide through programs and resources. This barrier was closely followed by the acknowledgement of stigma being the largest challenge for 24% of those who responded.



## HOW WISCONSIN EMPLOYERS CURRENTLY SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH

In response to how Wisconsin employers are currently supporting mental health, all who responded to this question shared that they provide support through at least one or more of the following categories: Health Insurance and Benefits, Supportive Cultural Experiences, Policies and Practices, and Leadership Commitment.

HOW ARE WISCONSIN ORGANIZATIONS CURRENTLY SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE?		
TYPE OF SUPPORT	YES, CURRENTLY SUPPORT	NO, DO NOT SUPPORT
<b>HEALTH INSURANCE AND BENEFITS</b> (EX: EAP, PAID TIME OFF, DISABILITY BENEFITS, OTHER)	100%	-
<b>SUPPORTIVE CULTURAL EXPERIENCES</b> (EX: FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS, MANAGEMENT TRAINING, PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS, COACHING, OTHER)	87%	13%
<b>POLICIES AND PRACTICES</b> (EX: SAFE, ETHICAL, AND WELL-COMMUNICATED PROTOCOLS FOR HR, MANAGERS/SUPERVISORS, AND CO-WORKERS)	95%	5%
<b>LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT</b> (EX: ALL LEADERS ARE ALIGNED IN DEMONSTRATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE AND INCLUSIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT)	90%	10%

### ADDITIONAL MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT DESCRIBED:

- *Flexible scheduling and flexible work environment*
- *Employees are certified to offer QPR (Question Persuade Respond) suicide prevention training, which is offered several times a year for employees*
- *Mobile app resources – specific apps mentioned:*
  - [Healthy Minds @ Work Program](#)
  - [Sanvello App](#)
  - [TalkSpace](#)
  - [Wise@Work](#)
- *Active encouragement to take time off and use sick time/PTO*
- *Leadership training on emotional intelligence and trauma informed workplaces*
- *Equity & Inclusion and Respectful Workplace Policies*
- *Created a Social Emotional Support Line to support the health care system employees with emotional health needs and access to behavioral health resources*
- *Peer-Led Support sessions and the Supporting Our Peers (SOS) network of supporters, equipped with training*
- *Diversity training and ongoing recognition of the importance of respectful interactions*
- *The leadership team has made themselves available for one-on-ones*
- *Provide Mental Health First Aid training*
- *Formalized the inclusion of Mental Health Parity and Access as a strategic priority*
- *Launched an #IWillListen Mental Health walk to help break the stigma around mental health*
- *Planning to launch a mental health Employee Resource Group*

## RANKING OF FOCUS AREAS TO FURTHER DEVELOP STRATEGIES

Employers ranked the focus areas that would be most useful to learn more about as they further develop effective strategies for mental health. They ranked the following six areas of focus on the scale of 1 = least important and 6 = most important: Collect and Assess Meaningful Data, Culture-focused Strategies, Manager and Training Support, Policies and Practices to Ensure Psychological Safety, Mental Health Stigma-crushing Strategies, and Communication Strategies.

Average Ranking of Importance Across the Focus Areas:



THE FOCUS AREAS RANKED MOST IMPORTANT COMPARED BY INDUSTRY	
INDUSTRY	MOST IMPORTANT
HEALTHCARE SERVICE PROVIDER	Policies and Practices to Support Psychological Safety
MANUFACTURING	Communication Strategies to Support and Reduce Stigma
PUBLIC ENTITY/GOVERNMENT	Communication Strategies to Support and Reduce Stigma
WELLNESS SERVICE PROVIDER/CONSULTANT	Culture-focused Strategies
EDUCATION	Culture-focused Strategies

## Q&A FROM WISCONSIN EMPLOYERS AND WCWI'S EXPERT CONTRIBUTOR, METTIE SPIESS

Wisconsin practitioners submitted specific questions they have about designing a work culture and environment that optimally supports mental health. Over 30 submitted questions uncovered four themes that depict what employers are most interested in and where they are seeking actionable recommendations.

Understandably, in the midst of these unprecedented times and the continuously evolving and unsettling circumstances of COVID-19, the workplace challenges resulting from the pandemic was one of the key mental health themes recognized in the submitted questions. The mental health concerns that have elevated during this time have been validated at a national level through screening data that Mental Health America (MHA) has been monitoring daily. According to MHA's data, the US has experienced a 19 percent increase in screening for clinical anxiety in the first weeks of February and a 12 percent increase in the first two weeks of March.

Additional questions submitted through the survey aligned with the themes of: creating lasting positive impact in the culture, how to encourage and protect psychological safety, and how to boost utilization of resources and crush stigma. WCWI partnered with Mettie Spiess, CEO and Founder of A World Without Suicide and Certified Psychological Health & Safety Advisor to respond directly to these WCWI member questions and share actionable strategies.

### COVID-19 RELATED WORKPLACE CHALLENGES

### WORKPLACE CULTURE & LASTING POSITIVE IMPACT

### PROTECTING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

### BOOSTING UTILIZATION OF RESOURCES & CRUSHING STIGMA

#### NEXT STEPS

Listen to the full recorded webinar with Mettie Spiess, CWP, CPHS for her recommended strategies across these themes:

[WCWI ARCHIVED MEMBER WEBINAR](#)

Your WCWI team is here for you and will keep you connected to ideas and strategic support:

- Talk with a WCWI team member for a [one-on-one consult](#) to brainstorm or problem-solve unique ways to support your employees' wellbeing.
- Join our monthly [Member Resource Groups](#) to connect and share ideas with your statewide WCWI community.
- Explore our [Expert Contributor](#) page for additional resources from Mettie Spiess (more coming soon!).
- Engage in WCWI's [Learning Agenda](#) to grow professionally, enhance your organization's wellbeing strategies, and connect with your WCWI community for shared learning.