



**Holistic health:**  
The intersection of  
employee mental, physical  
and financial wellbeing.

 **TELUS**® Health



When it comes to driving business value, there are many ways for companies to realize quick wins — whether it's implementing an innovative productivity tool or launching a viral marketing campaign. But for sustainable, continuous success, there's nothing more effective than ensuring employee health.

There are numerous reasons for this. [As reported by the World Economic Forum](#), healthy people tend to have healthy work habits; they show more initiative, take more responsibility and engage in more successful collaborations. They're also more likely to positively influence colleagues, helping seed the growth of a healthy workplace culture by inspiring others to improve their own wellbeing.

So it's no surprise that organizations can benefit immensely when they support and promote holistic health at work. After all, there's a direct connection between productivity and physical health, since [employees who are physically active](#) require less sick leave and have lower healthcare costs.

But holistic health acknowledges that there are numerous dimensions to wellbeing — including mental, physical and financial health. For example, employees who feel financially secure [demonstrate greater levels of engagement](#), with 77 per cent enjoying their work. On average, companies also report [12 per cent higher productivity](#) from happy employees.

Furthermore, [employees who feel satisfied with their holistic health](#) have lower rates of absenteeism and have proven to be better problem-solvers, as well as more resilient in the face of change. Together, mental, physical and financial health comprise key elements to support employee wellbeing and empower them to be their best in both their personal and professional lives.

This ebook explores how these interconnected aspects of employee health affect performance for individuals and organizations alike and advises employers on how they can help support their teams by implementing end-to-end wellbeing programs.



## The 3 elements of employee health and how they intersect.

Society's understanding of health has evolved. It's now well-established that the relationships between an individual's body, mind and circumstances all contribute to wellbeing, and institutions such as the Canadian Mental Health Organization (CMHO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) emphasize that [mental health and physical health are fundamentally linked](#).

Additionally, the CMHO connects physical and mental health with social determinants of health, including financial health. It asserts that physiological, emotional and social factors all play a role in shaping a person's overall health outcomes.

### Physical health

The definition of physical health [pertains to factors such as fitness level](#) and how well the body's organs, senses and systems function. As noted by the Institute for Health and Productivity Studies at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School for Public Health (previously linked), employees who are physically inactive tend to need more sick leave, leading to significant healthcare costs for companies.

Oppositely, the institute also found that physically active employees require fewer healthcare expenditures — and those who exercise vigorously for at least 75 minutes per week take approximately 4.1 fewer sick days of work per year, on average. What's more, [the focus-enhancing and stress-reducing benefits of exercise](#) means they also tend to be more productive at work.

Researchers have identified mechanisms by which physical health and fitness directly improve this workplace performance and productivity. [As reported in Harvard Business Review](#), two studies consistently found that daily physical activity boosts an individual's protein synthesis and sleep quality, which creates a beneficial feedback loop for both the body and brain. It also prepares them to excel at work by increasing their energy, vigour and vitality. On a cognitive level, physical health and fitness enhances task focus, meaning employees can better process, retain and concentrate on information.



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Good mental health has a cascade of positive effects on wellbeing.

## Mental health

The definition of mental health relates to emotional and psychological wellbeing and it has multiple components. [As noted by the WHO](#), it's determined by a complex interplay of stresses and vulnerabilities at the individual, social and structural levels; and it not only has intrinsic and instrumental value, but should be viewed as a human right.

According to the WHO, self-actualization, coping with stress, learning and working effectively and the capacity to meaningfully contribute to society are all markers of mental health.

Good mental health has a cascade of positive effects on wellbeing, [as documented by the Governments of Canada](#). It's associated with better coping skills, self-esteem and confidence, which results in healthier relationships, stronger community connections and greater personal autonomy.

Conversely, poor mental health can cause a cascade of negative effects. It's well established that living with a mental illness [can increase a person's likelihood of developing other, co-occurring diseases](#). Conditions such as depression, for example, can throw off the body's hormonal balances and sleep cycles, impair the immune system, reduce energy levels and motivation and lead to unhealthy habits that promote short-term relief over long-term wellbeing.

Mental illness can also correlate with difficulty managing finances and this can kickstart a cycle where financial stress causes worse mental health. For instance, [the Government of Canada](#) reports that 48 per cent of Canadians say they've lost sleep because of financial worries and according to the [Columbia University Department of Psychiatry](#), a lack of adequate sleep has been shown to amplify negative emotional reactions to stress and reduce positive feelings – continuing the cycle.





Living with the stress of financial challenges may lower both physical and mental wellbeing.

## Financial health

The definition of financial health includes income and the ability to manage it, as well as the ability to navigate through financial challenges and progress towards goals. The Government of Canada has found that living with the stress of financial challenges may lower both physical and mental wellbeing and that for people in Canada in general, money worries are the top source of stress.



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The government's study also points out that financially stressed employees report poor overall health at twice the rate of those without financial stress. It found that employees who feel the stress of financial challenges are four times as likely to suffer from sleep problems, headaches and other illnesses. Furthermore, financial stress can contribute to the development of heart disease, high blood pressure, depression and anxiety.

**2x**

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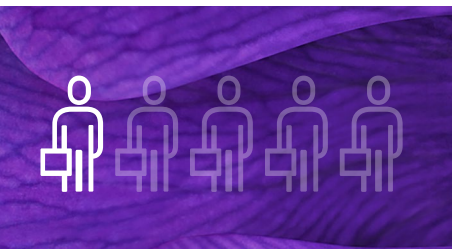
The TELUS Mental Health Index (MHI) likewise observes that those who aren't effectively managing their financial responsibility had the lowest mental health scores. Conversely, financial wellbeing positively correlates with mental wellbeing: those who reported managing their financial responsibilities successfully had the highest mental health score – more than six points higher than the national average and more than 30 points higher than those not managing their financial responsibilities well.



### Wellbeing at work

Looking at all this research, the many connections between mental, physical and financial health are plain to see. Consider how physical activity raises vigour and vitality while improving sleep quality, bringing cognitive and emotional benefits. And recall how mental health conditions can deplete physical resources, while also making it more difficult to manage finances.

This resulting financial worry then impacts employees' capacity to maintain healthy habits at work. [One survey identified](#) that one in five Canadian workers were aware that financial stress was distracting them from their work and those who were experiencing it spent nearly 30 minutes each day dealing with their situation. All of this detracts from an overall sense of wellbeing and a balanced lifestyle.



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So what can employers do to help improve employees' mental, physical and financial health? How can they strategically invest to make wellbeing resources available and easy to access for everyone?

# How wellbeing programs can reinvigorate workplace culture.

Organizations offer a varied spectrum of workplace wellbeing programs, but they need to take a holistic approach to addressing employee health in order to get the most value out of them. Those that do so can increase their opportunity to simultaneously elevate both wellbeing and business performance.

## Physical health programs can help boost workplace performance.

In order to be physically healthy, it's necessary for employees to be physically active and value nutrition — and employers have a critical role to play. Many people spend a huge portion of their waking hours at work and this time commitment can stand in the way of a physically active lifestyle. Therefore, workplaces need to make space for people to prioritize their physical health. If they do so, businesses are likely to see enhanced morale and workplace culture, higher levels of creativity and productivity and an improved brand image, [according to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety \(CCOHS\)](#).

There are many ways employers can support their teams in their physical health, fitness and activity through formal programs. Providing easy access to primary care clinicians and allied healthcare specialists, such as nutritionists, through virtual care can be helpful. So too can flexibility; to ensure employees have enough time in their day to exercise, allow them the freedom to determine their schedules, as well as when and how they access their benefits.

Finally, there are initiatives such as activity rewards and incentives, along with wellness challenges for individuals and teams, that can help boost employee wellbeing while supporting engagement. Employers can also offer reimbursements or discounts on fitness products, services, memberships or equipment.



Mental health programs may powerfully improve productivity.

Organizations with a comprehensive mental health strategy tend to demonstrate overall better organizational performance, according to the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA). In its report, it cites recent research showing that 60 per cent of senior leaders are confident or very confident that they've seen a strong ROI on their mental health programs.



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The CPA supports this with data from Deloitte Canada demonstrating that the median annual return for investing in workplace cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is CAN\$1.62 for every \$1 invested – and that increases to an ROI of \$2.18 for programs in place for three years or more. It's a tangible example of how mental health investments can deliver value for an organization beyond their benefits for employees.

There are, however, many direct benefits for employees. It's already been established that people are more productive and creative at work when they're better rested and less stressed. But for those with mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression and substance abuse, the CPA notes that treatments such as CBT are shown to be highly effective – and in many cases more impactful and less expensive than medication.




## Financial health programs give employees greater autonomy.

McKinsey corroborates that [economic security is an important indicator of wellbeing and productivity](#). It notes that financial struggles are likely to take a toll on employee mental health and affect their performance at work and that when individuals have a high income, they're five times more likely to report strong health compared to their low-income peers.



Employers may wonder if there are ways to support employee financial wellbeing other than increasing salaries. Many businesses might feel restricted in this regard, due to inflation's pressure on salary costs. But there are other ways for organizations to help their workforce [meet financial goals, boost retention rates and decrease stress at work](#).

Considering [more than three quarters of Canadians](#) would like to increase their savings, Benefits Canada suggests [sponsoring a group savings plan for employees](#) to help realize this goal. This can improve overall wellness and productivity, too: [according to 92 per cent of professional employee counsellors](#), employee health and workplace productivity are positively influenced when people feel financially stable and secure.



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## A holistic approach to wellbeing at work with TELUS Health.

Supporting employees across the three overlapping facets of mental, physical and financial health doesn't have to be needlessly complex or expensive for employers. With a partner like TELUS Health, organizations can evolve their benefits programs to help address these essential areas with a single provider.

**Physical health benefits** give people the freedom and flexibility to access healthcare and wellbeing support when and where it suits them. Solutions like [TELUS Health Virtual Care](#), for example, provide employees with 24/7 access to personalized primary healthcare support from clinicians, while [TELUS Health Wellbeing](#) empowers everyone to reach their wellness goals and maintain healthy habits.

**Mental health benefits** provide employees with personalized paths to [greater life satisfaction, creativity and resilience](#). And simply having workplace benefits programs can bring people peace of mind; as reported by the CPA, people in Canada with employer-provided benefits had notably higher rates of self-reported mental health. TELUS Health provides access to a range of convenient, digital-first tools to help improve employee mental health and wellbeing:

- [TELUS Total Mental Health](#) offers employees access to holistic mental health support, personalized care plans and ongoing guidance from dedicated care navigators.
- [TELUS Health EAP](#) provides mental health support and comprehensive work/life services for employees and their immediate families.
- [TELUS Health CBT](#) offers a short-term, self-serve therapeutic and digital approach to mental wellbeing that gives employees the chance to develop resilience at their own pace, with the guidance of a counsellor.

**Financial health benefits** can help employees bridge the gaps when it comes to meeting their financial goals through facilitated money management options. For example, [TELUS Health Retirement and Savings solutions](#) helps support employees in preserving and growing their long-term wealth. [As noted by HR Reporter](#), an RBC survey found that more than half of respondents who have employer-provided benefits rate their overall financial health as good or excellent, compared to only a third of those who lack such benefits.





## Holistic wellbeing powers an engaged, productive workforce.

The interdependence of employee mental, physical and financial health with organizational health is clear and supporting one facet of health can uplift another. For employers, providing access to holistic health benefits that help support end-to-end employee wellbeing can empower their workforce to thrive both at work and in every other aspect of their lives.

The social, financial and structural support of a multifaceted program can help not only empower and motivate employees to pursue their health goals — which can lead to positive health outcomes — it can also help overall business performance by improving productivity and boosting engagement.

Are you ready to explore how you can help support the health and wellbeing of your team with TELUS Health?

Contact us to learn more