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[PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS](#)

Views Helping employees manage chronic health conditions is good for business

By [Dr. Miles Varn](#) January 06, 2022, 9:00 a.m. EST 4 Min Read

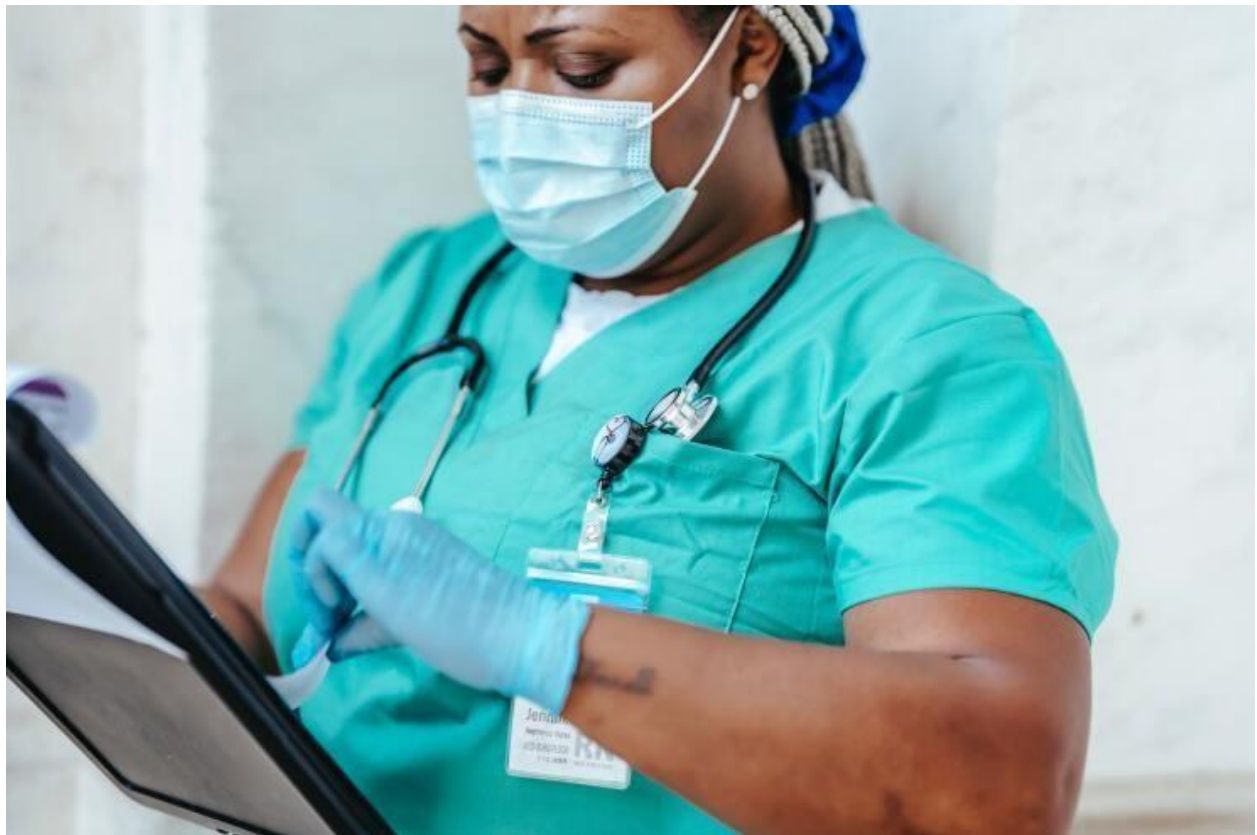


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While workplace wellness programs have the potential to improve the health and wellbeing of all employees, helping employees who are living with [preventable chronic conditions](#) like heart disease, diabetes, back pain, asthma, depression and high blood pressure can not only have a significant positive impact on the health of these employees, it can also lower costs for employers, reduce absenteeism and presenteeism, and increase productivity.

[Chronic conditions](#) are common and becoming more common, even among older millennial employees. One survey conducted by The Harris Poll for CNBC found that approximately 44% of the 33- to 40-year-olds surveyed reported having been diagnosed with at least one chronic condition. Looking at the broader population, six in 10 adults in the U.S. have been diagnosed with a chronic disease according to data gathered by the CDC.

When chronic conditions are not optimally managed, they can lead to more severe health issues like heart attack, stroke and organ failure. Worsening chronic conditions also are associated with increased hospitalizations and emergency room visits, both more expensive types of care.

These conditions can also increase costs. A [report](#) from the Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI) found that 20% of those with employer-sponsored health benefits accounted for 80% of employers' spending on health care. Meanwhile, 1% of employees or family members covered by an employer health plan accounted for 28% of employer health care costs. A significant number of the employees in these groups had chronic conditions. In addition to higher care costs for employees and the impact of higher utilization on health insurance costs, chronic conditions affect productivity, costing U.S. employers \$36.4 billion per year due to missed days of work.

What employers can do to help employees manage chronic health conditions

Gather data to tailor your program: The first step is to assess what percentage of covered employees, spouses, and dependents are currently living with one or more of these conditions and what conditions are most common. Aggregated insurance claim data can provide good insights for employees currently receiving care for a chronic condition. Workplace wellness screenings of blood pressure, blood sugar, weight, and other factors that increase the risk of developing a chronic health problem can augment that data and offer opportunities for early intervention to lower risk and ensure problems are identified and employees referred for follow-up care earlier.

Encourage employees to build a relationship with a primary care provider: An increasing number of employees rely on retail clinics and urgent care to meet their healthcare needs. Unfortunately, this means these employees do not have a consistent healthcare provider who is overseeing their care, tracking changes in key measures like blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar, and managing chronic health problems. This can lead to lack of care coordination, which negatively impacts both outcomes and costs. Employers can educate employees about the benefits of working with a primary care provider and encourage them to do so through incentives for choosing a provider and receiving regular routine preventive care services.

Provide additional support and education: Most [chronic conditions](#) are managed by employees' primary care physicians, but the time constraints of the average physician's visit may not allow employees to ask questions, receive in-depth education about their condition, and develop a patient-centered plan to manage their health issues. Adding another level of support and education can enhance employees' abilities to effectively manage their conditions. Options include case managers, patient advocates, and health coaches who regularly call or video chat with employees to check on their adherence to the treatment plan, answer questions, and educate employees about what they can do to better manage their condition. Employers can also offer evidence-based online education and resources about the most common conditions to enhance employees' understanding of the importance of carefully managing their condition and no-cost access to tools like blood sugar, nutrition, and activity tracking apps.

Incentivize better health: Get employees actively involved in improving their health and decreasing controllable risk factors. Offer incentives to encourage increased physical activity, healthy eating, stress management, smoking cessation, and other lifestyle choices. The cost of these incentives may be recouped in lower costs for care and health insurance and increased productivity.

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