



# 2021

## YEAR IN REVIEW

If 2020 was the year that brought employee mental health into the spotlight, 2021 will be defined by how organizations handled the ongoing mental health crisis. The pandemic has ushered in a new era for workplace mental health amid a heightened need for support from disruptions, uncertainty and loss. VITAL WorkLife continues to provide resources to support employees struggling with anxiety, depression, substance use, loneliness, concerns for their children's mental health and skyrocketing stress.

As your trusted partner, we saw consistent engagement with those resources in terms of number of cases as well as the use of all available sessions. This increased demand for counseling caused a national backlog in counselor availability and delays in setting appointments. Swift and ongoing changes to our virtual support relieved those delays for our client base.

In 2021, 39% of US adults experienced elevated depressive symptoms, compared to 28% in 2020 and 9% pre-pandemic<sup>1</sup>. A direct impact of this increase resulted in social workers, psychologists and counselors from every state saying they can't keep up with growing wait lists and the pain of having to turn clients away.

In a recent 2021 survey of therapists in all 50 states, 9 out of 10 say those seeking care is on the rise. This includes both new and former clients returning due to anxiety, financial stress, substance use, job concerns and more surfacing during the upheaval of the past 18 months<sup>2</sup>.

Our credentialed workforce of trusted and compassionate counselors were not immune to this challenge. We saw our typical wait times grow from 3-5 business days to 1-2 weeks due to shortages of counselors in rural communities and increases in the number of sessions used by each employee.

### To reduce wait times, we:

- Expanded our national counselor capacity by building out partnerships with counselors across the country providing video-based counseling.
- Promoted continued use of virtual counseling and helped to manage the expectations of employees who were new to video-based counseling as well as encourage leaders by describing the benefits and decreasing the stigma of "going virtual" for support.
- Targeted communications with our credentialed consultants in areas that had lower than average wait times to identify consultants who had openings. These targeted communications helped our team update our database and serve clients with up-to-date information.
- We brought the counselor to YOU: Well Being Check-In's were designed to provide support by having a licensed, behavioral health consultant available either virtually or on-site for one-on-one conversations.
  - These conversations provide in-depth support in a safe, structured, caring environment and help staff develop strategies to address areas where they may be struggling in their well being journey. Well Being Check-In's helped create a culture of psychological safety with a focus on maintaining productivity and effective coping while decreasing symptoms of burnout and compassion fatigue.

## What We're Hearing

The events of the pandemic have added unprecedented levels of stress and anxiety on employees and their families. While we have seen **GENERAL STRESS** cases decrease by about 20% year over year, we saw a significant increase of **149% IN STRESS/BURNOUT** cases.

**Family concerns** became the top issue for support with continued increases in anxiety. This is not surprising, due to the substantial amount of stress and anxiety the pandemic has exerted onto employees and their families.

**When asked "If the EAP service had not been available, what would you have done?"**

- 41% of respondents would have consulted with their primary care physician/mental health provider or a life coach.
- 19% of respondents would have done nothing.

**Result: Your EAP mitigates behavioral health claims against your insurance and helps keep premiums lower. Employees are able to address concerns and be happier and healthier, at work and at home.**

## Reasons Supervisors, Managers and Leaders Contact VITAL WorkLife

Consultations with supervisors, managers and leadership continued to make up just over 1% of all VITAL WorkLife cases. VITAL Worklife supported leaders by being a trusted sounding board, assisting in generating ideas and discussing best practices in dealing with difficult workplace situations such as:

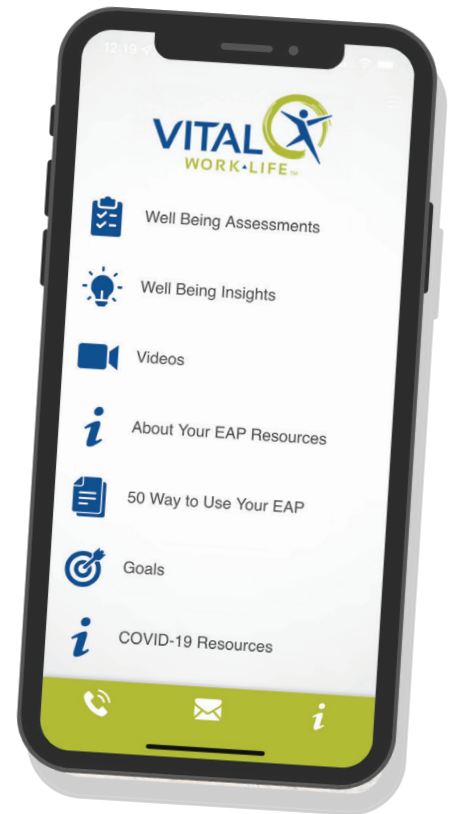
- "Polarizing" employee opinions (i.e. vaccines, masks, etc.)
- Increased employee mental health concerns, including isolation with remote working, burnout
- Support options for leaders struggling with COVID-19 stressors and anxiety
- Addressing workplace conflict
- Return to work planning
- Navigating reasonable suspicion and substance concerns in a remote environment
- Leading through constant change



# Best Practices for Encouraging Program Engagement

## Your 2022 Checklist for Success

- ✓ **Try out the resources yourself and speak with employees about your own experience using your EAP.** A positive testimonial from leaders can be a powerful tool to help employees feel comfortable talking about mental health and accessing their resources.
- ✓ **Speak about program resources** in regular meetings and encourage everyone to **download the VITAL WorkLife Mobile App together.**
- ✓ **Transform your intranet site** to include program highlights, case impact stories and links to VITAL WorkLife materials.
- ✓ **Provide a message of support and education about the program during on-boarding**—a critical time for new hires to be set up for success.
- ✓ **Home mailers (postcards) every (2) years** to ensure extended family members are aware that they can benefit from resources, too!
- ✓ **Meet with your VITAL WorkLife account team to discuss your 2021 communication plans.** Include representation from your communications department or person responsible for bringing your program to life to ensure success. Share engagement data with internal key stakeholders to discuss findings and drive new strategies/tactics.



## New Resources

- A newly revamped **Member Website**—optimized for your mobile device to improve resource availability anytime, anywhere. Log in with your organization's username and password.
- A new **searchable database of resources** for your employees to easily find content, resources and tools to support their well being needs.
- The new 2022 content calendar to share with your employees on your **Resource Site**.

## VITAL WorkLife Clients are saying...

"I am very grateful as a mom that I had VITAL WorkLife as a resource so I could **help my son through this AND get the emotional support that I needed as well.** Thank you to you and your team for all you do!"

VITAL WorkLife Client

"Unfortunately, I had a homeowner legal issue occur over the weekend. I called VITAL WorkLife's Legal Services and, within six hours, had a name and next day consultation appointment with a local attorney. **The responsiveness of VITAL WorkLife eliminated days of unnecessary stress.**"

Health System Medical Director

## With 40 years of experience focusing on employee well being,

VITAL WorkLife continues to evolve and innovate as your partner to ensure your employees and their family members have the support and resources they need to overcome even the most challenging times. Thank you for your trust and confidence in us.

1. <https://www.bu.edu/sph/news/articles/2021/depression-rates-tripled-and-symptoms-intensified-during-first-year-of-covid/>

2. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/12/16/well/mental-health-crisis-america-covid.html> integration in physicians and the general US working population between