



## OHIO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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**Guest Column:**

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### **Mental Health: The Workforce Challenge We Don't Talk About Enough**

We often talk about the issues facing Ohio's employers, including workforce shortages and issues with productivity, retention and the talent pipeline. But one of the biggest workforce challenges facing employers today is often left unacknowledged: mental health.

Mental health is not just a personal issue — it is a business issue. A strong economy depends on a strong workforce, and a strong workforce depends on people who are healthy, both physically and mentally.

Mental health challenges affect employees in every industry and at every level. They affect small business owners facing burnout, parents balancing work and caregiving responsibilities, and employees quietly navigating anxiety, depression or substance use disorder while trying to make it through the workday.

These struggles are not rare, and now more than ever, employers across Ohio are beginning to notice how mental health impacts attendance, productivity, retention and overall workplace culture.

While absenteeism is a commonly known effect of employee mental health crises, an even greater – and less known – threat is presenteeism, which is when employees are physically present but struggling to fully function because of untreated or unaddressed mental health challenges. For example, workers who battle depression face an average 35% reduction in productivity, and this presenteeism can cause up to 5.1 times greater losses than absenteeism.

As Ohio employers work to fill open jobs and compete for talent, employee well-being is becoming increasingly tied to business success. Companies that are already facing workforce

shortages and rising costs cannot afford to lose skilled workers due to a lack of workplace support.

That is why the Ohio Chamber Research Foundation recently launched its new [Employer Mental Health Toolkit](#), a free resource designed to help businesses better support the well-being of their employees. Developed with the support of knowledgeable partners across Ohio, the toolkit offers actionable guidance for businesses of all sizes.

The toolkit includes HR resources and policy templates, manager training materials, best practices from Ohio employers, and connections to mental health service providers. It is designed to help employers move beyond simply recognizing the importance of mental health and toward taking meaningful action to address it.

And employers who implement these tools can see real benefits for their businesses. Research conducted during the toolkit's formation revealed that well-designed mental health programs generate measurable returns for companies by reducing healthcare costs, boosting productivity and improving retention. According to Deloitte, every one dollar invested into employee mental health returns, on average, \$1.62 to more than \$5.

Supporting mental health in the workplace does not require companies to have robust HR departments or staggering budgets. Simple culture shifts, like working to reduce stigma and encourage open conversations, are often a great starting point.

Mental health education and implementation is one of our first steps toward building a stronger workforce. As Ohio continues to attract investment, grow jobs and compete in today's global economy, employee well-being will remain essential to long-term success.

This Mental Health Awareness Month, we encourage Ohioans across the state to continue these conversations and explore ways we can all better support one another. If you or someone you know is struggling, the 9-8-8 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a free, confidential 24/7 resource that can be used by call, text or chat to access mental health support and crisis services.

The Employer Mental Health Toolkit is available free of charge to all employers and individuals at [mentalhealth.ohiochamber.com](https://mentalhealth.ohiochamber.com).

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