

Moving towards prevention and wellness in mental health

OVERVIEW: OUR OPPORTUNITY

WHAT DROVE OUR FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH

In 2015, Alberta Blue Cross prioritized the wellness of our team members and customers, focusing on mental health and organizational well-being. We invested resources and time to support the creation of the healthiest workplace. We started by building awareness of and launching Balance®, our comprehensive and holistic digital wellness program, to provide our team members and customers with the resources and tools to support them on their wellness journey.

Through our review of Balance Health Risk Assessment (HRA) data, we recognized our team members were struggling with their mental health and their finances were having a huge impact on their stress levels.

WHAT WE DID

It is challenging to promote mental well-being when team members do not feel safe in their workplace culture. We recognize that psychological health and safety are essential for mental health and the prerequisite to the promotion of health. In 2016, we partnered with our Human Resources and Corporate Communications teams to achieve the Healthy Workplace Essentials program through Excellence Canada. By 2017, we successfully completed all 10 key milestones, demonstrating our commitment to creating a psychologically healthy and safe workplace culture.

Milestones

2016

In 2016, we partnered with our Human Resources and Corporate Communications teams to complete the Healthy Workplace Essentials program through Excellence Canada.

2017

By 2017, we successfully completed all 10 key milestones, demonstrating our commitment to creating a psychologically healthy and safe workplace culture.

2018

In 2018, mandatory mental health training for all team members was approved.

2019

In 2019, a decision was made to also increase psychological benefits.

2021

By the second quarter of 2021, 1,019 team members (89 per cent) have taken mental health training. Diversity and inclusion training will also be offered later this year.

To support financial wellness, in 2019 and 2020, our organization offered free, on-site one-on-ones with professional financial advisors and debt counsellors. More than 10 per cent of our team members booked and attended a session. Two-thirds reported the information they received led to actions that would reduce their financial stress. Our HRA data indicated that financial stress has decreased by 10 per cent over the last two years.

Using these data-driven insights and to support the growing demand from our team members, our Wellness team grew and worked collaboratively with other stakeholders in our organization to create a clear vision, a corporate wellness strategy and an operational plan.

Our Wellness team is dedicated to planning and prioritizing efforts, resources, programming and trainings to support a focus on addressing mental health across our organization.

What we saw: the results



89%

of our team members have taken mental health training



>10%

of our team members attended a session with a financial advisor



Mental health risk factors

FELL BY 9.6%



Financial health risk factors

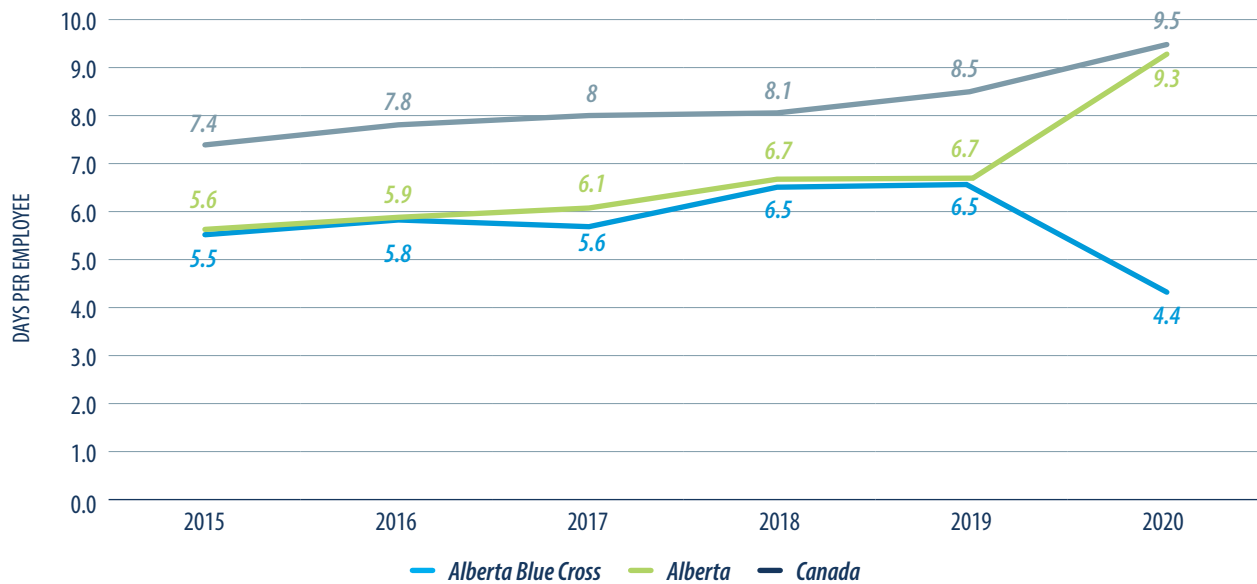
FELL BY 12.9%

FINDINGS

Our commitment to mental health and wellness was informed and driven by the following:

- **Creating a healthy workplace culture**—with our people at the centre. Engagement of our team members is critical for organizational performance and achievement of our outcomes. Our employee engagement scores help us stay informed and measure progress and employee satisfaction so we can make appropriate decisions to champion a healthy workplace.
- **Cost management**—absenteeism rates can be an early indicator of employee wellness and when unmonitored or unaddressed can lead to disability and benefit costs. Our flexibility in adapting to the circumstances brought on by the pandemic in 2020 highlighted the difference we have made in the ways we support our employees. One of these differences was seen through changes to absenteeism rates during our transition to a virtual working environment, which reflected our efforts to look out for the health and well-being of our team members and their families. Our absenteeism rate was also significantly lower than the provincial and national rates.

Absenteeism rates



With a focus on a psychological healthy workplace, the following meaningful benefits can be achieved:

- **Improvement in recruitment and retention.**

Our quarterly overall turnover rate averaged 3.9 per cent from 2015 to 2019, leading to lower administrative costs related to turnover.

- **Increased employee engagement**, which leads to better performance. Our engagement surveys showed that 92.3 per cent of our team members agree that Alberta Blue Cross is committed to wellness, which is an increase of 8.4 per cent since 2017.

- **Improved health and safety** for employees resulting in less stigma and a supportive environment where everyone has a role in wellness with 89 per cent of team members having completed mental health training and participating in numerous annual campaigns to reduce stigma around mental health.

- **A happier and healthier workforce** as shown through engagement survey results with 84.7 per cent of team members feeling supported by management in enhancing their own personal wellness and 66.7 per cent of team members taking a wellness break at least two times per week (an increase of 7.2 per cent from the year before).

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- More than ever, it's vital to address mental health concerns in the workplace. Success happens when employees and employers work together to cultivate a healthy workplace culture where everyone thrives. Taking only one step is better than not taking any.
- Ensure leadership support, commitment and buy in. Get a clear direction for your wellness strategy

and ensure it is aligned to overall business goals to demonstrate why investing in mental health is a good business decision.

- Conduct that may have been tolerated in the workplace five years ago is no longer acceptable; therefore, it is in the employer's best interest to act in a manner that prevents risk of legal

consequences. Consider adding diversity and inclusion or mental health training as a start.

- Use ongoing evaluations to measure progress in areas such as, employee and family assistance program utilization, health benefits utilization,

human resources statistics, risk assessments, staff engagement scores and personal feedback.

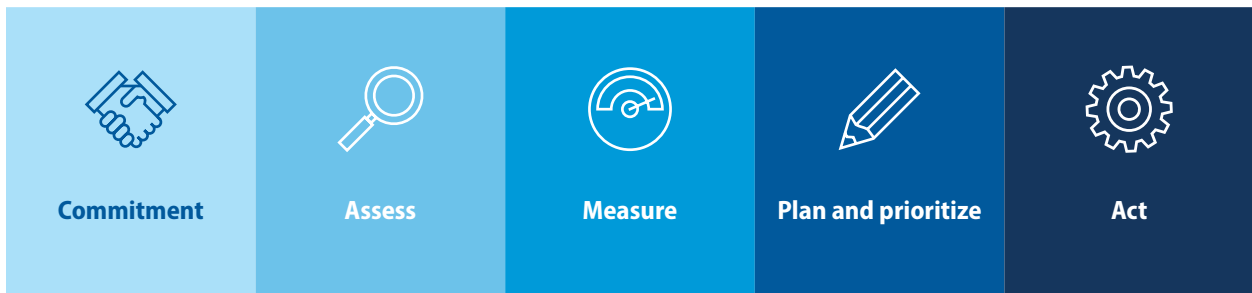
- Work collaboratively with other departments to create a wellness champion culture where everyone is part of the vision and bringing it to life.

A NEW APPROACH

More than 500,000 Canadians are off work each week due to a mental illness—making it one of the leading chronic health conditions employers are faced with.

Addressing mental health concerns of employees requires ongoing commitment, resources and

budget. We know that when mental health issues are left unaddressed, it becomes costly for organizations and drives workplace disability costs, reduces productivity and increases presenteeism and absenteeism.



The stepwise approach helps inform key priorities for the successful execution of wellness programming. Looking back at our journey, we see how the **commitment** from our leaders helped foster a culture of wellness and placed emphasis on the importance of mental health. We used what was available to **assess** the health of our team members and **measured** health data using information from the HRAs so we could prioritize our team members' health needs—which enabled us to see the need to focus and prioritize mental health. The data and information we received from Balance, along with

the feedback received through employee surveys allowed us to **plan and prioritize** a roadmap that led to a more comprehensive wellness strategy. And finally, our accumulation of data and metrics through various channels such as, aggregate reports, surveys, engagement scores, human resources data, employee and family assistance usage information and our Wellness Index enables us to evaluate our initiatives. Through this, we continue to **take action** and make better informed decisions to support the mental health of our team members.

