

Health Trends Edition

Putting Mental Health into Perspective

Mental health is hardly a new focus, but the topic is a growing concern for employers as they navigate the lasting, and seemingly unknown, impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their workforce. Employee mental health and total wellbeing is now the top HR priority.¹



Nearly 60% of workers say mental health is their top concern regarding their wellbeing at work.²

Employees' risk of PTSD is now 83% higher than it was pre-pandemic.³

Gen Xers in particular show signs of increased stress (15%) and risk of anxiety (94%).³

Adults reporting symptoms of anxiety and/or depressive disorder has quadrupled from 2019 to 2021.⁴

The latest analysis of claims data from nearly 100 employers on the Benefitfocus platform, combined with other research from across the benefits industry, indicates a need for employers to further support employee mental health and total wellbeing through benefits education, while designing plans that cost-effectively address those needs.

Mental Health Claims and Cost Trends: The Quarantine Effect

Pre-pandemic, mental health claims had grown by almost 15 percent between 2018 and 2019. While that growth slowed to only a nine percent increase in 2020, a continued uptick is expected moving forward, especially as the lasting mental health effects of the pandemic take shape.



increase in employer mental health claims from 2018 to 2020.



increase in average employer spending on mental health claims since 2018.



decrease in cost per member for mental health claims in 2020.

Telehealth for Mental Health

With the push to bridge the gap in care brought on by the pandemic, telehealth and virtual health services have evolved and are now widely available. One area that's seen substantial growth is mental health services delivered via telehealth, also known as telemental health.⁵



32%

of all mental health claims in 2020 were telemental health claims, up from less than 1% in 2019.

6,700%

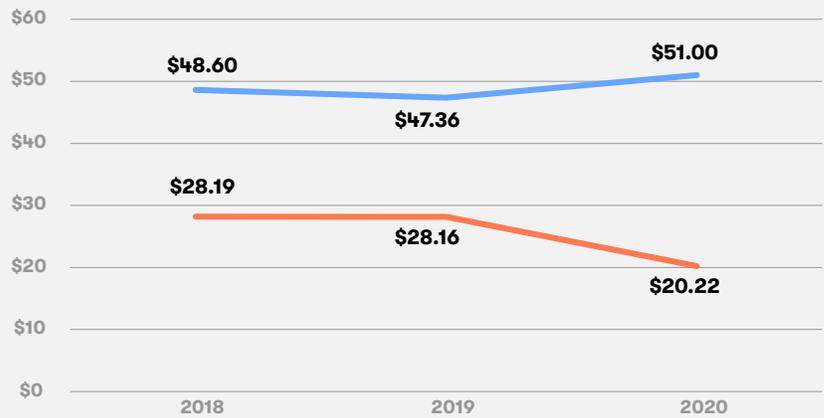
increase in the number of telemental health claims from 2019 to 2020, growing from an average of 27 to over 1,800 claims per employer.



Telehealth vs. In-Person Mental Health Costs

How much are employees spending per visit?

The out-of-pocket (OOP) cost difference between telehealth and in-person mental health claims increased by 60% in 2020, making virtual care a more attractive option financially for employees.



- Average member OOP cost per in-person mental health claim
- Average member OOP cost per telemental health claim



What is the cost to the employer?

Employers spend significantly more on in-person mental health services for their plan members.

2020	Average Employer Cost Per Member	Average Employer Cost Per Claim
In-person	\$802.53	\$152.27
Telehealth	\$478.86	\$81.60
Difference	\$323.67	\$70.67

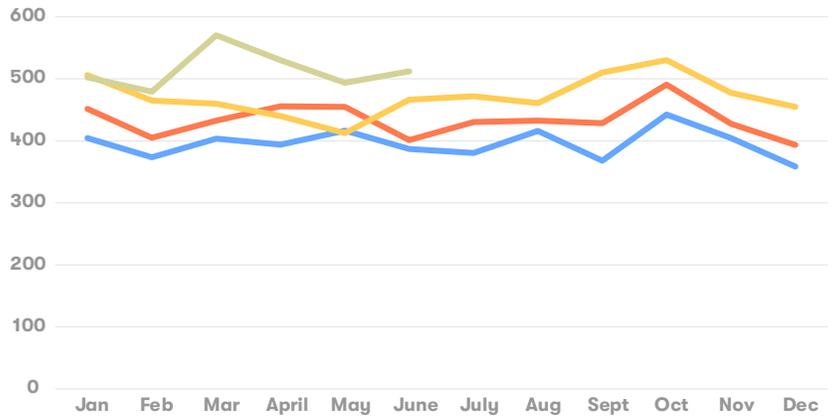


Mental Health Trends in 2021

The average number of mental health claims continues to rise each year. There was a downturn experienced during the height of quarantine in 2020, while the highest peak was experienced when the Delta variant was reported in the U.S. in March of 2021.



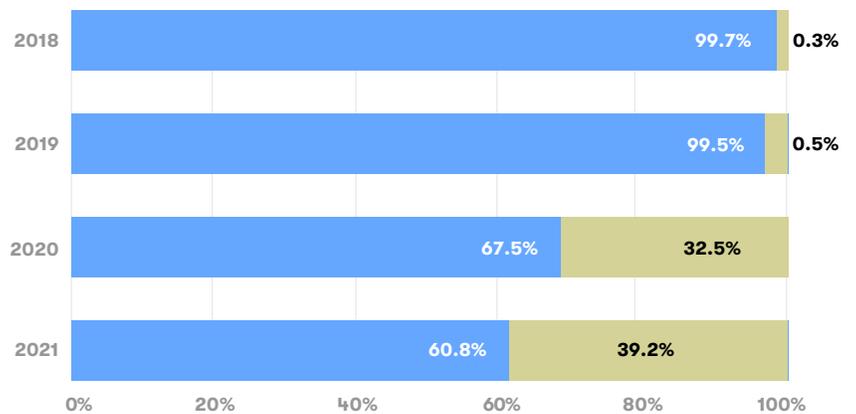
Average Mental Health Claims Per Employer by Month, 2018-2021*



Telemental health continues to grow in popularity, accounting for nearly 40 percent of total mental health claims in the first half of 2021.



Percent of In-Person vs. Mental Health Claims, 2018-2021*



*2021 data is a partial dataset that includes a year-to-date look from January 1, 2021 to June 30, 2021.

Telemental Health: A Promising Future

COVID-19 served as a catalyst in the growth of telehealth, and it's expected to become more deeply ingrained in the health care delivery system as patients and providers grow more comfortable with the technology. Plus, studies show that telemental health is as effective as in-person care for common behavioral health concerns.⁶

Benefits of Telemental Health:

- ✔ Broader treatment access and engagement of employee populations
- ✔ Better employee experience
- ✔ Helps address stigma of receiving mental health care
- ✔ Improved health outcomes
- ✔ Reduced total cost of care



Key Takeaway

Strategic, long-term planning around mental health benefits is critical for employers. Here are some steps organizations should take in constructively addressing mental health:

- 1. Identify and adapt.** Employers faced new challenges around how to reopen in 2021. By leveraging claims analytics to identify trends, employers can adapt their benefit plans to more effectively mitigate risks of mental health illness, improve outcomes and retain talent.
- 2. Take action to support.** Supporting employees with mental health coverage isn't one and done. Employers should continuously evaluate ways to expand mental health support, increase awareness of benefits and consider additional mental health days to give employees a break from work.
- 3. Grow and sustain virtual health use.** Telemental health can provide employees an effective way to address mental health, while also being a cost-effective solution for everyone. Help educate employees around how to access this solution and why it might be a good fit for them.

Lean More

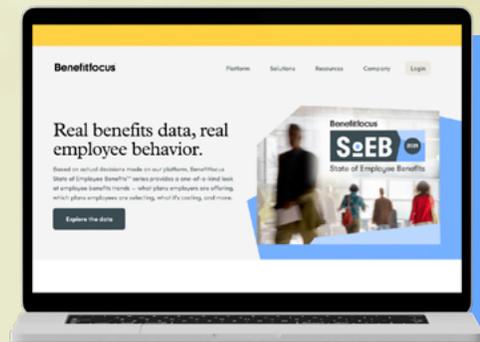
Take a deeper dive into the data:

www.benefitfocus.com/state-of-employee-benefits.

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State of Employee Benefits



About the Data

The dataset for the State of Employee Benefits Health Trends Edition was built with anonymized claims data from a sample of nearly 100 large employer customers using Benefitplace in combination with Health Insights, representing more than 1.3 million members.

The analysis attributes were measured on actual claims data on an employer level and included: total number of claims, average number of employees and average number of members for activity from January 1, 2018 through June 30, 2021. This dataset is not meant to be a nationally representative sample, but rather to represent aggregated data for employers on the Benefitfocus platform.

This is the first report of a series that will continue focusing on evolving trends in health care claims over a specified period of time.

About Benefitfocus

Benefitfocus (NASDAQ: BNFT) unifies the entire benefits industry through innovative technology solutions that bring efficiency, cost savings and simplicity to employee benefits administration. Our powerful cloud-based software, data-driven insights and thoughtfully designed services help employers, insurance brokers, health plans and suppliers address the complexity of benefits enrollment and engagement, while bringing easier access to health, wealth and lifestyle products through a world-class benefits experience. Our mission is simple: to improve lives with benefits. Learn more at www.benefitfocus.com.

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Sources:

1. HR 2021 Sentiment Survey, Future Workplace
2. The Conference Board, March 2021
3. The Mental Health Index, July 2021 Update, Total Brain; "PTSD" defined as posttraumatic stress disorder.
4. Kaiser Family Foundation
5. The National Institute of Mental Health defines "telemental health" as use of telecommunications or videoconferencing technology to provide mental health services
6. Telebehavioral Health: An Effective Alternative to In-Person Care, Issue Brief, October 15, 2020, Milbank Memorial Fund

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