

Highlights

01. COVID-19

Employers and Vaccine Incentives

02. Clinical Spotlight

Mental Health Solutions and COVID-19

“The UK variant B.1.1.7 is the most dominant coronavirus strain in the US today and represents >27% of all cases”

INSIGHTS BY OPTIMATUM

April 2021

Welcome to Insights by Optimatum

Optimatum is excited to share with you our thoughts on current issues and topics facing employer sponsored health plans. Insights by Optimatum provides a summary of healthcare and health plan-related topics as well as a clinical spotlight. We will provide information that you can turn into actions or help create opportunities to have new conversations with your employer sponsored health plan vendor or PBM. If there are specific topics of interest please let us know so we can make this as informative and useful to you as possible!

COVID-19 Update

As states continue to loosen their restrictions to ease pandemic fatigue and bolster their local economies, the CDC warns of a fourth surge in COVID-19 cases. Per the CDC as of April 26, 2021, the US has experienced:

>32M

COVID-19 cases

>569K

COVID-related deaths

>232M

Vaccines administered

>37%

% of population ≥ 18 fully vaccinated

The Pfizer-BioNTech’s 2-shot vaccine with 95% efficacy is approved for age 16 and older, and the Moderna 2-shot vaccine with 94.1% efficacy is approved for age 18 and older. The single shot viral vector J&J/Janssen vaccine with 66.3% efficacy has been approved safety reviews.

Employers and COVID-19 Vaccines

Incentives and vaccination Q&A

Can I ask my employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19?

Employers can ask if an employee has been vaccinated, but not why they have not as this may trigger ADA or other concerns. ([National Law Review 4/22/2021](#))

Can I offer vaccine incentives?

The EEOC is working to provide clarity for employers on the topic of incentives, and the CDC has updated their [Workplace Vaccination Program website](#) to offer additional guidance.

What are employers doing to encourage employees to become vaccinated?

Employers are offering paid time off up to two days, \$25-\$200 cash or gift cards, financial credits towards an employee’s monthly health plan premium (IFEBP, 3/30/21) if they get vaccinated?

Optimatum encourages employers to speak with the vendors about incentive strategies and also to consult with your legal counsel before implementing any COVID-19 vaccination or incentive programs, or mandates (KFF, 4/7/21).





Pandemic and Mental Health

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), one in five U.S. adults has some type of mental health diagnosis, such as depression or anxiety. A recent study by the [KFF \(4/14/21\)](#) found that nearly 50% of adults are reporting continued mental health issues and 15% reporting difficulty accessing mental health care. Women and children are reported to be experiencing more difficulty coping with the burdens of the pandemic.

67% Nearly 7 in 10 people report experiencing increased stress since the pandemic began

American Psychological Association

Five strategies for helping your employees

- **Communication** with your employees is one of the most crucial actions you can take to ensure they feel engaged, supported and informed. Be sure your communications have leadership buy-in, foster inclusivity, and reduces stigma. Let your employees know what resources are available to them and how to access them on a regular basis.
- **Flexible scheduling** is a great way to ease the stress of juggling home and work. Flex-schedules are ranked very high next to work-life balance amidst COVID-19 challenges.
- **Multi-channel supports** (Digital/virtual tools and tele-behavioral health) are essential extended services and should be available through your employer sponsored health plan to support employees' mental health care needs. These may include mobile apps and virtual mental health coverage with clinicians. Be sure the tools have been vetted by your health care vendor, easily accessible, and provide you with metrics you can measure.
- **Employee Assistance Programs** offer a broad range of supportive services including financial help, child care, elder care, legal services and more. Promote their availability and how to access them to help manage ongoing life events.
- **Behavioral health dashboard** that tracks key metrics to alert you on how your employees are (and are not) coping. Data points can include ER visits for injuries and ill-defined illnesses, 1-day inpatient admissions for behavioral health and/or substance abuse, telehealth utilization, and antidepressant and anti-anxiety pharmacy metrics are metrics that may provide insights into how stress is impacting your employees and offer opportunities to strategize on how to improve health outcomes with your vendor(s).




ABOUT OPTIMATUM

Optimatum is the leading vendor management firm for the HR Supply Chain. Since 2007, we deliver robust solutions in the areas of Employer Sponsored Healthcare, Retirement, HR Systems and M&A/Transitional Services.

Our end-to-end solutions answer the most pressing issues faced by employers in HR today, improving financial and operational plan performance through forensic analysis, vendor relationship realignment and ongoing vendor management.

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