

# Supporting Employee Health and Wellbeing in a Changing Work Environment

Anticipating the New Normal  
in Response to COVID-19

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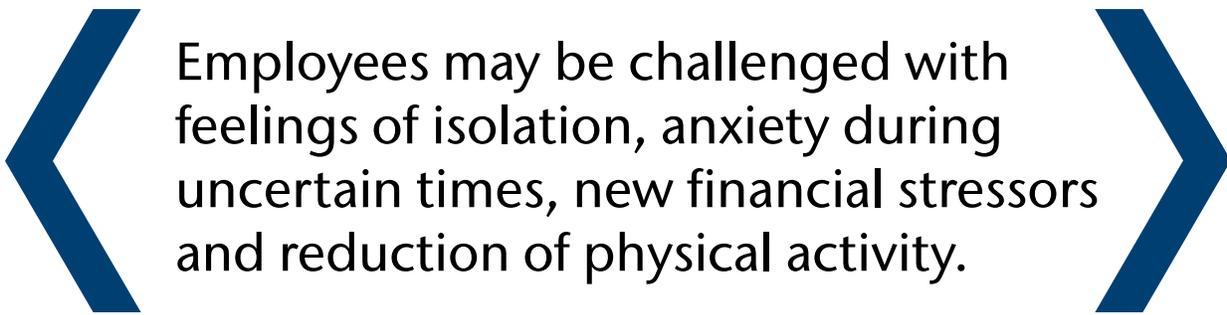
# Supporting Employee Wellbeing During a Pandemic

Government strategies across the globe continue to evolve as they seek to address the threat posed by the COVID-19 outbreak. From a workplace perspective, we anticipate that an increasing number of employers will not only be seeking creative solutions for much of their workforce, asking their employees to work from home as a key part of a broader ‘flatten the curve’ strategy, but also will need to make difficult decisions regarding temporary suspension of work for their employees.

Although some employees may be familiar with non-traditional work environments or structures, this shift in routine or the reduction of hours may prove challenging for many. Especially with the prospect that this could require implementation for an extended period. This will likely have an impact on the wellbeing of your employees, and they will need your support.

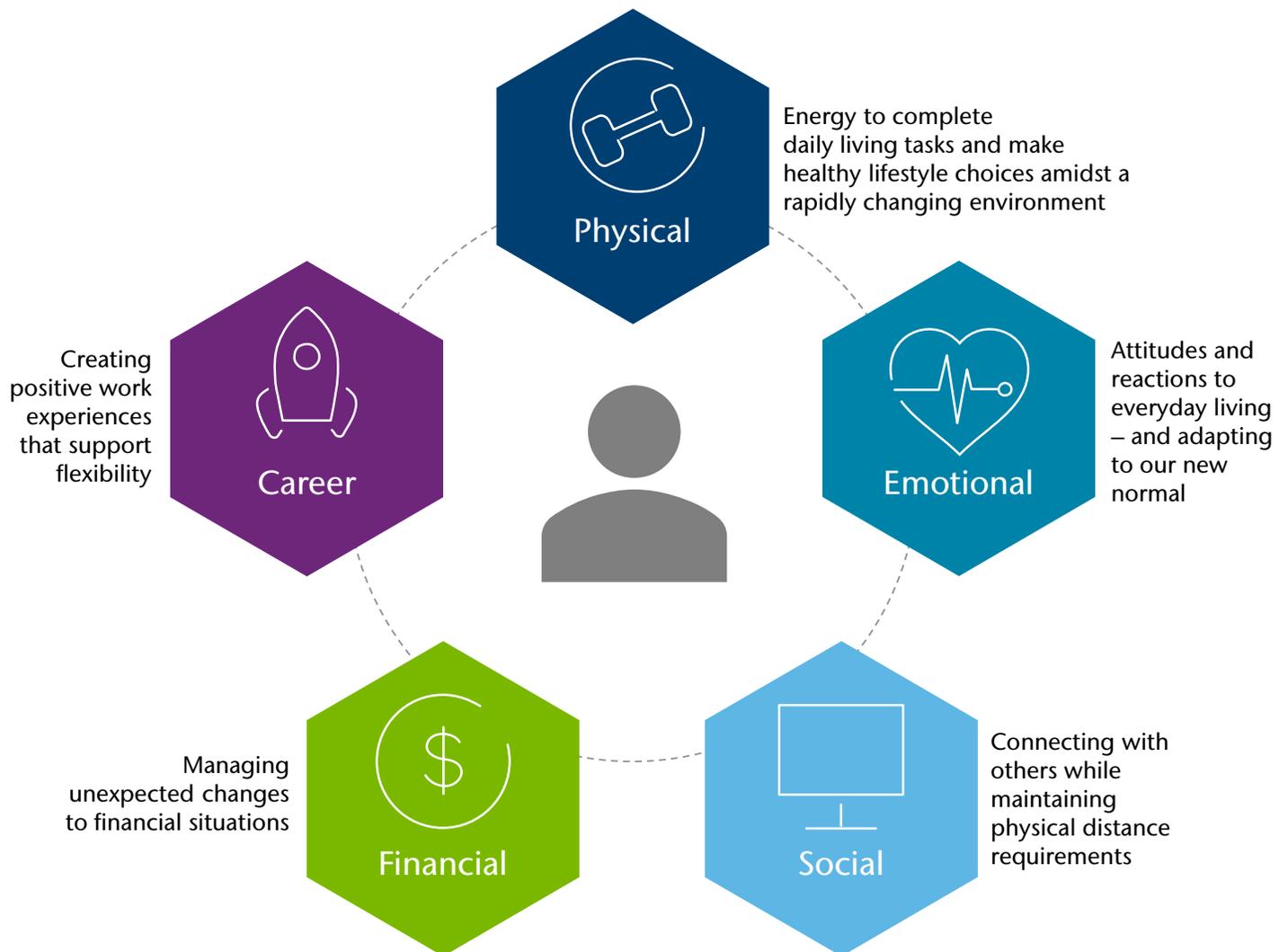
Employees may be challenged with feelings of isolation, anxiety during uncertain times, new financial stressors and reduction of physical activity. For those with employees working from home, employers will need to redefine the concept of a “flexible work schedule” due to factors such as limited space, technology/connectivity issues, children who (due to school closures) require assistance with e-learning, younger children who require supervision or even illness of family members who require care.

Employers have a significant role to play in helping their employees thrive in whatever their new working environment may be, however temporary. The purpose of this document is to outline suggestions we believe employers should consider as they adjust to support their employees’ wellbeing in these challenging and uncertain times.



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# Recognizing the Areas of Wellbeing in Your Employees



# Physical Wellbeing



Physical activity saves lives and protects health. The evidence is clear—physical activity promotes normal growth and development among children and adolescents, can reduce the risk and severity of various chronic diseases, and makes people feel better, function better, and sleep better. Some health benefits start immediately after activity, and even short bouts (10 minutes) of physical activity are beneficial. In addition, engaging in regular physical activity is important to maintaining a healthy weight and staying emotionally fit. During this period where work routines are likely to change it is important employers remind employees to engage in regular physical activity. Even those who are quarantining have options available!

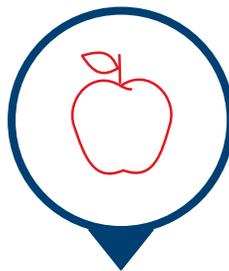


## Stay Active

If appropriate, get outside for a walk, run or bike ride (while complying with physical distancing requirements).

Participate in virtual workouts or design an interval workout that does not require equipment.

Be mindful of your posture throughout the work day. Take a break from sitting – stand during conference calls, go up/down stairs, jump rope, stretch, JUST MOVE!



## Eat Balanced Meals

Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. Get creative with meals inspired by chefs offering free cooking videos. Stay hydrated!



## Rest

Get appropriate amounts of sleep to keep your immune system strong or to recover when you are feeling sick.

# Emotional Wellbeing



According to Mind, nearly half of employees have experienced a mental health issue in their current job<sup>1</sup>. A wide range of factors can contribute to or cause mental health issues, for example, having caring responsibilities (childcare and/ or eldercare), financial concerns, sleep deficiency, job security and relationship breakdown.

Requirements to maintain physical distance, alter work routines and changing family situations will test the emotional fitness of employees during the next few weeks and months.



## Leverage Existing Resources

Employers should ensure that if employees need help during this period they know exactly what benefits (disability, time away, caregiving) are available to them and how to access such support.



## Support Leaders

Provide leaders with resources to support leading their teams through unprecedented times.

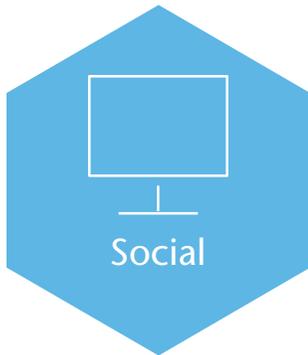


## Reach out to EAP Provider

Encourage use of EAP resources and services available to employees and their family members. Promote local public health and community resources.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/half-of-workers-have-experienced-poor-mental-health-in-current-job/>

# Social Wellbeing



The EU Science Hub found that lonely people are more likely to have poor health, poor cognitive performance, emotional health challenges and pessimistic views<sup>1</sup>. A Loneliness in the Workplace study by Cigna found that reduced productivity, increased sickness absence, higher turnover and reduced performance were some of the key outcomes associated with workplace loneliness<sup>2</sup>. During this period of reduced or even eliminated face-to-face contact with fellow co-workers, employers should make a concerted effort to ensure employees don't feel isolated and that they maintain a strong sense of purpose.



## Promote “Face-to-Face” Engagement

Use creative ways to connect with colleagues and friends – use video during conference calls and schedule virtual coffee breaks with colleagues.



## Help Your Community

Encourage your employees to find creative ways to support their local community – donations to a food bank, take advantage of employer matching program, buy a gift card or make a donation to local business.



## Leverage Support Resources

EAP providers offer independent and confidential advice and counselling in difficult circumstances. Promote local public health and community resources.

<sup>1</sup><https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/news/how-lonely-are-Europeans>; <sup>2</sup><https://www.cigna.com/static/www-cigna-com/docs/about-us/newsroom/studies-and-reports/combating-loneliness/cigna-2020-loneliness-factsheet.pdf>

# Financial Wellbeing



Financial wellbeing is the ability to confidently manage financial life today, while preparing for the future and anything unexpected along the way. Poor financial wellbeing has many downsides, including having a detrimental impact on an individual's physical and emotional health their ability to live day to day and ultimately retire. During this period where many employees are facing uncertainty about their near-term and long-term financial situation, employers have an opportunity to support and remind employees about the benefits and resources available to them.



## Personal Financial Management

Assist employees in identifying programs available to defer recurring expenses and to re-purpose discretionary spending to meet new realities.



## Adjust Financial Goals

Remind employees how to adjust investments, retirement contributions (if applicable) and other savings vehicles to adapt to changing financial situation.



## Leverage Resources

Encourage employees to leverage the financial resources available through employer, government and local communities.

# Career Wellbeing

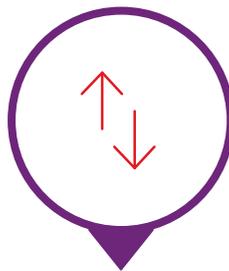


Being open to new work environments, ways of thinking/ doing/ collaborating. Employers must create a supportive culture to maintain business continuity during this “new normal” COVID-19 has created. Recognizing the “old way” of defining flexible work arrangements, environments, schedules, teaming and partnering has drastically changed. In addition, providing adequate and additional time away to take care of self and family during the pandemic is important.



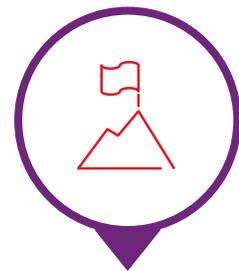
## Establish Your Workspace

Provide guidance on how to more effectively work from home, how to adapt to changes in the work environment, wherever that may be. Create a rotating schedule to support physical distancing while at work.



## Redefine Flexibility

Establish expectations for employees and how to be flexible given changes in school schedules and family schedules; establish a process for employees to communicate their daily routine/work hours.



## Lead Through Change

Direct people leaders on how to interact with their direct report in a new working environment. Develop additional time away guidelines and coverage.

# Contact List

## US

- Will Sneden, U.S. Health Solutions Practice Leader, [will.sneden@aon.com](mailto:will.sneden@aon.com)
- Stephanie Pronk, National Health Transformation Practice Leader, [stephanie.pronk@aon.com](mailto:stephanie.pronk@aon.com)

## APAC

- Tim Dwyer, CEO Asia Affinity Solutions, CEO – Asia Pacific Health Solutions, [tim.dwyer@aon.com](mailto:tim.dwyer@aon.com)
- Amitabh Deka, Head of Wellbeing Solutions – South Asia and Aon Care, [amitabh.deka@aon.com](mailto:amitabh.deka@aon.com)
- Amanda Mercep, Head of Wellbeing Solutions – North Asia, [amanda.mercep@aon.com](mailto:amanda.mercep@aon.com)

## EMEA

- Alistair Connell, CEO – UK & International Health Solutions, [alistair.connell@aon.com](mailto:alistair.connell@aon.com)
- Matthew Lawrence, Chief Broking Office, Health Solutions EMEA, [matthew.lawrence@aon.com](mailto:matthew.lawrence@aon.com)
- Charles Alberts, Head of Health Management, [charles.alberts@aon.co.uk](mailto:charles.alberts@aon.co.uk)

## Canada

- Brad Lorimer, Executive Vice President, Health & Financial Institutions Leader – Canada, [brad.lorimer@aon.ca](mailto:brad.lorimer@aon.ca)
- Erin Murphy-Sheriffs, Wellness Program Specialist, [erin.murphy-sheriffs@aon.com](mailto:erin.murphy-sheriffs@aon.com)

## LATAM

- Violetta Ostafin, CEO, Health Solutions – Latin America, [violetta.ostafin@aon.com](mailto:violetta.ostafin@aon.com)
- Nicolas Jimenez, Regional Analytics Manager – Latin America, [nicolas.jimenez@aon.com](mailto:nicolas.jimenez@aon.com)

## Global Benefits

- Francois Choquette, Executive Vice President, [francois.choquette@aon.com](mailto:francois.choquette@aon.com)
- Brad Melton, Senior Vice President, [brad.melton@aon.com](mailto:brad.melton@aon.com)

## About Aon

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