

Mental Health Cost Calculator – Key Takeaways

The National Safety Council and NORC at the University of Chicago created the Mental Health Cost Calculator, funded by Nationwide, to help employers understand the pivotal role they play in supporting the mental health of their employees. Below are the key takeaways from the Calculator, as well as additional details on interpreting the data.

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL DISTRESS AND ILLNESS

- Mental health, or mental wellbeing, is the foundation for emotions, thinking, communication, learning, resilience and self-esteem.
- Mental distress and mental illness are not the same. Over the course of a lifetime, most people will not experience a diagnosable mental illness but, at some point, most people will experience mental distress or challenges to their mental wellbeing.
- Over 46 million Americans – nearly 1 in 5 – live with a mental illness ¹ and over 11 million Americans have a serious mental illness.
 - Mental illness, or mental disorders, diagnoses, or conditions, are diagnosable health conditions involving significant changes in thinking, emotion, and/or behavior, and/or distress and problems functioning in social, work or family activities.

INTERPRETING THE DATA

- The Mental Health Cost Calculator, available at nsc.org/MentalHealthAtWork, codes serious psychological distress within the past year if respondents reported: periods of intense nervousness, hopelessness, restlessness, depression, things requiring great effort, or felt down on themselves, no good or worthless. We refer to serious psychological distress as mental distress.
- Serious psychological distress is not a diagnostic category in the DSM-5. Responses to the questions about depression do not equate to rates of diagnosed major depressive disorder, nervousness does not equate to generalized anxiety disorder, etc.

THE DATA – KEY TAKEAWAYS

COSTS

- Employers spend, on average, over \$15,000 a year on employees who experience mental distress.
- Employees experiencing mental distress are three-and-a-half times more likely to have substance use disorders.

INDUSTRIES AND OCCUPATIONS

- Industries with female workforces have higher levels of distress: information, communications, retail, entertainment, recreation, food service and other services.
- Distress varies greatly across occupations: low prevalence occupations include executive/administrative/managerial/financial, protective services and construction.
- Occupations with high levels of distress include: entertainment, sports, media and communications, and technicians and related support occupations.

HEALTH CARE USE

- On health care: employees experiencing mental distress use, on average, nearly \$3,000 more in health care services per year than their peers.

¹ <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml>

Mental Health Cost Calculator – Key Takeaways

- Employees experiencing mental distress were two-and-a-half times more likely to be admitted to the hospital in the past year than non-distressed employees (10% and 4%, respectively).
- If hospitalized, employees experiencing mental distress spent an average of one day more per hospital episode hospitalized than non-distressed employees (4.5 days and 3.5 days, respectively).
- On average, an employee experiencing mental distress is almost twice as likely to be treated in the emergency department than a non-distressed employee (0.67 times per year and 0.34 times, respectively).
- Employees experiencing mental distress went to their primary care physician nearly 4 times as frequently than non-distressed employees (4.3 times per year and 1.1 times, respectively).
- Employees experiencing mental distress are more likely to be treated for a mental health condition than non-distressed employees.

ABSENTEEISM

- The cost of days lost averages \$4,783 per year per employee.
- Employees experiencing mental distress take more days off for illness, injury or other reasons than non-distressed employees (16 more days annually).

TURNOVER

- The cost of turnover averages \$5,733 per year per employee.

OTHER IMPACTS

- Employees experiencing mental distress are more likely to report engaging in “risky” behavior. This may translate to engaging in riskier behaviors at work.
- Employees who have experienced mental distress in the past year are more likely to have reported driving under the influence of alcohol, marijuana or other drugs.
- Accessing care – workers who have experienced mental distress are much more likely to report that they needed mental health services in the last year but failed to get them.
- Employees who have experienced mental distress are more likely to report at least one episode of major depression during their lifetimes (57%) and more likely to report experiencing a major depressive episode or episodes in the past year (43%).
- Employees who have experienced mental distress are much more likely to report having suicidal thoughts over the last year than non-distressed employees.
 - A total of 29% of male distressed workers and 28% of female distressed workers reported having suicidal thoughts in the past year, and 3.1% of non-distressed male workers and 2.8% of non-distressed female workers reported past year suicidal thoughts.