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# **EMPLOYEE BENEFITS NEEDS ARE CHANGING AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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A key shift in day-to-day operations for *employee benefits* in the corporate workforce since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic is the increased usage of technology. Born out of necessity and implemented for safety, companies are learning how to help their employees virtually in all benefit categories.

Aside from emergency measures for people in crisis (COVID-19 testing coverage and easier access to flexible spending accounts [FSA] by federal mandate), most employers are not making any dramatic changes to their existing benefit plans. Instead, they are addressing need on a case-by-case basis. Here are some of the more commonly adopted changes of the last 6 months which will likely continue into the foreseeable future:

## **OPEN ENROLLMENT**

In-person meetings are on hold indefinitely so many employers are offering virtual enrollment. They have used both live or pre-recorded sessions and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. With the implementation of digital hubs for information storage, the enrollment process is happening almost entirely online, eliminating the need for paper collection and retention at a time when doing that is difficult.

## **TELEMEDICINE**

Telemedicine is not a new idea but it has become essential since the onset of the



pandemic. A compelling alternative to an in-person visit with a physician during the more stringent period of the shutdown, it was a key means by which some people were able to keep tabs on their own physical well-being, separate from COVID. Now, even with more in-person office visit availability, many still opt for telemedicine appointments when possible to actively follow social distance protocols. It also allows for 24/7 health management and the anticipation is that this model will continue to thrive even as things continue to normalize in the future. We are seeing in-office doctor visits co-existing with telemedicine appointments which are being offered more and more, especially for people who are higher risk.

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

Mental health services for employees have always been available in their benefits packages but now, those services are even easier to access. Especially in these stressful and anxiety-provoking times, many employees are seeking and getting mental health assistance for stress, anxiety, depression and other conditions, often via virtual video conferencing platforms, sometimes on short notice.

## **FINANCIAL WELLNESS**

Many employees are feeling the pinch financially, some more harshly than others. A reduction in hours or salary, or increased workload all contributes to financial urgency in these uncertain times. Some of the financial wellness services being offered include payroll advances, emergency savings accounts and student loan debt repayment support. At a time when financial worries can overtake a person's physical and mental well-being, these services can provide structure, management and self-care to people struggling in ways they never could have imagined, pre-pandemic.

It's a work in progress for many companies, small and large, but the willingness of



these organizations to think of the overall physical, mental and financial health of their employees will help to secure their workforce during these difficult times and in a future, post-pandemic world.



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