

## Equity in Mental Health Learning Action Collaborative

### *DFWBGH Summary Report Q&A*

*December 7, 2023*

1. Why was this topic an important one for the coalition to get involved with? What were you initially hoping to get out of the project?

Mental health is a key area of focus for our coalition, and so is diversity, equity and inclusion, but we hadn't put these two issues together in our educational initiatives. This project offered an opportunity for us to learn together with other employers and MH-HE experts to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges employers face in developing comprehensive strategies to improve MH equity in the workplace.

2. Did you have any initial conversations with your participating employers to introduce this project and/or ensure their readiness to start this work?

Yes, I discussed this opportunity to participate in an interactive small group learning experience with peers and subject matter experts about a "top-of-mind" issue of mental health and equitable access to MH treatment, as well as useful resources and successful benefits strategies to support this goal.

3. Overall, what are 3-4 key takeaways and/or insights for you and your coalition as a result of this Learning Action Collaborative:

- It's important to collaborate with other employers to gain insights and ideas on MH strategies and to compare our actions with other employers.
- This was a good opportunity for self-analysis and self-disclosure with peers from other companies.
- To better understand our MH-HE problems, we need to collect relevant data: demographics, MH claims data, EAP utilization, etc.

4. What 2-3 specific area(s) of equity in mental health do you feel were most important to you or your employers in the workgroup discussions?

Involving company leadership is critical: Benefits managers need greater effort to gain their buy-in to support and provide resources for our MH-HE initiatives.

Currently, most employer-sponsored MH resources and communications are very general—not targeted specifically to any racial, social, cultural, or economic groups. By gaining a better understanding of workforce diversity, employers might be able to target MH communications more effectively and increase utilization of MH resources.

5. If your coalition was focused on equity and mental health prior to the learning collaborative, what did you learn during the collaborative that you didn't already know?

Most of our mental health initiatives have focused on communicating company-sponsored MH resources to employees, such as improving use of EAP services, reducing stigma, and forming ERGs to help employees discuss personal MH challenges, rather than equitable access to quality treatment. We had not emphasized the importance of health equity as a key driver of access to quality MH treatment and recovery.

6. What education and/or resources on equity and/or mental health did you connect employers with during the project? Please provide example(s).
  - a. We shared National Alliance Action Briefs on MH-HE Equity because these succinctly provide useful, actionable information on demand for busy benefits managers.
  - b. We also developed a Mental Health Employer Playbook
  - c. We hosted and will continue hosting employer roundtable discussions led by MH subject experts as a way to engage a small group of employers directly in sharing their own challenges, experiences and successes to improve health equity in their workplace.
7. Do you plan to share the outcomes of this project with other member employers who did not participate?
  - a. We plan to host several employer workshops in 2024, in which our Project participants can share what they learned and how they are using the information they garnered in this Learning Collaborative.
  - b. We will engage our Board members as strong advocates for MH equity and ask them to share their own challenges and solutions in testimonials in our 2024 MH-HE workshops.
  - c. We plan to share NA's Guiding Principles and Maturity Model for Achieving Equity with our members and post this and other useful MH resources on our website. This is an excellent tool to guide our employers in coordinated efforts to improve health equity via education & support, taking action, and focusing on accountability. with all of our employers and use this as a key component of our 2024 MH-HE workshops

8. How will you build future engagement on equity and mental health with your members?  
How does this influence your long-term strategic thinking on the topic?

Our key role as a coalition is to provide education for our employers and their vendors, and share useful resources to help improve both parties' understanding of mental health equity challenges in the workplace. Our goal is to work together to develop and implement effective strategies to improve equity and inclusion, and then celebrate and share solutions that are working.

9. Do you think this project will spur additional employers within your coalition to seek or take on similar work? Why or why not?

I believe that our employer participants will continue to apply their acquired information and resources in their thinking and apply this in their benefits strategies and communications regarding MH resources and equitable access to timely and affordable MH treatment.

10. What potential future opportunities do you see that can help other coalitions or their participating employers better address equity and mental health?

The best opportunity to share the value of this learning collaborative will be to continue this discussion in National Alliance conference. Another opportunity is to follow up with our employer participants to see what changes they are making in their benefits strategies to address MH equity more effectively in their own companies, and then share this with other employers.

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