



# Supporting Mental Health

**SUMMARY:** Views on mental health care are changing, with increasing recognition of the importance and prevalence of mental health issues. A binary view of being well versus unwell is breaking down—though the question of what constitutes mental health may prove increasingly contentious. Efforts are underway to achieve equity and access in mental health, while therapy innovation is growing.



## Forecasts

- In the medium term, Americans will face a strain on mental health as they navigate social and political instability, economic uncertainty, and the reverberations of the coronavirus pandemic.
- There will be tension around the definition of “mentally well,” with collisions around issues of inclusion and exclusion, culture, and gender. The nature of the spectrum of mental wellness and who gets to define it will be under question.
- Younger generations will shift attitudes and approaches to mental health, destigmatizing mental illness and pushing to make workplaces more accommodating of mental wellness.
- Data mining, biomarkers, genetics, and brain science will improve diagnosis and treatment of mental illness, but precise diagnosis will remain a challenge.
- Artificial intelligence will play a growing role in treating mental health. AI will have roles in diagnosis, monitoring, and counselling, operating with growing sophistication. However, determining what works will take time.

## Key Uncertainties

*Level of funding and support for mental health care amidst healthcare resource constraints*

*Level of stigma around mental health issues*

*Speed of advances in the science of diagnosis and treatment*

*Long-term mental health effects of the coronavirus pandemic*

*Mental health and wellness attitudes of younger age groups*

*Effectiveness of AI-based interventions*

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## Supporting Trends

- **Neurodiversity.** Mental health advocates are pushing for a reexamination of conditions such as autism, ADHD, and dyslexia among others, and are developing a neurodiversity paradigm that destigmatizes these cognitive conditions and places them within a wide variation of human behavioral traits.
- **Cultural diversity in psychology.** Researchers in the social sciences are finding that human psychology can be highly variable among cultures, calling into question the universal applicability of findings from behavioral psychology.
- **Expanded mental healthcare access.** Efforts are underway to make access to mental healthcare easier, with telemedicine, care provision by nonprofessionals, and automated systems.
- **Social media’s negative impacts on health.** Use of social media is being linked to brain, behavior, and mood changes though the degree and nature of the harm is debated.
- **New tools for mental health.** Mental health software and apps are being created for workplaces and personal use. The American Psychological Association estimates that there are 10,000 – 20,000 mental health apps available for download.
- **Affective computing.** Affective computing integrates emotion detection and simulated psychological sensitivity into computer interfaces.
- **Crisis fatigue.** “Crisis fatigue” is being identified as a new and growing emotional disorder that occurs “when [exterior] causes put the body’s natural stress response into overdrive.”

### Related Drivers of Change

- Disability Inclusion
- Healthcare Disruption
- Population Health
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Personalized Artificial Intelligence

## Notable Data Points

### LACK OF MENTAL HEALTHCARE

Experts estimate that 20% of the population has a mental health issue at any given time, but **75% of those needing treatment don’t receive it.**

*Source: Jee and Heaven, “The therapists using AI to make therapy better,” MIT Technology Review.*

### WORRIED YOUTH

A 2021 study found 60% of 16-25 year olds in 10 countries felt very or extremely worried about climate change; **75% called the future “frightening”** and 56% said they believe “humanity is doomed.”

*Source: Roger Harrabin, “Climate change: Young people very worried – survey,” BBC News, Sept. 14, 2021.*

### ANXIOUS AND DEPRESSED

In late 2020, **43% of Americans reported anxiety or depression.**

*Source: Anxiety and Depression Household Pulse Survey, National Center for Health Statistics and the U.S. Census Bureau.*

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## Strategic Insights

- Amidst a rising expectation that workplaces and organizations should actively support employees, attending to mental wellness offers potentially decisive advantages in retaining staff and creating a productive and effective workplace. This requires understanding the evolving emotional needs of staff and discovering and implementing innovative approaches, policies, and tools.
- Associations can monitor emerging issues and innovations in mental health and wellness in their industry or field and provide resources and evaluations to help members understand evolving best practices in prevention and treatment.
- Organizations may experience tensions over issues of mental wellness and job performance, feedback, and work standards and metrics, some of which will take the form of DEI issues. Tensions may emerge between standards of behavior and efforts to broaden inclusion.
- It is important to understand how issues of cultural diversity intersect with mental wellness, both in terms of the pressure points different groups are under, and how mental health issues are perceived within different cultures.
- Technology may provide tools to help organizations identify and track aspects of the work environment that cause stress and other mental health-related issues among staff, members, and clients. However, employing such tools will require careful attention to privacy. The boundaries between health monitoring and intrusive surveillance are likely to be an emerging area of controversy and conflict.

### Timing

- **Stage:** Growth, with approaches to mental health actively changing.
- **Speed:** Medium, as underlying issues are relatively stable, but many aspects are shifting.

### Potential Alternative Futures

- **Commitment to wellness.** Society and organizations put decisive new effort into addressing mental health and providing the resources to support it.
- **Newly effective interventions.** Advances in pharmaceuticals, genetics, and brain science combine to create a new level of efficacy in treating various mental illnesses.
- **Automated therapy.** More effective, data-driven AI combined with monitoring enable automated interventions to be much more useful and widespread.
- **The “normal” majority.** Mental health gets caught up in culture war issues, spawning a reaction against mental health inclusion.

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## Take Action

- **Create safe spaces for constituents.** Develop and enforce policies that protect staff and members physically and mentally. Define appropriate behavior and boundaries between staff, members, and volunteers. Be intentional in creating a supportive, inclusive, and welcoming community of members. Have a plan for navigating actions and communications when inappropriate behavior occurs.
- **Integrate mental well-being into DEI efforts.** Define how mental health fits into your association's DEI strategy and establish a clear, common language for talking about mental health. Understand that different populations, such as people of color, women, and frontline workers, have had varying experiences seeking support, while others, such as men, may hesitate to seek support or relate a struggle to mental health at all. Be cognizant of implicit and explicit bias around stress and well-being. Consider integrating trauma-informed care principles into DEI policies and procedures.
- **Lead with empathy.** Look at how stress, neurodiversity, mental health diagnoses, and substance abuse may manifest in different ways. Set the standard for self-care, establish boundaries, destigmatize difference, and build a culture of safety, trust, and empowerment. Get staff training in identifying signals that someone is not well and assessing individual situations. Identify underlying systems that are causing unhealthy behavior. Consider how to provide immediate relief while building long-term solutions.
- **Communicate with and educate members.** Incorporate wellness sessions into educational programs and develop tools or resources for members. Look for resources from other associations with expertise in this area. Teach members what to look for and how to identify stressors. Ensure communications to members convey authentic care for their well-being.

## Keyword Search

To continue researching this change driver, use these search terms alone or in combination: *mental health, telemedicine, stress, deaths of despair, mental health apps, artificial intelligence, chief wellness officer, mental wellness, mental health apps.*

### Who Will Be Affected

All organizations will be affected by changing approaches to mental health.

### About ASAE ForesightWorks

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- Regularly updated action briefs;
- Tools for applying insights from the research in your association;
- Guidance in performing environmental scans;
- Opportunities to engage with peers around the research.

Ultimately, the program's mission is to empower association leaders to create a culture of foresight in their associations and to lead their organizations confidently into the future.

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