

Redefining wellbeing through a DEI lens

QUICK READ



Employee wellbeing has taken centre stage for many organisations as COVID-19 has worsened the burden of poor physical, mental and financial health on the workforce and business outcomes. However, it's more complex than simply offering a few educational resources, granting additional leave or 'mental health days'. Wellbeing for everyone means adopting a robust, flexible, and personalised approach to health and wellness that meets everyone's unique needs.

Breaking down the barriers to equity

It's crucial for employers to acknowledge the diversity of cultures, ethnic identities, gender identities, religious or political beliefs, family dynamics, and social support networks present within their workforces. The pandemic disproportionately impacted already marginalised parts of society, with women making up more than half of the individuals affected by COVID-related job loss and minority ethnic groups at higher risk of coronavirus as a result of the social determinants of health. Creating a work environment – whether remote or on-site – that provides equal opportunity for career advancement and improved health outcomes to all members of your workforce is the foundation of a truly inclusive organisation. Not only is it the right thing to do; it's essential for short and long-term organisational success.

Understanding how subtleties like unconscious bias and microaggressions, widespread issues like systemic racism and external factors like every day social interactions, socioeconomic status and other personal stressors contribute to marginalisation in the workplace is an important step in breaking down these barriers to equity. According to Dr. Jessica Isom, board-certified community psychiatrist, clinical Instructor in the Yale Department of Psychiatry and member of the Virgin Pulse Science Advisory Board, marginalised employees often feel overlooked, undervalued and invisible, leading to higher rates of absenteeism and staff turnover. “You have to think about how power and privilege can actually determine your workload and available resources to get the task done that you need to get done,” says Dr. Isom.

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Equity is more than just a priority for organisations — it's a necessity for our health. Equity and social justice shouldn't be priorities, they really should be core values because values don't shift.

- Dr. Marlette Jackson

Diversity matters more than you think

There's something to be said about the ways in which diversity in personal experience, thought processes and values fuels innovation, problem-solving and success in the workplace. Employers that welcome different viewpoints, encourage employees to express their thoughts and opinions, and focus on building a truly diverse workforce are more likely to empower employees to bring their best selves to work each day without fear of judgment or exclusion, which leads to better business outcomes.



7 in 10 candidates report that inclusion is important when choosing an employer.



Inclusive teams make more effective business decisions 87% of the time.



Whether in gender or in race, diversity in executive teams increases the likelihood that they will financially outperform others in their industry.

Facilitating a DEI culture drives employee engagement

Employees and candidates are actively seeking out employers who promote a diverse, inclusive and equitable culture. Organisations that ignore the urgent need for racial and gender equity run the risk of losing valuable employees and sabotaging business outcomes.



4 in 10 employees surveyed report that they would leave their company for a more inclusive one.



More than half of employees at diverse companies report excellent team morale as compared with less than a quarter from less diverse organisations.



Intrateam collaboration and overall team performance increase when all members of the workforce feel included.



Focusing on DEI improves health outcomes

Prioritising diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace can influence the community-wide change necessary to achieve true health equity across race, gender identity and socioeconomic status. By increasing opportunities for often marginalised parts of society to become physically and mentally healthier, more financially stable and feel more socially connected, they'll be better equipped to understand and advocate for more accessible resources and supports within their local community.



Minority ethnic populations have a 1.5-2x greater likelihood of developing a major chronic condition like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, hypertension or obesity.



A report issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) found a correlation between social inequality and increased risk of a variety of common mental health disorders like anxiety, depression, substance abuse and schizophrenia.



Providing the right support to employees could mean the difference between early detection and intervention of a physical or mental health condition or a difficult course of treatment with a lower success rate.

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Who defines engagement in your workplace and who actually owns the initiatives to address it? You could ask that same question for workplace wellness, because how you define a problem determines the solutions that you generate for it.

- Dr. Jessica Isom

Tailor your workplace wellbeing programme to all employees

Employee wellbeing is not a one-size-fits-all solution. We all have different needs and wants, skills and limitations, health risks and goals and motivational factors, so providing employees with a wellbeing programme that can be custom-built to fit their unique needs and preferences is imperative. According to Dr. Isom, "If we invested in everyone's wellbeing, we would reap a lot of benefits and rewards from that, including maximising everyone's potential."

How can your organisation ensure that it's enabling all members of the workforce to perform and feel their best in the workplace? First, include all employees in your conversations and planning as you seek to make changes within your company culture and wellbeing efforts. Learning what's important to your teams will help HR and leadership teams address the shortcomings and identify areas for improvement.



Want to help each member of your workforce succeed in work and wellbeing? Get in touch to learn how Virgin Pulse can help.

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