

# Companies Investing more into Employee Benefits for Mental Health in 2021



Whether you have been isolated in a remote workspace or exhausted on the front-line, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought significant stress into the Canadian workforce. A shocking [50% of Canadians](#) have admitted higher anxiety and depression due to Covid-19. According to [CAHM](#) “the economic burden of mental illness in Canada is estimated to be approximately \$51 billion each year, with \$6.3 billion resulting from lost productivity. By 2041, it is estimated that the cumulative cost of poor mental health to the Canadian economy will exceed \$2.5 trillion.”

The increase of anxiety and depression has been directly linked to lower productivity and higher absenteeism in the workplace throughout various industries. This trend is on a downfall and supporting the mental health of employees has required a big step up from Canadian businesses in 2021. [CloudAdvisors](#) (CA), Canada’s Employee Benefits Marketplace, has observed a recent rise in mental health coverage for employees and their families. The platform connects to over fifty insurance and benefit providers, many now offering solutions which cater directly to the effects of Covid-19. Providers have shifted their solutions to accommodate the mental health crisis with additional packages for Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), Virtual Healthcare, increased Psychologist Maximums, Pharmacogenetic Testing, Mental Health Programs, Healthcare Navigation, Healthcare Spending Accounts (HCSA), and Wellness Programs.

## **What are the benefits of these programs for employees and their families?**

**EAP:** Supports employees and their families with specialized counselling in person or virtually, often without a limited number of sessions. They can also aid in childcare, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, financial services, and eldercare needs.

**Virtual Health / Telemedicine:** Since many medical facilities have limited in-person patients, phone and video appointments have increased rapidly in Canada. Virtual Health connects employees to a General Practitioner or nurse twenty-four hours a day for mental health related issues, including referrals to a psychiatrist, psychologist, or paramedical.

**Paramedical Practitioners:** Psychologists, Clinical Counsellors and Masters of Social Work are paramedical practitioners often included in an employee benefits plan. The majority of plans include \$500 or less per year in coverage, often insufficient for treatment. Employers have been reviewing these amounts and considering them separate

from practitioners such as chiropractors and massage, pushing the benchmark to \$1000-\$5000 for psychologists.

**Pharmacogenetic Testing:** Pharmacogenetics is a way of testing an individual's DNA to determine their expected reaction to a medication before prescribing it. Doctors have traditionally prescribed drugs based on standard approvals and therapeutic indications, however with Pharmacogenetic Testing the physician can identify the patient's individual profile to optimize care. Testing can help prevent patients from testing medications for extended periods in an effort to 'find what's working'. Testing can help patients with Mental Health conditions predict the likely effectiveness and response of a suggested drug.

**Mental Health Programs:** Similar to EAP and Virtual Health, most Mental Health Programs are delivered digitally through an app and include self-guided assessments, access to resources, programs including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (iCBT), health coaching, and specific well-being support for teens.

**Health Care Navigation:** These programs are sometimes related to second opinion services, aiding employees who have received a broad diagnosis connect with specialized nurses that provide guidance. Employees are supported through initial assessment, physician consultations, referrals, and psychiatric services. Navigation also supplies education and coaching for self management strategies.

**Healthcare Spending Accounts:** Allocates corporate dollars to pay for personal medical expenses such as prescription drugs, medical cannabis, naturopathic visits, and therapy. The [Canada Revenue Agency](#) (CRA) determines the eligible expenses in accordance with the Income Tax Act (Canada). As with other employee benefit programs, an HCSA is a tax-deductible benefit, and the benefits are received tax-free.

**Wellness:** There are many standard Wellness items which encompasses personalized health such as: daycare, gym memberships, vitamins, personal training, smoking cessation, ergonomic office equipment, and meditation classes.

While the majority of Canada's largest employers have adapted mental health benefits such as EAP, small business owners are now more than ever investing in the importance of mental health. Prior to Covid-19, CloudAdvisors reported only 10-15% of small employers in common industries included an EAP. Today that number is over 25%, a large increase in adoption of these benefits, however with 98% of Canada's employers being under 100 employees, many small businesses still have opportunity to improve.

Workplace mental health is the most important issue organizations are facing today. Establishing a mentally healthy workplace for isolated and overworked employees is becoming an ongoing priority for business leaders. Employers and their Advisors can now leverage technology like CloudAdvisors to monitor their plan in the marketplace and identifying trends or gaps in coverage. The mental health downfall is being met with an increase in mental health support for working Canadians, where does your company stack up?

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