

PUTTING WORDS TO ACTION:

5 real-life examples of how employers are making health equity a reality



While lack of quality healthcare access is nothing new, the COVID-19 pandemic shone a renewed spotlight on the inequities and inefficiencies that exist within our nation's healthcare system. As we learned, it's going to take more than company-sponsored health insurance to give everyone equal opportunities to live their healthiest lives, no matter who they are, where they live, or how much money they make.

According to a [McKinsey & Company study of employee healthcare and benefits offerings](#), over two-thirds (65%) of all full-time employees at large US companies have "at least one unmet basic need." 66% of LGBTQ+ employees report two or more unmet basic needs. And 69% of employees of color who earn less than \$100,000 have two or more unmet basic needs compared to only 49% of their white counterparts. So [health inequity](#) is alive and well, and we're past due to fix it.

Today, it's our job as HR pros to ensure that our employees have access to healthcare that's tailored to their needs. Addressing the pressing need for health equity requires more than a commitment in a glossy brochure or press release. It means companies must define health more broadly, encompassing physical, mental, and financial wellness. It means they must offer an inclusive benefits program that addresses employees' unique needs. And it means that employee benefits must be easy to understand, access, and use.

Leading employers are starting to embrace health equity.

More and more employers are starting to address the inequities that lead to poor health outcomes for a variety of underrepresented groups.

For example, the Black Community Innovation Coalition, whose members include Accenture, Best Buy, Genentech, Medtronic, State Farm, Target, and Walmart, has developed a [care concierge and healthcare navigation platform](#) that removes barriers to care for Black Americans. A growing number of companies are [covering travel expenses for employees who need abortions](#). And more businesses are adopting flexible work schedules, such as [four-day work weeks](#), to promote well-being and accommodate the needs of parents and caregivers.

On the following pages, we'll highlight ways that businesses are turning their commitments into concrete actions. Let's take a closer look at how five companies are making health equity a reality both within and outside their office walls.

44%

of employers have made health equity a priority in the last 2 years

[SOURCE](#)

BOOZ ALLEN HAMILTON

Destigmatizing seeking and receiving care

Booz Allen Hamilton is a global consulting firm with 29,000 employees. Its guiding purpose is “to empower people to change the world.” And the company applies this mission to changing the lives of its employees, too.

In 2020, the company recognized the twin pandemic affecting employees: COVID-19 and systemic racism and inequality. These stressors have led to depression and anxiety, and made it harder for employees to focus and innovate at work (much less maintain their health).

Since then, the company has embarked on a series of wellness efforts:

- Establishing a physical and mental wellness program, called “PowerUP,” that includes an internal group of “first responders” who report warning signs of emotional suffering and help employees access mental health resources
- Requiring all leaders to attend annual training in mental health and emotional wellness
- Holding an annual mental health symposium called “Reignite Your Spark”
- Starting an employee-led diversity, equity, and inclusion movement, called “Unstoppable Together,” designed to deepen people’s “understanding of the complex issues facing the modern workforce”
- Scheduling “Let Us Be Heard” sessions focused on social inequality
- Expanding benefits for caregivers, including additional PTO hours and family support services for children and adult dependents
- Providing financial support to help employees deal with pandemic-related hardships through a Resilience Fund
- Supporting employees through an employee assistance program that provides up to eight clinical counseling or crisis intervention sessions for employees and their spouses, partners, and dependents, free of charge

According to Betty Thompson, Booz Allen’s Chief People Officer, the company prioritizes making sure employees have access to the resources they need.

Thompson noted:

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Our company’s comprehensive programs emphasize physical wellness, the importance of being part of a community, financial wellness, and then mental wellness at the early stages.

The company also promotes openness and transparency that allows employees to feel at ease using the employee assistance program and asking for mental health support. Thompson observed, “The most important thing is to just ask people how they’re doing. Just that. That question shows you care and is a great opening.” She added, “When you have leaders who will stand up and tell their own colleagues, that makes a big difference.”



Betty Thompson
is an executive vice president and chief people officer at Booz Allen Hamilton. She drives the company’s people strategy, including its diversity, equity, and inclusion strategy.

ADP

Building a workforce that reflects the diverse world we live in

ADP, a global provider of cloud-based human capital management solutions and business outsourcing services, HR analytics, and compliance, takes a holistic approach to advancing health equity in the workplace.

In a [recent interview](#), ADP Chief Diversity and Talent Officer [Bob Lockett](#) said, “Health is wealth. We think everyone should have the same opportunity for a healthy quality of life, which is why our organization is trying to move the needle so we all can have a better lifestyle as we age.”

For ADP, health equity begins with job security. Lockett explained:

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We believe that the opportunity to achieve health equity starts with secure employment. Once you have job stability and access to great health care benefits, you can then start to take advantage of employer benefits and see positive health outcomes.

To build greater inclusiveness, ADP has increased its outreach to underrepresented communities. The company fine-tuned its recruiting strategy to include a more diverse set of recruiters, because it recognizes the importance of representation for prospective employees. To amplify its results, ADP has also partnered with OneTen, a coalition of CEOs and companies with the goal of upskilling and hiring 1 million Black individuals who do not have a four-year degree.

ADP also eliminates barriers and encourages healthy habits for all employees in a variety of other ways:

- Health-based incentive programs
- Education on choosing the right health benefits
- On-site healthcare at larger locations with no out-of-pocket costs
- All-inclusive health care benefits to any domestic partner
- Access to mental health programs

In discussing the importance of on-site health care, Lockett commented, “There are certain health challenges different communities might face. So there’s opportunity to educate people about specific precautions they might take, such as the importance of maintaining a healthy weight and eating healthy foods to help lower cholesterol and blood pressure.”

ADP also wants employees to know that each person counts. “We want [our employees] to have the opportunity to be [their] authentic selves, to have the support and the mental health space [they] need to be effective at [their] role and have a great quality of life.”



Bob Lockett

is ADP's chief diversity and talent officer and holds responsibility for the company's diversity, corporate social responsibility, and talent strategy.

HEARST

Expanding healthcare access to underrepresented employees

Hearst is a global media services company that operates in 40 countries. Every day, Hearst’s television networks, newspapers, magazines, and websites address pressing social issues, including diversity, equity, and inclusion. And the company addresses these issues internally as well for its 23,000 employees.

David Carey, Hearst’s senior vice president of public affairs and communications, said that the pandemic and recent social justice movements was a catalyst for the company to reconsider its DEI practices, and identify opportunities for improvement. One of their focuses was health equity, so the company audited its health benefits practices “through the lens of whether our benefits and programs are fair and equitable.”

As a result, the company has enhanced its maternity, family planning, caregiving, and transgender care benefits. The company is also studying the access and affordability of care. Specifically, the company is examining enrollment in high-deductible and point-of-service plans as well as “health care utilization by key conditions, such as cancer, and how access to high-quality oncology breaks down among employees, particularly by race, ethnicity, and income.”

Maria Walsh, Hearst’s senior vice president and head of benefits, described the problems facing lower-income employees. “I think we have to understand that some employees who are on the lower salary range are under-insuring themselves.”

Because these employees are selecting less expensive plans, Walsh comments:

“ [Lower-income employees are] probably not accessing care as they should, outside of maybe preventive care, because it’s unaffordable.

To improve access, Hearst also offers:

- Mental health services to support employee stress and burnout
- Six therapy sessions free to all employees and their households, plus additional free telemedicine visits
- A flexible, hybrid work environment
- Well-being webinars virtually and on-site throughout the year on topics including anxiety and stress
- A \$25,000 lifetime reimbursement for the costs of adopting a child or surrogacy to support “every path to parenthood”
- Access to culturally knowledgeable, high-quality providers attuned to the needs of the LGBTQ+ and other communities
- A dependent care flexible spending account and a dependent care subsidy
- Tuition assistance for courses related to an employee’s position or general career

The goal, Walsh said, was to develop “a workplace environment of kind of greater sensitivity to important issues, of course to diversity, but also to mental health within their offices.”



Maria Walsh
is a senior vice president and head of benefits at Hearst.



David Carey
is Hearst’s senior vice president of public affairs and communications.

NIELSEN

Supporting the whole person and closing the gender gap

Nielsen, a global leader in audience measurement and data and analytics, puts diversity, equity, and inclusion at the heart of everything it does. The company made a commitment to fighting racism in mid-2020 and has since renewed that focus, with a particular emphasis on equity.

In addition to addressing equity in employment, including hiring, promotion, and pay, the company is building a workplace of inclusion. For Nielsen, that begins with managers setting an example in inclusive leadership. The company has equipped its managers with tools and resources to help employees bring their best selves to work, and its chief diversity officer, Sandra Sims-Williams, has chosen to “challenge discrimination, directly impact the lives of thousands of employees, and pay it forward to lift up underrepresented groups.”

As part of achieving these goals, Nielsen offers a bevy of wellness and health equity initiatives:

- “Whole You,” a comprehensive, coordinated benefits program that brings together employee health and wellness, including physical, emotional, financial, social, and environmental well-being; it includes self-assessments, tools, resources, and guides to holistic wellness in areas such as nutrition, exercise, stress management, and work-life balance
- A mental health hub where employees and their families can find resources to support their physical, emotional, and mental health
- Global wellness initiatives on-site, including webinars on topics such as financial planning and stress management as well as exercise classes
- Monthly on-site visits from holistic health and wellness coaches, nutritionists, and exercise experts
- Rewards of up to \$300 for exercising, making healthy eating choices, tracking sleep, and getting appropriate immunizations, relevant health testing, and an annual physical
- Twice-annual mental health awareness and suicide prevention training, plus webinars on mental health topics
- Counseling sessions for all employees and their family members ages six and older, plus coaching, mindfulness training, crisis support, and more at no cost
- A fitness program subsidy of up to \$75 per quarter

Nielsen also started a campaign, #ChooseToChallenge, designed to close the gender gap. The company recognizes that:

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We have a larger role to play in the industry and in the broader community to ensure equal representation and counting of women and across all diversity and inclusion factors.

Part of that recognition is working on improving screen time for women over the age of 50. But a critical part of this movement centers on employees. Nielsen has “refocused its efforts and priorities around pay equity, doubled its parental leave, created new norms around work flexibility, as well as expanded its mental health and employee assistance programs, among other initiatives.”



Sandra Sims-Williams is the chief diversity officer at Nielsen. Her responsibilities include developing a more inclusive culture at the company and increasing diverse representation.

Are you inspired to work toward greater health equity?

Now is the time to start making sure that your benefits offerings are equitable for everyone. That your employees' basic needs are met. That your benefits are accessible and understandable. And that you've eliminated any stigma that makes employees feel uncomfortable asking for help and receiving care.

Not only are these things the right things to do because they will help your employees and their families live healthier, happier lives, but they will also ensure that everyone feels valued and supported, strengthening employee engagement and productivity—and ultimately, your employer brand.

Find out how you can improve access to benefits for everyone.

[BOOK A DEMO](#)

