

Mental Health in the Workplace:

Will Gen Z Men Shrink the Stigma?



Research from The Standard shows that the men of Generation Z take leave for mental health at a higher rate than men of other age groups. This finding highlights the prospect of reducing the stigma attached to mental health issues by tuning into Gen Z men's perspective on emotional well-being. It also points the way toward increasing men's acceptance of psychological support — and even leave in general. Shrinking the stigma not only creates a kinder workplace. It can reduce turnover, increase employee engagement and lead to better financial outcomes.



Create a Kinder Culture and Improve the Bottom Line

Leveraging Gen Z men's outlook on mental health can socialize acceptance of leave and support for psychological issues. And that can boost retention and productivity.



Gen Z men are more likely to take a mental health leave of absence than men of other generations.

This data points to an avenue for employers to reduce stigma across workplace generations — especially among men.



Gen Z men and women are equally likely to take mental health leave.

Previous generations of men were often discouraged from acknowledging emotional needs. Reaching the point where a cohort of young men can prioritize mental health at the same level as women in their age group marks an important milestone.



More Gen Z men than Gen Z women report not returning to their job after taking a leave for mental health.

Exploring the support needed by Gen Z men to successfully return to work after a mental health absence can result in greater engagement and lower turnover with this age cohort.

The takeaway

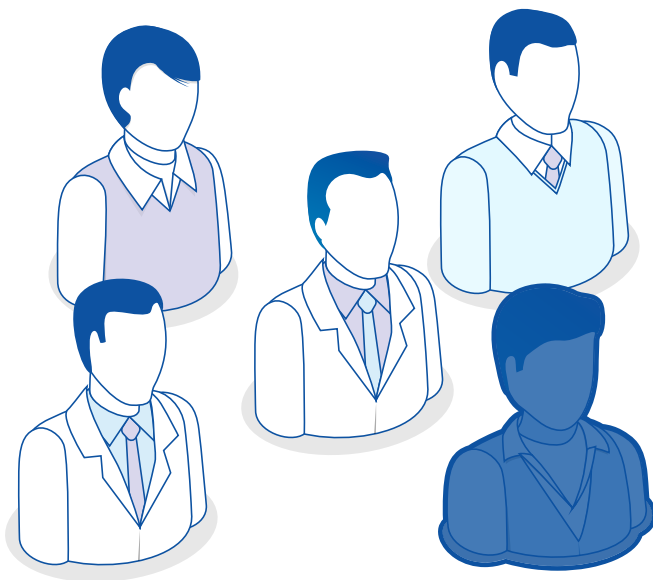
The findings on Gen Z men present an opportunity for HR to focus — or refocus — on mental health and wellness benefits. One avenue is inviting the perspectives of Gen Z men as a way to lessen the mental health stigma for men of other generations. Another is to apply the attitudes of Gen Z men toward mental health to create communications targeted at men. Connecting men with the right support for a successful return to work — or for staying at work while receiving treatment — can lower absenteeism and strengthen engagement.

Mental Health Comes Into Focus for Gen Z Men

More than older men, the men of Generation Z are prioritizing their mental health.

It's common to think younger people feel more willing to seek support for mental health challenges. Research bears this out. According to an analysis by KFF: "Compared to older adults, young adults (ages 18 – 26) were more likely to receive mental health treatment and experienced the highest increase in receipt of treatment over time."^{*}

Research from The Standard shows that 20% of Gen Z men — members of the youngest workplace cohort — report taking leave for mental health reasons.



1 in 5 Gen Z Men

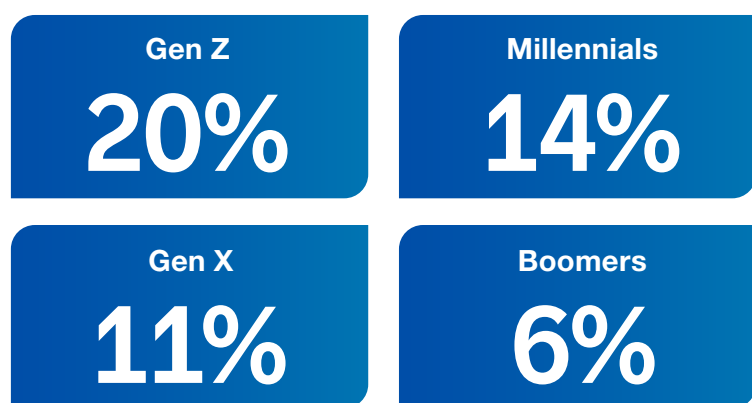
report taking leave for mental health.

* Karen Diep, Brittini Frederiksen, Usha Ranji, Ivette Gomez, and Alina Salganicoff, [Access and Coverage for Mental Health Care for Women](https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/access-and-coverage-for-mental-health-care-for-women/), KFF, May 6, 2025, <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/access-and-coverage-for-mental-health-care-for-women/>, accessed Feb. 3, 2026

Will Gen Z Men Normalize Seeking Help for Other Men?

The Standard's data reveals that, of men taking leave for mental health reasons, Gen Zers are more likely to do so than men in other age groups.

Men's Mental Health Leaves Across Workplace Generations



The inclination of Gen Z men to pursue mental health support runs counter to the outdated idea that men must project strength and avoid seeking help. This young cohort of men showing greater willingness to take leave for mental health may help reduce stigma across age groups. Ideally, Gen Z men are setting an example that caring for one's mental health is not only acceptable — but beneficial — for an individual's well-being.



Are Gen Z Men the Key to Reducing Stigma?

Asking Gen Z men about their views on caring for their mental health could yield valuable insights on how to connect more men with available resources. Employers who understand the views of Gen Z men may have an easier time breaking down other men's resistance to taking needed leave.

Employers should also consider approaching Gen Z men in the effort to drive a cultural shift on mental health. The young men who've experienced mental health challenges stand as potential allies in launching anti-stigma campaigns. They also may be more likely to join and support an employee resource group devoted to mental health.

What if seeking assistance, including leave, isn't well supported within a company's culture? The ideas and language of Gen Z men might still help HR leaders fashion communications that move the needle for more men in the workplace.



I had serious anxiety and depression, so I chose to take some time off for myself.”

22-year-old man earning \$50K – \$99K



Gen Z Men and Women Take Mental Health Leave at the Same Rates



What happens in a workplace where men become as willing as women to focus on their mental health?

Gen Z men and their relationship to their emotional well-being may soon allow employers to answer this question. Our research shows that equal numbers of Gen Z men and women say they've taken a leave for mental health reasons.

This finding isn't entirely surprising given that men of all ages aren't far behind women in saying they face mental health challenges. Research from KFF shows that "in general, slightly larger shares of women describe their mental health status as "fair" or "poor" compared to men (28% vs. 23%)."

Review Benefits Through a Mental Health Lens

It's a good idea to regularly evaluate benefits to ensure they meet employee needs. As they work with their benefits provider to assess portfolios, employers should also view programs through a mental health lens to gauge the support they offer.

To ensure benefits offer sufficient resources for mental health, employers can look at whether workers have easy access to providers. Reducing copayments for mental health treatment might be another option. Companies could also explore offering employees an EAP program or other counseling support.

* Karen Diep, Brittini Frederiksen, Usha Ranji, Ivette Gomez, and Alina Salganicoff, [Access and Coverage for Mental Health Care for Women](https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/access-and-coverage-for-mental-health-care-for-women/), KFF, May 6, 2025, <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/access-and-coverage-for-mental-health-care-for-women/>, accessed Feb. 3, 2026

Gen Z Men Face Hurdles in Coming Back to Work

Gen Z men have the same level of mental health-related absences as Gen Z women. But they're more likely than the women of their generation not to return to work in these instances.

For employers, Gen Z men not coming back to their jobs can mean higher turnover and loss of expertise and institutional knowledge. For employees, not returning to work can have lasting effects on their careers and lifetime income.

The Cost of Doing Nothing

Regardless of generation or gender, untreated mental health is costly for employees and employers. Workers might endure symptoms without relief and be less engaged at work. For companies, lack of both treatment and engagement could lead to negative impacts on health care costs, productivity and turnover.

Gen Z Men Are Less Likely to Return to Work After Mental Health Leave
(% reporting not returning to work)

Gen Z Men

20%

Gen Z Women

13%

Average annual cost per employee due to mental health issues: \$1,488*

That includes lost time (\$445), job turnover (\$533) and health care (\$510).*

* [The Economic Impact of Poor Mental Health](#), Integrated Benefits Institute, November 2024

Summary of Findings

Digging into the mindset of Gen Z men could provide the building blocks for a strategy that more effectively supports men facing mental health issues in the workplace. Employers who adopt a robust approach to men's mental health will position their companies to increase engagement and productivity and improve the bottom line.

Key Data:

- Compared with men of other generations, more Gen Z men — one in five — report taking a mental health leave of absence.
- Twenty percent of both Gen Z men and Gen Z women have taken a mental health leave.
- The rate of Gen Z men not returning to a job after a mental health leave is seven percentage points higher than for Gen Z women.

Why It Matters:

- Employers can leverage Gen Z men's tendency to seek help for mental health conditions to create stronger communication with men of all ages. Targeted messaging on mental health resources can connect men facing mental health issues with the right support for returning to or staying at work.
- Having a negative stigma attached to mental health issues doesn't support a healthy workplace culture, which can negatively impact employee well-being. In turn, poor well-being could result in higher absenteeism and presenteeism and lower productivity.
- Because employee engagement leads to greater retention and profitability, companies that help men feel safe in seeking support for mental health issues — and leaves overall — will likely see lower turnover and better financial outcomes.



By offering employee assistance programs, accommodations or other employer-provided mental health benefits, organizations can empower men to take care of their mental health. Providing this type of support also tends to have a positive impact on productivity.”

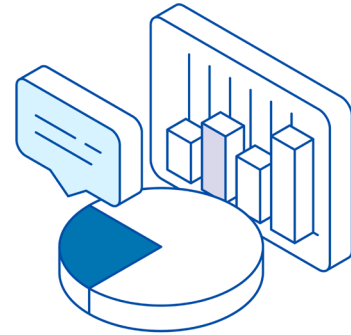
*Nathan Whiteley, VP Absence and Disability Services
The Standard*



About the Research

On behalf of The Standard, a third-party research firm conducted a 15-minute online survey of 5,000 participants. Most currently receive some employee benefits.

- Fielded: ~70% women (N=3,468) and ~30% men (1,523)
- Ages: 18 – 70
- Field dates: March 10 – 27, 2025



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