



# Making Mental Health a Part of Your DEIB Strategy

A roadmap to achieving a more equitable and inclusive workplace



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## Introduction

**Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) initiatives have expanded rapidly in recent years as companies and their leaders have made an effort to address the systemic issues of racism, discrimination, and inequality within their organizations.**

The national outcry following the murder of George Floyd, the Great Resignation, mass layoffs, and other critical events in the wake of the pandemic created a turning point, spurring CEOs and HR leaders to reflect more deeply on their DEIB strategies. HR leaders were given both the green light and the financial support to move forward with new initiatives.

**54%**

of employees said their employer's DEIB policy has a positive impact on their mental health

However, in the last year, DEIB programs have lost some momentum with cutbacks to DEIB teams, less leadership support around DEIB efforts, and rising misinformation around the purpose of DEIB. Despite these challenges, a majority of employed Americans (56%) believe the focus on increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in their workplace is a good thing.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, in Headspace's annual report on workforce trends, over half of employees (54%) said their employer's DEIB policy has a positive impact on their mental health.

With the changing landscape around DEIB, HR leaders and teams need support to build out and implement successful DEIB initiatives. In this paper, we provide a guide for HR leaders to foster a more equitable and inclusive workplace by making mental health a part of their DEIB strategy.

## Start at the intersection of mental health and DEIB

Mental health is inextricably linked to one's sense of identity, belonging, and self worth. In the workplace, when a person's identity – gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability – is questioned, used against them, or used to exclude them, their mental health is greatly impacted. Investing in workplace mental health runs parallel with an effective DEIB strategy because they are both rooted in a company's understanding of systems within the organization that impact an employee's ability to thrive – and the company's willingness to fix those systems by providing resources and partnering with employees to change internal factors.

A mental health benefits partner can help you better understand your employee population and take advantage of the variety of data you have readily available. What are the demographics of your teams? What does productivity and absenteeism look like at your organization? Have your employees or employee resource groups provided you with feedback? All of this information provides critical details about your employees and the challenges they may be facing.

## Meet your employees where they are

There is no denying there is a lot of work to be done to create a more equal society. The economic gender gap, the consistently higher unemployment rates for Black and Hispanic workers, LGBTQ+ workplace discrimination, and the significant wage gap between workers with disabilities and their non-disabled peers are just some of the critical issues we have yet to solve.

Providing access to mental health support is one way you can help your employees feel supported as they navigate these challenges and lay the groundwork for a culture change within your organization. As an end-to-end mental health platform, Headspace provides a variety of strategies and tools to foster a more supportive and resilient workplace. Content like our Black Joy Collection and Pride collection, resources for ERGs and culturally responsive organizational support, for example, ensure that your company is supported at the organizational, team, and individual levels.



Headspace Culture offers best-in-class services to help you better understand your organization's population and engage in best practices to reach them. In addition to weekly reports on monthly active use and what content in-app members are using most, Headspace Culture provides leaders and managers with training on how to build cultures of growth, empathy, and compassion.

## Invest in culturally responsive care

Mental health benefits can contribute to the success of DEIB initiatives by helping employees work through the challenges they're facing, both professionally and personally. Investing in *culturally responsive* mental healthcare services takes it a step further, ensuring that underrepresented communities in the workplace are getting the high quality, personalized care they need.

### **CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE MENTAL HEALTH CARE CAN WORK IN TANDEM WITH YOUR DEIB PROGRAMS BY:**

- Giving your employees access to providers from different cultural backgrounds and identities, who understand that identity and lived experience influence their needs
- Reducing barriers to care experienced by underrepresented populations
- Providing a safe and productive space to articulate and work through workplace challenges
- Delivering better experiences and outcomes for employees with different cultural backgrounds and identities

With a global footprint of 200+ countries and regions, Headspace is committed to hiring and working with inclusive care providers, from behavioral coaches to therapists and psychiatrists. These providers receive ongoing training on delivering culturally responsive care, with a focus on topics like racial trauma, LGBTQ+ issues, gender discrimination, veterans affairs, and more. In addition, Headspace also offers responsive content in a member's today tab that helps them to work through world events happening in real time.

## **Create safe spaces**

Creating safe spaces for employees to open up about their individual and collective experiences is essential to both a successful DEIB strategy and employee mental health strategy. In recent years, Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), internal employee-led groups based on shared identities or interests, have risen in popularity because they help to facilitate safe spaces and promote inclusivity.

### **IF YOU HAVEN'T DONE SO ALREADY, THINK ABOUT CREATING DIFFERENT TYPES OF SPACES:**

- Support spaces (for members that belong to a specific community, plus allies) - These spaces invite all employees to gather together and discuss current events or issues that may affect a specific community or communities, with no judgment.
- Affinity spaces (for members that belong to a specific community) - These spaces are designed for members of a specific community to join together and share their unique experiences with each other in a safe, supportive environment.

What's crucial is that ERGs are properly funded by companies, as well as supported and validated by senior leadership. The most effective ERGs have helped to attract and retain diverse talent in support of an organization's DEIB strategy, increasing representation of marginalized communities.<sup>2</sup> ERGs have also helped employees join together in tackling company-wide challenges<sup>3</sup>, so they find trust and accountability in each other and in their leadership.

# Leverage mental health resources and tools

As a HR leader, you are often the first stop on an employee's journey to getting the support they need, whether it's for a negative experience they've had as an employee or for guidance around their benefits and other related issues. Mental health benefits partners can serve as an external resource to help your employees navigate the challenges they're going through, as well as to support you as you deal with issues that are often complex and stressful.

## 41%

of HR leaders reported using their mental health benefits regularly

In Headspace's annual survey on workforce trends, only 41% of HR leaders reported using their mental health benefits regularly, compared to 64% of CEOs and 73% of employees.<sup>4</sup> In order to be the best advocate for a healthy workplace, you need to ensure you have the support, resources, and tools you need to care for your own mental health. Modeling positive behavior, whether it's promoting DEIB initiatives or tapping into your mental health benefits, can encourage others to do the same.

Taking advantage of the mental healthcare you have on hand will also help you on your journey to becoming a more inclusive leader. When identity-based traumatic events occur, either in the workplace or out in the world, you'll be better equipped to support your employees who are most impacted and guide your company's leaders on taking supportive action as an organization. As you encourage employees to bring their whole and best selves to work, you'll also be able to bring your whole and best self to work.

# Create meaningful, lasting change

What's the ultimate goal when it comes to DEIB? To drive meaningful, lasting change for your employees, both current and prospective, that will contribute to change on a larger scale – while also making your organization a more robust and successful entity.

As you review your DEIB programs, find ways to measure what works and what doesn't. Don't be afraid to acknowledge mistakes along the way. Proceeding with purpose will improve outcomes, while performative actions will yield fleeting results at best.

Here are some guiding DEIB principles Headspace follows as we work to create change within our own organization and create an inclusive mental health strategy:

### **Dismantle tokenism**

Give racial, ethnic, and other minority ambassadors an active role; don't just use them to create an aesthetic or appearance of diversity.

### **Build in belonging**

Code diversity into your product/services and content as status quo and continue checking in with internal stakeholders/community members to see how things are resonating.

### **Disrupt single stories**

Rather than minimizing social differences in your communications and storytelling, wholeheartedly embrace them while also showing how they can coexist in an inspiring, productive way.

## Design nothing about your community without them

Use inclusive decision-making approaches, participatory methods, and co-creation strategies to elicit community input.

## Showcase diverse experiences

Create a supportive space where people from underrecognized groups feel seen, heard, and safe to share their stories.

## Stop to bias check

Continuously align, check, and validate against your broader DEIB roadmap and true north goals.



With our evidence-based courses grounded in inclusivity to our care team that reflects a variety of backgrounds and identities, Headspace is designed to compassionately connect with every individual regardless of their identity. Our DEIB priorities include ensuring responsive and relevant content, accessibility, a care team from different cultural backgrounds and identities, and support for marginalized communities.

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center, 2023. "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Workplace."

<sup>2</sup> McKinsey and Company, 2022. "Effective employee resource groups are key to inclusion at work. Here's how to get them right."

<sup>3</sup> Great Place to Work, 2023. "What Are Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)?"

<sup>4</sup> Headspace, 2023. "Fifth Annual Workforce Attitudes Toward Mental Health."

