

How PGx Benefits are Helping Employers Tackle the Mental Health Crisis

A faster path to better mental health



The mental health of the U.S. workforce is plummeting. It's a reality that employers grapple with daily – a massive challenge that's being met with an onslaught of wellness-oriented benefits, from counseling resources to flexible work arrangements. However, more than half of employees say their employer's well-being initiatives were either not helpful or slightly helpful at best, according to a recent [survey](#) by The Conference Board.

In fact, [prescription drug use](#) for mental health conditions continues to rise. This is where there's untapped opportunity to improve employee health – and lower healthcare costs – with precision medicine benefit programs fueled by pharmacogenomics (PGx).

A Faster Path to Better Mental Health

While new developments in PGx (the study of how a person's DNA impacts his or her response to medication) hold promise throughout the healthcare spectrum, the topic is particularly salient for mental health given that approximately 60 FDA-approved medications used to treat mental health concerns are impacted by genetics. These drug-gene interactions affect efficacy, often spur adverse drug events, and, if left unknown, can end up sending individuals down a time-consuming and expensive path before landing on an appropriate medication regimen.

Rather than spending critical time going through multiple rounds of medication adjustments to get the drugs and dosage just right, PGx testing and analysis helps ensure individuals are taking the right medications for them, right away, based on natural variations in their DNA.

Coriell Life Sciences' [Corigen® Medication Safety Program](#) takes this analysis even further by factoring in the impact of dozens of other factors, such as an individual's age, medical conditions, other medications, what they eat and drink, and other lifestyle factors. All an employee has to do – after enrolling in the Program and receiving their DNA kit in the mail – is provide a saliva sample at home and mail it into the laboratory. Whether the insights inform the selection of a newly prescribed drug or flag an adjustment to an existing medication regimen, this personalized knowledge helps individuals fast-forward to better health.

Highly Personalized Healthcare

By empowering employees – and their providers – with a clear view of which medications are the safest and most effective for them specifically, doctors and pharmacists can better personalize treatment plans for mental health as well as other conditions. For example, PGx has been demonstrated to improve outcomes related to depression, cancer, pain management, and many other conditions.

All it takes is one comprehensive PGx text, along with the proper analysis and reporting, to provide insight that is clinically relevant for an individual's lifetime. This precision medicine approach streamlines the course of care and reduces the risk and inefficiencies inherent in trial-and-error prescribing.

Controlling Rising Healthcare Costs

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, adverse drug events in outpatient settings account for 3.5 million physician office visits, 1 million ER visits, and 125,000 outpatient hospital admissions annually. In fact, treating adverse drug events in the U.S. may cost up to [\\$30.1 billion](#) every year. It's easy to see how the cost of getting medications wrong reverberates through the healthcare service model and echoes back as wasted resources, time, and poor health.

[With employer healthcare costs expected to rise more than five percent in 2022, HR and benefits leaders will need to find new avenues to contain their organizations' expenses while simultaneously competing on the benefits front amid a war for talent. That's exactly where PGx comes in.](#)

Just consider that the sponsoring organization of one of our flagship Corigen programs is realizing an average charged-to-plan savings of \$218.82 per member per month. Over the course of the first 32 months, these savings have accumulated to more than \$7,000 per member. The organization is also containing costs, with non-enrolled individuals' costs growing month-over-month unabated. These metrics underscore that PGx programs not only improve patient health but also drive real, bottom-line benefits.

While PGx is emerging as a formidable tool for improving mental health, its value reaches far beyond any single therapeutic area. PGx benefits provide employers a significant opportunity to enable safer, smarter healthcare for their employees all around. And, with new advances in technology, these benefit programs are easier than ever to implement. That's just one of the many reasons PGx implementations among both payers and providers are picking up globally – and why PGx is poised to shape the future of healthcare.

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