



# Mental Health and the Federal Workforce: What Can I Do?

A Guide for Federal Managers, Supervisors and Employees



OFFICE OF DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT POLICY  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

What can  
**YOU** do?  
THE CAMPAIGN FOR  
DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT

# What Can I Do to Promote a Mental Health-Friendly Federal Workplace?

When it comes to well-being at work, we all have an important role to play. This Workplace Guide—a companion resource to the video titled “Mental Health and the Federal Workforce: What Can I Do?”—outlines ways federal employees at all levels can help promote a mental health-friendly workplace, for the benefit of themselves and their colleagues. Agency leaders, employee resource groups (ERGs) and others are encouraged to use it to raise awareness about this important topic and/or facilitate discussions about collaborative approaches to workplace well-being.



To access the video, visit [dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/mental-health](https://dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/mental-health).

*Thank you to our partners at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Office of Personnel Management, as well as the U.S. Department of Education and Access Board, for contributing their time and expertise to this video.*

# Fostering inclusive, supportive federal workplaces, for *all* employees.

**The Federal Government is committed to fostering supportive, equitable, inclusive and accessible workplaces for all workers, including those with disabilities.**

This includes people with mental health conditions. Every day, people with mental health conditions work in all sorts of positions in federal workplaces across the country and the world.

We foster mental health-friendly workplaces in a number of ways. These include:

1

## **Awareness**

Raising **awareness** by educating employees and managers about mental health conditions and working to reduce stigma.

2

## **Accommodations**

Ensuring workplace **accommodations** and other supports are provided to enable people with mental health conditions to perform their best.

3

## **Assistance**

Offering employee **assistance**, which most agencies do through employee assistance programs, or EAPs.

4

## **Access**

Providing **access** to behavioral, mental health and substance abuse treatment through our employee health plans.

These strategies align to the “4 A’s” framework, which is a key part of the Mental Health Toolkit developed by ODEP’s Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN). To access this toolkit, visit [AskEARN.org/MentalHealth](https://www.odep.gov/AskEARN.org/MentalHealth).

# Mental Health and the Federal Workforce: *What Can Managers and Supervisors Do?*

**If you're in the role of a manager or supervisor, there's a lot you can do to foster a mental health-friendly federal workplace—for yourself and for others.**

One key strategy is ensuring all employees have the right tools and work environment to perform their best. For some employees with mental health conditions, this might involve making a reasonable accommodation, when requested.

Not all accommodations involve technology, equipment or physical changes to the work environment, and that is often the case when it comes to accommodations for people with mental health conditions. Furthermore, not all employees with a mental health condition will need an accommodation. For those who do, common examples include flexible work arrangements and scheduling, leave to assist in accessing treatment, a workplace mentor, more frequent breaks and other strategies, such as allowing food or drink at workstations to help with potential side effects of medication.

You can also refer employees seeking additional support to your agency's employee assistance program (EAP). EAPs assist employees and family members experiencing personal difficulties, including but not limited to mental health conditions, that might be impacting their job performance. In addition, you can take steps to make all employees aware of mental health service providers in their communities.

It is important to note that it is not your job to diagnose or ask or speculate about an employee's mental health. Rather, it is to supervise and ensure employees meet performance requirements—and address problems when they do not. Providing support and referring employees to assistance is an important strategy for doing so. Always remember to keep confidential any employee medical information you may learn about.

A reasonable accommodation is any change to the work environment, or the way a job is done, that enables someone with a disability to enjoy equal employment opportunities. Employers, including federal agencies, are required to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified employees or applicants with disabilities, unless doing so would cause an undue hardship.

# Mental Health and the Federal Workforce: What Can *Co-Workers* Do?

**As a co-worker, you can do a lot to help promote a mental health-friendly federal workplace, regardless of your position or level within the agency.**

To start, if a co-worker shares information with you about a mental health condition or is having problems at work that you feel might be a result of stress, anxiety or other mental health conditions, you can encourage them to seek help. Your agency's employee assistance program (EAP) is a good place to start. Nearly all federal agencies offer EAPs. EAPs assist employees and family members, including those with mental health conditions, experiencing personal difficulties that might be impacting their job performance.

You might also suggest your co-worker seek assistance outside of workplace programs, for instance, through a community mental health services provider. While it is not your role to provide solutions, your suggestion may serve as a first step in someone getting needed support. You can also remind co-workers with a mental health condition that they may be able to request a reasonable accommodation to assist with

performing their job, if they are open to talking to their manager or someone in your agency's Human Resources or Equal Employment Opportunity office about it. Remember that information about a person's disability should always be held in confidence.

More broadly, you can play an important role in creating a supportive, inclusive culture—both at work and in your community—by how you speak about mental health. Words matter. Discourage others from perpetuating stereotypes or using derogatory terms to describe people with mental health conditions. Co-workers should also be mindful of cultural sensitivities around mental health conditions. For a variety of reasons, including historical inequities, not all people have the same comfort level talking about the issue or accessing resources to help. Finally, all people have mental health needs, so remember to take care of your own and access support and resources, if needed.

It is important to note that it is not your role to diagnose or ask or speculate about a co-worker's mental health. But, by understanding more about mental health conditions and resources available to help people experiencing them, you may be able to help.

# Mental Health and the Federal Workforce: *What Can People with Mental Health Conditions Do?*

**If you're a federal employee with a mental health condition, it's important that you feel empowered to advocate for yourself, starting with asking for what you need to perform your best at work.**

Sometimes, this might mean requesting a reasonable accommodation. Common examples of accommodations for people with mental health conditions include flexible work arrangements and/or schedules, quiet office spaces or devices that create a quiet work environment, and changes in supervisory methods.

While federal agencies are required to provide reasonable accommodations under the circumstances described above, it's generally your responsibility to request them (although employers may ask applicants whether they will need a reasonable accommodation for the hiring process). To request an accommodation, you simply need to ask for an adjustment or change at work for a reason related to a medical condition or disability. You don't have to talk to your supervisor to request an accommodation; you may prefer to go to someone in your agency's Human Resources or

Equal Employment Opportunity office first.

You may be asked to provide documentation for your request from a healthcare professional documenting your condition and how it affects your work. If you do not want to disclose the specifics of your diagnosis, it may be sufficient for your healthcare professional to state the general type of disorder. Also know that, by law, this information must be kept confidential and separate from your personnel file.

As a federal employee, you will also be invited to self-identify (via a form) as a person with a disability. Just as with deciding whether to request an accommodation, choosing to self-identify is a personal choice. Know that the information you share must be kept confidential and separate from regular personnel files, in a similar manner to documentation provided for an accommodation request. Self-identification data is

collected and used in aggregate to help agencies understand and respond to the needs of their workforce better.

Finally, you may be in a position to educate others about mental health conditions. This may require a willingness to disclose, which again is a personal choice. But, even without disclosing, avenues for advocacy might exist through an employee resource group (ERG) or workplace activities around mental health and general disability awareness.



## Resources

Thank you for doing your part to promote a mental health-friendly federal workplace. By modeling best practices, federal agencies can help promote supportive workplaces for people in *all* sectors, all across America. The following resources can help:

### **Your agency's employee assistance program (EAP)**

EAPs assist federal employees experiencing personal difficulties, including but not limited to mental health conditions, that may be impacting their job performance. EAPs may also assist employees' family members.

### **U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)**

- **Mental Health at Work ([dol.gov/mentalhealth](https://dol.gov/mentalhealth))**  
DOL's *Mental Health at Work* initiative centralizes resources to assist private- and public-sector employers and workers to advance mental health and wellness in the workforce.
- **Job Accommodation Network (JAN) ([AskJAN.org](https://askjan.org))**  
JAN is the leading source of free, expert and confidential guidance on job accommodations for individuals with a range of disabilities, including mental health conditions.
- **Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) ([AskEARN.org](https://askearn.org))**  
EARN helps employers, including federal agencies, build inclusive workplace cultures. Its Mental Health Toolkit outlines best practices and examples of initiatives implemented by a variety of organizations.
- **Campaign for Disability Employment (CDE) ([WhatCanYouDoCampaign.org](https://whatcanyoudocampaign.org))**  
The CDE showcases supportive, inclusive workplaces for all workers through public awareness campaigns, one of which focuses specifically on workplace mental health.

### **U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) ([OPM.gov](https://opm.gov))**

OPM offers federal agency leaders and employees a variety of resources to support workplace well-being, including information about EAPs, employee wellness programs and reasonable accommodations.

### **U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)**

EEOC leads federal agencies and employees on all aspects of the Federal Government's equal

employment opportunity program, which prohibits discrimination on a number of factors, including disability, both apparent and non-apparent.

### **U.S. Access Board ([Access-Board.gov](https://access-board.gov))**

The U.S. Access Board promotes equality for people with disabilities through leadership in accessible design and the development of accessibility guidelines and standards.

### **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) ([SAMHSA.gov](https://samhsa.gov))**

SAMHSA works to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental health conditions on America's communities and offers materials agencies can use to educate employees, including treatment locators.

### **Center for Workplace Mental Health ([WorkplaceMentalHealth.org](https://workplacementalhealth.org))**

The Center for Workplace Mental Health offers trainings, case studies and other tools to help employers create a more supportive work environment and advance mental health policies in their organizations.

### **Mental Health America ([MHANational.org](https://mhanational.org))**

Mental Health America provides advocacy, education, research and services to people with mental health conditions and their families. It also offers resources for use in the workplace and runs an employer recognition program.

### **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) ([NAMI.org](https://nami.org))**

NAMI works to build better lives for people affected by mental health conditions and has hundreds of local affiliates across the U.S. Through its "StigmaFree Company" program, it also offers resources for use in the workplace.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, free and confidential 24-hour support is available. Contact the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Simply call, text or chat using 9-8-8.



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