



# Change your perspective: From 10,000 feet in the air to feet on the ground

How various levels of health data leads  
to a healthier workforce, healthier business

# Contents

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Want the full perspective? Then you'll need the view from the sky and feet on the ground.

How can high-level data help you determine the health landscape of your team? Use it to create a positive return on investment.

Collecting the right data – it's key. So is using the right tools at the right time (and from the right people) to support your workforce.

How does this work in the real world? We feature true-life examples of companies that created tangible and lasting change.

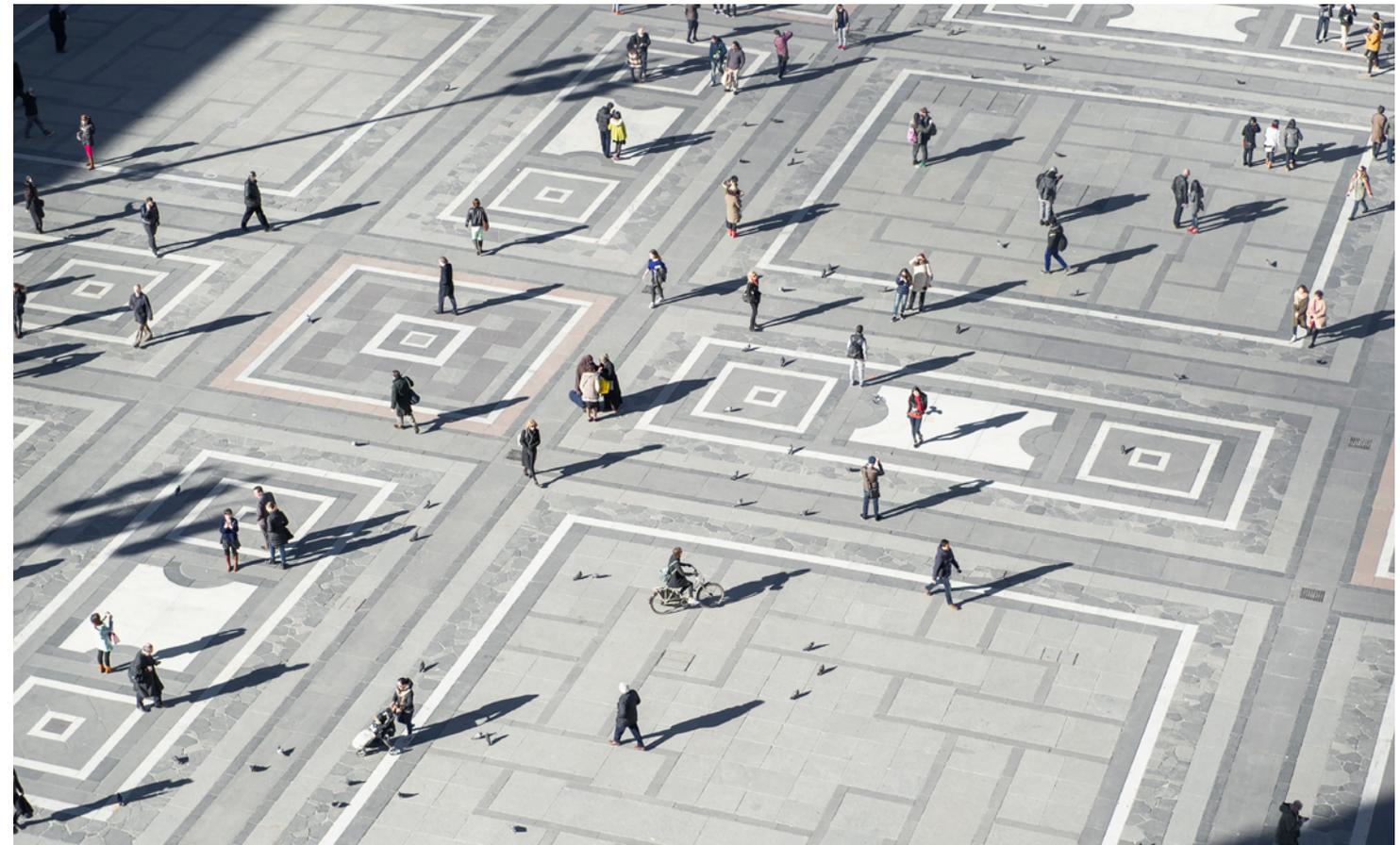
Here we spotlight the key takeaways that were discussed and the importance of C-suite support.

# Introduction

What data do you need? And how can you get it?

Imagine an aerial firefighter flying at 10,000 feet. From that distance, they can make out patches amid a lush landscape. As they descend to 3,000 feet, mottled red embers. Closer still, smoke makes them cough. The team reviews general data. But to really develop a plan of action, they also need feet on the ground to get the full picture of what might also affect the fire's path.

It's the same with understanding the health landscape for your team. Getting a full look at data could help you develop a game plan. Who's at risk? How does it impact your business? How could that knowledge inform your plan for prevention to create a healthier, happier and more productive workforce and community?





THE VIEW FROM 10,000 FEET:

# Understand your population

Most people in an organization understand that illness impacts the work environment. Poor health can lead to absenteeism, which can be a burden to coworkers. Or work falls through the cracks. This causes rising direct costs, including medical supplies, prescriptions, hospital admissions and other treatments. Then there are those on short-term disability. Or, as has recently been common, more people resigning.

High-level data can reveal trends related to the health of workers. Dissecting the data could help reveal what causes health concerns and clarify what impact they might have on your team and business.

For example, diabetes. Absenteeism can lead to about a 5% loss in productivity. But presenteeism, where a worker is present but less productive can cost over 18%. For depression, absenteeism costs about a 2.6% loss in productivity; presenteeism costs 14.5%. Other mental health issues caused by COVID-19 like anxiety, loneliness due to isolation and the loss of loved ones can also have an effect.<sup>2</sup>

However, understanding symptoms of poor productivity does not provide a clear path to solutions. Often, many factors are at play. For example, people with physical health conditions can also have serious mental health conditions that affect many aspects of their jobs.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, mental health conditions

can manifest themselves as physical symptoms. Either way, these issues have a business cost. But effective health programs can turn some of the red ink to black. Every US dollar applied to mental well-being programs for depression and anxiety, for example, results in a return on investment of \$4 US, due to better health and productivity.

To achieve returns like this or better, business leaders need a roadmap to better understand the problem and identify where and how they can help workers improve their health.

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# \$4 USD

**APPLIED TO MENTAL WELL-BEING PROGRAM RESULTS IN A RETURN ON INVESTMENT, DUE TO BETTER HEALTH AND PRODUCTIVITY.**



3,000 FEET:

## Expand your data

Public and industry-specific data can give your organization more context and detail of the high-level view. For example, researchers warn of a coming wave of long-COVID syndromes involving the heart, lung and nervous system, in part from new diagnoses directly linked to COVID-19 and in part from care deferred for months or years.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

Researchers have also noticed a rise in mental health issues due to COVID-19. Even among previously outgoing or optimistic people, depression, isolation and similar conditions increased during the pandemic.<sup>8</sup>

In the UK pre-pandemic, 10% of people reported symptoms of depression. That rose to 20% during the pandemic.<sup>9</sup> In the US, three times more people reported signs of depression in 2020 compared to pre-pandemic years.<sup>10</sup> For those who worked remotely, isolation became—and continues—to affect mental health. Financial concerns also have an impact on workers' mental health.

These broad data sets for workplace well-being are informative. But other types of data can offer insights that might be more relevant to your workforce.

For example, age can be a factor. In late 2021, one in 10 people under age 35 said they had “always” felt lonely in the prior 30 days. For people 65 and older, only 1 or 2 in 100 respondents reported the same.<sup>11</sup> These few examples demonstrate what research

confirms: a mental health condition like depression, for example, is a very specific health issue that requires very specific interventions.<sup>13</sup>

So, in order to help employees, an organization needs to collect the right data, using the right tools, at the right time and from the right people. However, getting such data can be resource intensive, researchers say.<sup>14</sup>

Where can you begin in supporting your workforce and improving your bottom line? By looking at other layers of data provide insight.

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3X

**MORE PEOPLE IN THE US  
REPORTED SIGNS OF DEPRESSION**

in 2020 compared to pre-pandemic years.<sup>10</sup>



FEET ON THE GROUND:

# Improve business health

Business leaders need an unbiased view of their workers' health to help them first pinpoint symptoms and then the underlying causes. To help, analysts look at two types of data: subjective and objective. Subjective data can reveal trending health issues and help measure results from a broader perspective. Objective data can help leadership identify areas of focus, as well as help them measure the success of interventions.

Read on to see three examples of how large companies used data to improve workplace health in ways that impacted their business.

## 01 Improving mental health: It's good business.

Using a variety of data sources, a 12-campus US hospital system discovered that mental health was at the top of all chronic conditions for their workforce. A subjective survey found that over half of the people in their wellness program "sometimes or often" had feelings of anxiety or stress. Health insurance records showed that mental health care for about 2,300 of their plan members totaled over USD 2.2 million in one year. And anti-depressant medicines

were among the top 10 prescriptions for their workers and dependents. These numbers got leadership's attention. After evaluating options, the system decided on a wellness initiative that met both medical treatment and financial goals. They offered workers an online program instead of more costly face-to-face mental health care. The results?



**Success:**  
Surveys showed improvements for 7 out of 10 workers who had "moderately severe depression" and for 6 out of 10 who had "severe anxiety."



The system earned a return on investment of 17 USD for every 1 USD spent on the program. This was well above findings of other surveys.

## 02

### Relieving financial stress helps improve productivity

High-level research finds that financial stress can impact worker productivity.<sup>17</sup> A global financial services company, Prudential, wanted to know if this were true for their workforce. With an analytics team from Merative, they created custom risk profiles for specific business groups. And they tracked key measures over time via employee opinion surveys and health risk assessments, using our [Health Insights®](#) solution and analysts. The team of analysts helped them evaluate health risks by connecting the organization's data to the extensive Health Insights® data warehouse. Analysis showed that among their workers, higher financial stress was linked to: higher absenteeism (two additional days per employee), lower productivity, and greater incidence of short-term disability. Now, Prudential had the data to help them create an actionable plan. They offered employees a variety of support, including additional benefits, and even created a task force dedicated to examining financial health risk.



[Read the Prudential Financial case study](#)



### 03

#### Honing in on interventions, with feet on the ground

Another large company consulted with Merative to examine how the pandemic was affecting their workforce and their families. Health Insights® analysts found that, between 2018 and 2020, trends among their workforce included:

- **Anxiety** overall increased 35%.
- **Depression** overall increased 29%.
- **Substance abuse** decreased. But there was an increase of almost one-quarter for people needing in-hospital care related to the condition.
- **Spouses were about 40% more likely** than workers to have substance abuse issues.

With their “feet on the ground,” analysts offered leaders actionable data. For example, the data revealed the locations – down to specific work areas or departments – where their organization’s employees had the highest incidences of anxiety and depression. Data also revealed four specific US states where workers had the highest prevalence of substance abuse, and four different states where in-hospital care for substance abuse among workers was highest. With such a rich level of timely information, leaders could focus their efforts where they would have the best impact for their workforce.



## Starting again: Begin at 10,000 feet

In summary, look at three different levels of data:

- At the 10,000-foot level, population health data offers insights into the current and growing number of people who have health challenges and reveals what they are. This data provides focus areas that can make the most impact to improve mental and other high-priority health issues.
- At the 3,000-foot, organizational level: Analysis of objective and subjective data gives important snapshots in time. It's useful as a benchmark to help monitor and improve the workers' health landscape. This analysis should include populations that might be underserved. It should also include a review of workplace wellness, intervention and prevention programs that have proven to work in other organizations.
- At the feet-on-the ground level, assess the health benefits and programs you've already made available to workers and their dependents. How is employee engagement? Are they aware of the programs? Are they using them? Gather data from workers and their dependents about their concerns, barriers to care, and awareness of specific resources available to them.
- As you narrow in on the best well-being initiatives, consult experienced analysts from a solution such as Merative's Health Insights® to develop "success metrics." These could include retention, worker satisfaction and a variety of other objective and subjective data.
- Collect data pre- and post-intervention to ensure you're using all your resources in the best way. Monitor employee use, results and opinions. Review effectiveness of providers and programs.



[See what Merative Health Insights® can help you uncover](#)



# Conclusion



Note that without strong C-Suite support for workplace well-being initiatives, sustaining them is very challenging. We recommend giving leaders key metrics throughout the process, so they can objectively evaluate each intervention and understand where they can adjust.

With the right analysis and application, you can create a new health landscape that supports growth for your people and your business and prevent smoldering embers from becoming a spreading fire.

[Learn more about healthcare analytics →](#)

# About Merative

Merative is a data, analytics and technology partner for the health industry, including providers, payers, life sciences companies and governments. With trusted technology and human expertise, the company works with clients to drive real progress. Merative helps clients reassemble information and insights around the people they serve to improve healthcare delivery, decision-making and performance. Formerly IBM Watson Health, Merative became a new standalone company as part of Francisco Partners in 2022.

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