

burnalong

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How to improve employee population health

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I. How are you supporting your population based on the latest claims data from your broker?

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Have you noticed an increase in healthcare costs year over year? You aren't alone.

As annual claims reports come in from your health plans and insurance benefits consultants, employers are seeing a steady increase in costs per contract across main subscribers, spouses, and dependents.

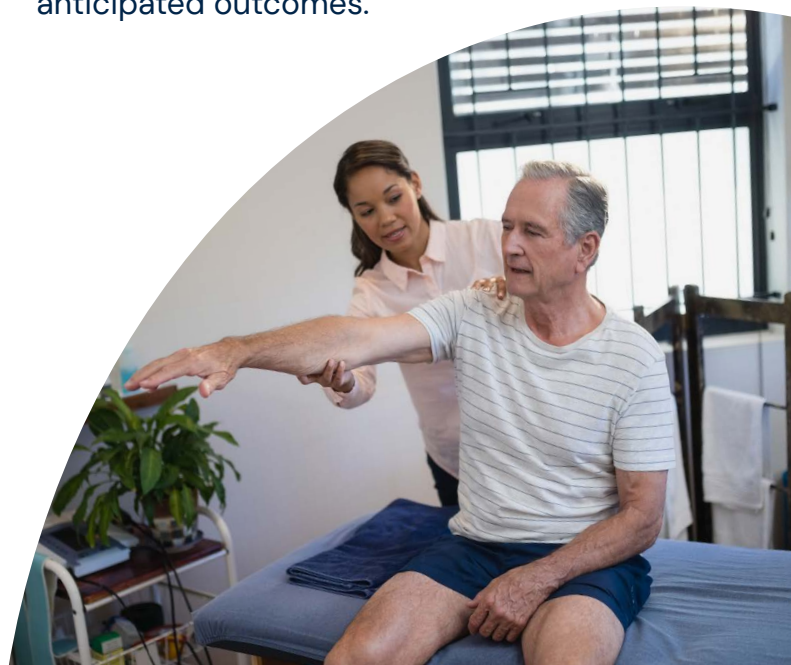
According to [SHRM](#), US employers are anticipating their group health plan premiums to increase by an average increase of 5%; health claims costs are also expected to rise in 2022. The general thought is that costs are quickly returning to pre-COVID levels.

In fact, Willis Towers Watson's found in their employer survey that the total average employer cost rose in 2022 to an estimated \$13,360 per employee.

While this change isn't nearly as drastic as the nearly 15% increase in 2002, it comes at a time when inflation and economic shifts are looming.

For self-insured group plans, you, as the employer, are very likely looking at increased costs for health claims in the coming year.

If you are looking to effectively manage population health and reduce claims costs, keep digging. In the next few sections, we'll dive into core population health concerns to have on your radar, how to reach at-risk populations, and anticipated outcomes.



II. Core population health concerns for employers



While healthcare costs will vary greatly based on employee populations, some of the most costly care and treatments are associated with chronic conditions. And in many instances, preventative care combined with health risk assessments could mitigate overall costs.

The most common chronic conditions seen in workforces today include:



Mental illnesses, such as depression and anxiety



Hypertension



Diabetes



Cancer

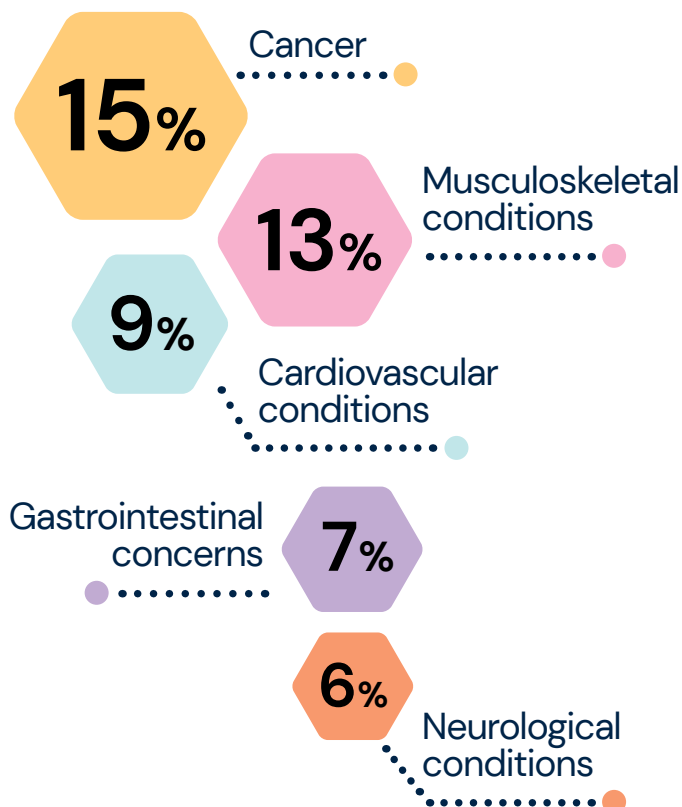


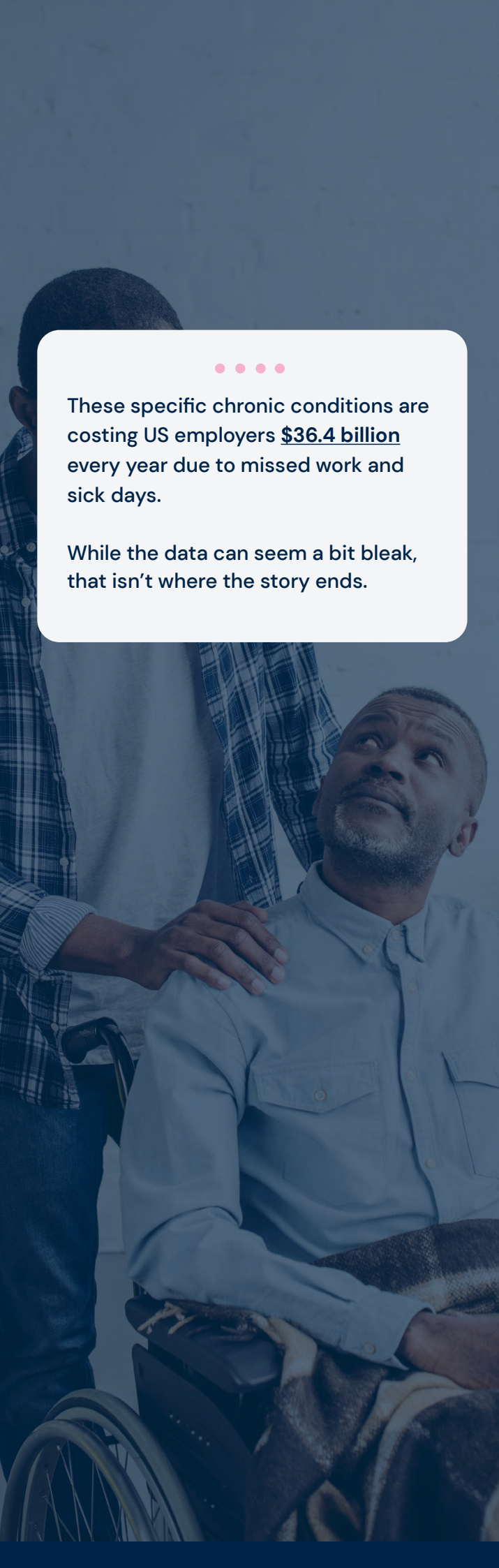
Cardiovascular conditions

It is estimated that chronic conditions alone cost **\$4.1 trillion** in health care costs each year. But not all population health concerns cost the same

A recent study by Health Action Council and UnitedHealthcare found that five specific conditions make up 50% of healthcare costs: cancer, musculoskeletal, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, and neurological. Within each condition, large portions of the costs are associated with specific treatments, such as chemotherapy, or medication.

5 specific conditions make up 50% of healthcare costs:



A photograph of a man in a wheelchair being supported by another man. The man in the wheelchair is looking upwards and to the right. The man supporting him has his hand on the wheelchair's back. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

These specific chronic conditions are costing US employers **\$36.4 billion** every year due to missed work and sick days.

While the data can seem a bit bleak, that isn't where the story ends.

As you are likely discussing with your insurance benefits consultant or with your health plan directly, there are actions you can take to reduce costs, increase engagement, and improve processes. Many leading employers are using their designated “wellness dollars” to take action through the implementation of:

- Point solutions to address specific concerns or conditions
- Digital health and wellbeing tools
- Employee engagement campaigns to encourage use of wellbeing programs
- Re-framing care management with apps and platforms
- Employee wellness challenges with incentives (i.e. steps challenges)
- Encouraging preventative care with wellness days
- Clear resources to detail available benefits and care
- Extending wellbeing care for employee family members too

How to improve population health and reach at-risk demographics



The prevalence of chronic conditions and increasing healthcare costs leads to an easy conclusion:

Work-sponsored health and wellness support can have a dramatic impact on quality of life and quality of work. Such programs can reduce risk and serve as preventative measures impacting more than **157 million employees** in the US.

A **2020 Gartner study** of HR executives found that 94% of companies made significant investments in their well-being offerings for employees; notably, 85% of companies increased support for mental health with only 50% of companies increasing support for physical wellness.

And for the employees who take advantage of these benefits, and use them, they are showing improved physical health (17% higher levels of physical health, even) and better sleep.

However, employers and employees only benefit from well-being support if it is used and it impacts those who need the programming most: at-risk or chronically ill employees and their dependents. In fact, it is estimated nearly **\$400 million** is wasted, each year, on health and wellness memberships that go unused.

Plus, implementing a well-being program can positively impact **employee morale**, attract and retain top talent, and increase loyalty to employers who invest in employees.

With rising healthcare costs, employers need to shift focus to simply reaching the young, or the fit and healthy. While that demographic is important and represents a sizable portion of employed adults, population health

Some employers have turned to numerous memberships, tools, and specialty platforms to address specific needs. The average price for this support doesn't always result in the anticipated ROI and reduced healthcare costs. Let's take a quick look at the associated costs with specialty point solutions intended to address chronic conditions and at-risk populations:



Session with mental health professional:

\$100-200

per session



Parkinson's personal training:

\$80

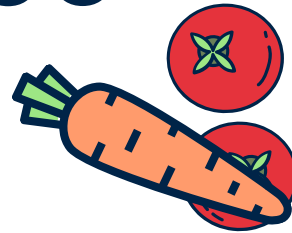
per hour



Nutritional classes:

\$100

per hour



Adaptive Training Sessions:

\$340-425

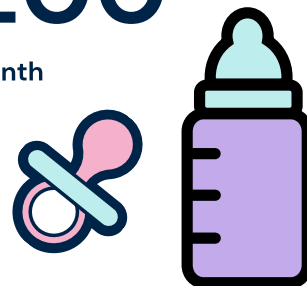
per month



Prenatal and parenting classes

\$200

per month



These offerings matter to employees, especially in the midst of the pandemic. **MercerMarsh** did a global employee study and found that employees who felt particularly supported by their employers over the past two years are 44% less likely to leave their job. And ongoing employee support matters whether the Great Resignation continues or not.

But do employees and their dependents, particularly people who are at-risk or currently managing chronic conditions, use these available solutions? It depends.

A recent cohort study conducted with Bernalong and a client's population health team (name withheld for privacy) found that, on average, Bernalong users were:



Older

The majority of people using Bernalong were **50-59**, despite the average age of the population being 33.



More at risk

Those using Bernalong were shown to be **more at-risk** of health issues than those not using the platform.



Suffering with chronic conditions

65% of those using the platform had chronic conditions, but those with chronic conditions made up only 40% of the broader population.



Reaching the at-risk population is not specific to this one client, however. In fact, across the Burnalong platform, we have found that:

- **68% of members self-identified as “beginners” in their health journey**
- **Since 2020, we’ve seen 86% increase in usage of specialty content that supports mental health, neuromuscular conditions, and chronic condition management for concerns such as Diabetes and cardiovascular health. As we’ve seen this increase, we have also leaned into creating more categories to deliver what our members need.**
- **Of the beginners on the platform, they find classes that support what they need in the specialty categories such as:**

- Education and Leadership Development
- Nutrition
- Meditation
- Seniors
- Stretch and Restore

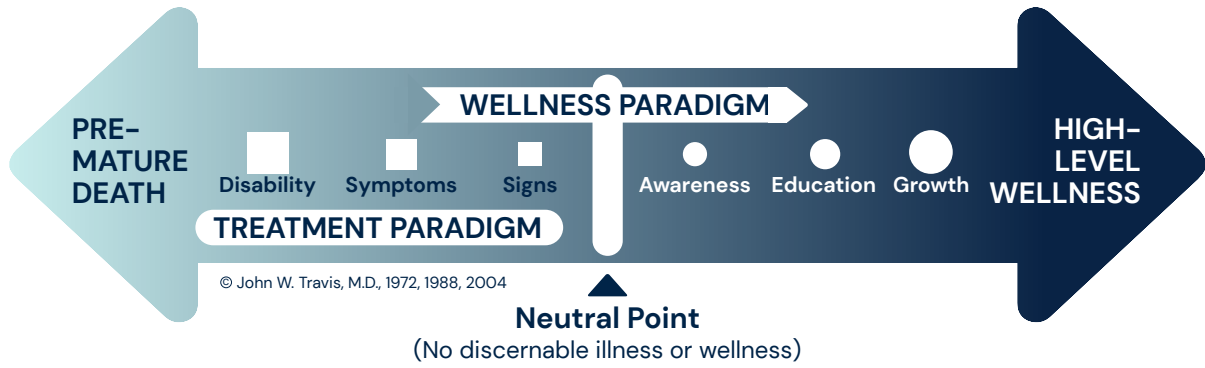
While it is our unique mission to help people achieve their human potential through our end-to-end wellness solution, we want all employers to be prepared to find support that will positively impact their populations and healthcare costs. When considering digital health and wellbeing support for your employees, consider looking for solutions that support six core principles:



1. **PREVENTION:** Look for a solution that will help you prevent and treat ailments
2. **HOLISTIC:** Provide something for everyone in your population, including those with chronic conditions
3. **PERSONALIZE:** Customize each health journey based on individual goals, conditions, and interests
4. **INCLUSIVE:** Look for a platform that represents the diversity of your workforce with accessible and relatable content
5. **SOCIAL:** Include communities of colleagues, friends, and family to improve motivation
6. **CULTURAL:** Build and drive internal culture with challenges, events, and online communities

Consider providing support across the entire wellness continuum. This might look different for every organization but as a general rule, consider the core stages detailed below:

Illness-Wellness Continuum



6

Once you have provided health and wellbeing support, you can anticipate improvements in population health across the board. We'll dive into those anticipated outcomes next.

IV. Anticipated population health outcomes of focusing on employee health



Digital health solutions positively impact population health.

They are most effective when coupled with additional activities including:

- **Preventative screening to identify health risks**
- **Behavioral change support mitigating risk factors**
- **Ongoing communication, activities, support**
- **Organizational culture shifts to support holistic employee health**

Offering a singular platform or point solution can still have a positive impact on your population's health. It is better that you provide health and wellbeing support to your workforce than not; start wherever and however you can.

By providing workforce populations with digital health solutions, employers can:



Reduce healthcare costs



Decrease spending on chronic condition treatment



Reduce reliance on multiple medications



Cut down on the number of sick days



Address presenteeism due to illness



Mitigate expensive crisis responses

And digital health solutions work.

UnitedHealth Group launched a digital health program for patients with Type 2 diabetes which combined wearables with coaching. Initial pilot studies, spanning multiple years of review, found that there was a meaningful reduction in A1C levels within three months of the program.

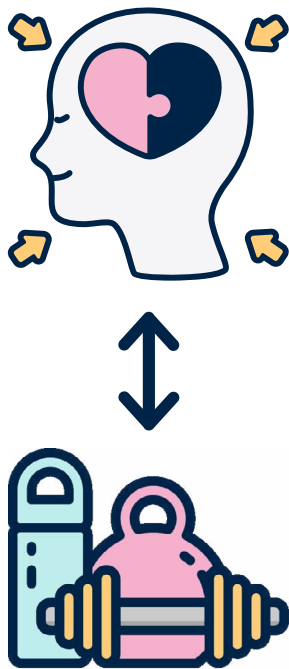
In 2017, a **controlled clinical trial** was run with overweight and obese adults that looked at the effectiveness of using an application for weight loss. The app used an intervention approach, a human coaching element, and asked participants to log meals and exercise. They found clinically significant weight loss (effect of -7.5%) at the end of the program with decreased glucose levels and body fat percentages.

Another study, out of **Stanford**, found that digital self-management programs for diabetes helped participants reduce blood sugar levels and address depression.



Digital health solutions that focus on more than one area of wellbeing allow employers and employees to benefit from holistic support.

After all, physical health impacts mental health which can impact financial health which can impact emotional wellness.



Let's zoom in really quickly to also look at the connection between mental and physical health. More than **32% of US adults** who have a mental illness also experienced a substance abuse disorder in 2020. AllWays Health Partners reports that 68% of adults with a mental health condition have one or more medical conditions (which will also require treatment). The WHO shared that people with severe and chronic mental illness have a 10-25 year reduction in their life expectancy.

Digital health tools that address physical, mental, emotional, financial, and medical wellness – all in one platform – can even more effectively impact population health. It reduces a key barrier to addressing conditions by improving ease of access and providing an inclusive option that your entire workforce can find useful.

V. So what's next?



To address the most common chronic conditions found on claims reports, year over year, employers need to reach their at-risk population and provide comprehensive chronic care management solutions.

Digital health tools provide a cost-effective way to not only provide access to a diverse range of programming but also data and analytics to show impact. Your population's health will improve as you focus on reducing risk, offering the support they will actually use, and celebrating the efforts of your employees diligently focusing on their wellbeing.



When considering a digital health solution to address population health concerns, start by asking these questions:

1. Can my entire workforce (inclusive of all abilities, age, races, location, fitness level, and chronic condition) find support in this solution?
2. Does this solution impact the biggest healthcare claims I see, year over year?
3. Can this solution positively impact our culture and celebrate progress towards healthier lives?
4. Are there events, challenges, and activities sponsored by this solution that will engage my at-risk population?
5. Does this solution align with my business and DEI goals?
6. What tracking and data is available so we can monitor engagement?
7. Can this solution help my teams thrive and reach their potential?

Why Burnalong?

People who feel good, do better work. You know that. But what does it mean to feel good? And how can you facilitate that as a company? Chances are you've tried a lot of things to answer those questions. You may even have robust layers of programs in place today. But they're probably not working quite as well as you'd hoped, right? Don't feel bad.

Almost all wellness programs fail. It's not from a lack of effort, or caring, or passion. The reason most wellness initiatives fizzle is simply that it's HARD. It's hard to build a robust wellness program with choice and diversity. It's hard to get the word out to everyone consistently. And even if you build and broadcast what you have, it's even harder to get those most in need to participate. Oh, and reporting your results? Forget about it. Data is hard to come by if it exists at all.

So what can you do about it? Over the last five years Burnalong has replaced or supplemented hundreds of existing wellness programs at companies across the world. In nearly every deployment we've increased engagement over 5x anything that existed before. Five times more people, doing five times more activity is a powerful energy catalyst.

How do we do it?

There's a lot of reasons why we get people engaged. It's partly due to the thousands of classes across dozens of categories (including programming for chronic conditions), not to mention the hundreds of world-class instructors. It's also because of the sneaky smart but easy-to-use technology. The dedicated human who works with your team to launch, market, and customize your programming also helps.

Ultimately, Burnalong is about substance over style, longevity over splash, support over six-packs. We think about wellness as a community effort (which is why family access is always free). If you explore deeper you'll see how we've layered our people, tools, content, and entire approach into creating a place where people can thrive together. **If you want to learn more and explore whether we're a good fit for your people, reach out today.**

[TELL ME MORE](#)

