

# Winning with Well-Being

BY TIM STATE

Humana's transformation from traditional health insurance company to health and well-being leader is being driven through its associates' personal journeys toward their best health.

Building and leading a world-class workforce today involves helping organizations address some fundamental questions. How do we evolve our company culture to best reflect and enable our core purpose and values? How do we create an employment experience that engages and inspires our talent—and strengthens our business results? How do we foster an employee community that is thriving physically and emotionally—in the best condition to create relationships and value with customers and have personal meaning in one's work?

A key answer to these questions at Humana has been this: a vibrant social movement inside the company, deeply rooted in a shared purpose. What does this look like? Thousands of people, namely our associates, on a personal journey toward their best health and well-being, supporting one another as they make progress, struggle at times, and move forward together. Guided by an enterprise well-being strategy, this movement is powered by the energy and ideas of thousands of associates and visibly championed by the company's leadership. It has become foundational to the work culture and experience of associates.

This movement also reflects a broader, basic premise supported by both common sense and a body of study

and evidence: As people's health and overall well-being improve, they generally are able to be more productive, engaged, connected, resilient, and effective at fulfilling their ultimate purpose. This is true for an individual person and for an organization full of people—its number one asset. That simple idea, and the stark opportunity the workplace has to enhance personal and population well-being, offers tremendous possibilities.

At Humana, the journey toward improved well-being is having a profound impact while measurably improving lives. A few facts:

## **We've reversed the trend toward declining health.**

As a cohort, our associates employed since 2012 have significantly fewer health risks on average than three years ago, with 7 out of 10 people either sustaining or improving their health risk profile. These risks include factors like hypertension, BMI, blood glucose and cholesterol that lead to the onset or progression of chronic conditions, and other challenges. The overall average number of risks per person has been reduced 9% in three years, with 42% of the population eliminating risks and improving their health. For example, 37% of these associates went from elevated blood pressure to normal levels, and 26% moved their



elevated blood glucose levels (associated with diabetes risk) to normal range.

**Holistic well-being has steadily improved.** Since 2012, across the company we've seen a 13% improvement in the overall well-being of associates, measured by the four dimensions of well-being: purpose, health, belonging, and security.

**Workforce engagement has blossomed.** We've experienced world-class associate engagement levels—in the top tenth percentile globally—for the past four years as measured by the Kenexa engagement survey, which directly translates into higher productivity and many other positive impacts. Each of those years, the number one driver most correlated with engagement has been our commitment to associates' well-being.

**Leader commitment has proven vital.** In 2015, for instance, 86% of associates agreed when surveyed that their leader really cares about their well-being. And today, 87% of associates say Humana is committed to creating a work environment that contributes to their health and well-being.

These results and others have added to our performance and provided a competitive edge. Beyond the impact of

health-related cost savings, we're more engaged and productive as a team. Perhaps more important, when our members interact with us, they are encountering people who believe in our defining purpose of helping people achieve their best health and lifelong well-being and who experience it firsthand.

## HAVE A DREAM AND A WAY TO GET THERE

A clear and powerful purpose that unifies and inspires teammates is indispensable. One key to our progress toward deeper engagement and elevated well-being has been Humana's "Bold Goal." We've pledged that the communities we serve will be 20% healthier by 2020 because we make it easy for people to achieve their best health.

We've taken that goal further with our own associates, promising ourselves that we will be 20% healthier even earlier, by 2017. We're leading by example, knowing that embarking on our own health journeys creates more empathy and makes us better partners for our customers. As Tim Huval, our senior VP and chief human resources officer, put it, "We want to invest in what matters most, our teammates—we're better able to serve other people when we do that. By getting there first, we will lead and learn from the front."

To measure our success toward that goal, we're using the "Healthy Days" tool developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for population health management. Participants are asked to rate their recent days of physical health and mental health; they consider things like pain, depression, anxiety, sleeplessness, and anything that might limit their physical activity. What emerges is a simple, overall picture of their health. Among Humana associates, our number of Healthy Days has significantly improved since 2012.

Although Humana is well on its way toward achieving its goal, the fact is that no matter who you are, these days health is hard. In this unifying goal, we emphasize making health easy because our convenience culture and lifestyles create daily barriers to good health that must be overcome. The fragmented healthcare system often struggles to reward health outcomes or enable them through affordable access and people-centered technology. Given all that complexity and importance, for Humana it is the significance of the mission that makes this shared purpose so unifying and inspiring. It is also why making the journey easier for our own has been an imperative for HR and leadership across the business.

That journey has also enabled new learning into how individuals and communities improve. Through co-creation and iterative trials, our associates' own experiences have

and as a community. For example, when associates regularly volunteer, they not only experience a stronger sense of purpose but measurably do better in all other dimensions of personal well-being when assessed. Humana has been committed to volunteerism since the company's founding in 1961. And today—with our core values guiding our work and impacting the health and well-being of the communities we serve—it's even more important. We have a goal to more than double our volunteer participation over the next three years, and we've created ways to make volunteering easier and more vibrant. For example, our Humana Volunteer Network website makes it easy to find local volunteer opportunities that are personally meaningful, and our "volunteer time off" benefit provides the opportunity to take a day of paid time off to participate in volunteer activities that support health and well-being. We believe that meaningful purpose is at the heart of healthier lives.

Likewise, the value of a diverse workforce and the importance of an inclusive atmosphere where everyone feels welcome and belongs reflect an important dimension of well-being, and of Humana's values. For example, we've created several Network Resource Groups—associate-led and associate-driven organizations that provide valuable insights and points of view. Among these are groups for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) associates;



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contributed to new understanding and product development that helps accelerate positive outcomes while better connecting teammates to the needs of customers.

As Humana's multiyear journey to help its internal community achieve its best health and well-being has progressed, several principles have proven critical to achieving results:

### **EMBRACE WELL-BEING HOLISTICALLY**

We all sense that feeling well and happy involves multiple dimensions of "health." At Humana, this is foundational. The interconnection between our health (physical and emotional), sense of purpose, feeling of security, and sense of belonging with others is profound. These dimensions of well-being are assessed at the individual and team level. Measurable organizational progress toward goals is shared through reporting, so teams can work together through action plans on the areas that most deserve their focus.

Applying this integrated view has enabled deep learning into how people make positive changes in all areas, individually

African Americans; Hispanics; caregivers; military veterans; women; and Asian and Pacific Islanders. The groups are open to everyone across the company, and they engage and empower all of our associates in bringing our purpose to life. More important, they foster a sense of belonging that is so instrumental to well-being.

### **FOCUS ON PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OVER PROGRAMS**

Helping people be their best shouldn't be experienced merely as a corporate initiative; it is about empathetically meeting them where they are. For example, for someone struggling with severe depression or on the verge of family bankruptcy, near-term success in a new weight-management program may be a long shot.

Processes that normalize caring and authentic workplace conversations about the well-being of individuals and teams, supported by effective resources and solutions that can actually meet their needs, help open the door to lasting change. Leaders, in particular, must be encouraged and



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supported in their ability to nurture and inspire health and well-being as an embedded feature of the leadership model.

Motivating and rewarding personal progress is also critical to sustained improvement. For example, HumanaVitality® (to be renamed Go365™), our wellness and rewards program, offers incentives to participants for making healthier choices. Earned Vitality Points can be redeemed for gift cards, fitness trackers, clothing, and so on, ultimately helping people set goals and keep them while encouraging them to get out and get active. A short health assessment produces a personal Vitality Age that indicates whether your body is living younger or older than your actual age based on personal lifestyle and habits.

Today, HumanaVitality is well engrained within our culture. While more than 90% of associates participate, about 7 out of 10 associates are actively engaged in improving their status—a group that has experienced 30% fewer unscheduled days of absence since measurement began in 2012.

## LEVERAGE SOCIAL INFLUENCE TO MOVE COMMUNITIES

Not only are our habits and attitudes fairly contagious, but their outcomes are as well. Humana has observed that, similar to other communities, the health of its own work teams tends to move together, for good or for ill. Moreover, few stories of positive change are solo acts. They invariably involve the support and influence of family and friends, especially at work. Sparking social engagement within frontline teams and virtually across the organization has been vital. Today at Humana, the number one topic people routinely choose to discuss on internal social media is their efforts toward health and well-being.

The stories of inspiration and shared experiences are lifeblood to the cultural movement under way. A powerful example is Humana’s 100 Day Dash. Since 2012, Humana associates have participated in the Dash, a mass social experience designed to get people moving and have fun at the same time. Steps are tracked via a pedometer or another wearable device, and teams are spontaneously formed to promote camaraderie and healthy competition. The Dash rallies us as a community and helps everyone take steps toward their best health. In 2015, we took more than 15 billion steps together. The executive team’s average step count was even higher than the associate community’s average, which speaks to the importance we put on leaders’ inspiring the health of our Humana teammates.

The social nature of this shared cultural experience provides inspiration toward healthier lifestyles and the catalyst for lasting positive change. For example, our associates who have lost weight, often spurred on by the Dash, have shed over 100 tons in three years, and the prevalence of prediabetes has been cut by 20%.

## MAKE IT SIMPLE

Enabling an easier path to health and well-being requires eliminating the barriers that complicate progress. This is especially true in the employer context, where adults spend most waking hours. To understand those barriers, Humana combines deep analytics on multifaceted hard data with critical information gained from a crucial means: intently listening to people.

Applying customer research principles, we proactively segment and seek out associates for their insights and experiences. The goal is to use this information, combined with a steady flow of grassroots perspectives from a voluntary network of several hundred well-being champions, to eliminate critical barriers to health while enabling a more integrated experience across all elements. Over time, the discipline of seeking to understand the unmet needs and barriers that create complexity has enabled a wide spectrum of changes that matter. From smaller elements like where healthier items sit in vending machines to broad policy on health plan design and incentives, making progress easier by simplifying the journey for people is a must.

Today more than ever, customers, job seekers, and even investors are increasingly choosing to align themselves with organizations that carry a meaningful purpose in the world—having a net positive impact on our communities and society. Likewise, positive workplace cultures that help move people toward their best selves are associated with distinct competitive advantages in both talent and enterprise performance. As Humana is witnessing firsthand, at the intersection between purpose, culture, and great societal need there is the potential for transformational change, especially when we put people—and their well-being—first. [AQ](#)

*Tim State is VP, associate health and well-being at Humana. The company has a goal of improving the health of every community it serves, and that commitment begins with its own 50,000 associates. State and his team develop leading-edge strategies designed to drive a well-being movement within Humana’s workforce. Along the way, he has led the development of several population health and well-being solutions that have ultimately become available to external Humana customers.*