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Palantir's Perspective: Going All In on Mental Health

We spoke to **Alyssa Dunbar**, senior benefits and well-being program manager at Palantir Technologies, to get her perspective on why a comprehensive workforce mental health solution that scales with your company is crucial for companies of all sizes.

CHALLENGE

Find a mental health solution that not only provides available and effective therapists, but also serves a population with diverse needs—including those seeking preventive care and those with more urgent needs.

APPROACH

Partnered with Lyra to implement a flexible solution quickly that would scale with Palantir's employee population and also provide the benefits team hands-on and proactive support. Their HR team deployed a three-step strategy to make the internal case for a comprehensive mental health solution.

RESULTS

Strong engagement and positive anecdotal feedback, in addition to powerful access and recovery data—99 percent of the members utilizing Lyra services were instantly matched with a provider, and 81 percent of members in care have seen reliable clinical improvement or recovery.

Company overview:

Palantir Technologies is a software company that lets organizations integrate their data, decisions, and operations into one platform. They are headquartered in Denver with offices in New York, Palo Alto, and Washington, D.C., and have additional locations worldwide.

By the numbers (in the U.S.):

1,600
employees

3,000
total members on their medical plan

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CHALLENGE

Palantir's employees help decision makers across the globe solve their most urgent business challenges. At the same time, their leadership team prioritizes "taking care of employees who are taking care of very complex challenges." When it came to making sure their employees had easy access to high-quality mental health care, their benefits team looked to external experts for help.

The company has long supported employees' mental health by covering 90 percent of out-of-network costs for behavioral health visits, as well as offering some lightweight mental health solutions for employees. But these investments didn't solve two key challenges: 1, access to available and effective therapists, and 2, a focus on preventative care to cultivate a more resilient workforce. Meanwhile, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges that led Palantir to realize they needed to offer something more, and fast.

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Palantir's team approached their health plan partner, Collective Health, to help identify a new, comprehensive mental health care solution. They ultimately decided to partner with Lyra based on some key capabilities:

1 **Ability to implement a solution quickly and easily. Given the increasingly urgent needs surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic**

Palantir's goal was to select a partner and launch within a few months. "We wanted to implement quickly, and Lyra was up for the challenge. Our customer success manager was a huge part of being able to hit the ground running within a few months," Dunbar said.

2 **Comprehensive, fast access to care for all employees across the mental health spectrum**

Palantir's previous solutions worked for a segment of their population, but Lyra offers access to quality care for employees across a spectrum of needs—from those experiencing moderate mental health challenges to severe conditions. With Lyra, the onus isn't on Palantir's employees to manage their own care regimen—members take a brief survey and are directed to either a coach or therapist based on their unique needs.

Alyssa Dunbar: "People can plug into Lyra wherever they are. Sometimes people need help urgently and need to get into care that same day...We wanted to be confident in the solution we were handing to people [in times of need], and now we are."

3 **A provider network and resources that scale with growing companies**

"It's important to make sure that whatever solution you're looking at is able to accommodate for your own company's growth and that you're able to support people throughout their lifecycle," Dunbar said. "Palantir has been around a while but is still growing as a company, so we've valued working with a partner that is able to 'grow up' with our people—[for example,] as people become parents and take on new responsibilities in their lives, it's important to make sure that they are supported." Lyra's vast network of providers—diverse in geography, clinical specialty, and racial identity—is prepared to grow and scale with companies and their workforce needs.

4 Flexibility to integrate into the existing health plan

Palantir first introduced Lyra as a reimagination of its employee assistance plan (EAP) with free sessions for all members. In January 2021, they opted to also integrate Lyra as a part of their health plan to allow for more care options for employees. With their current integration, employees who surpass the number of free visits Palantir covers can now seamlessly pay in-network for additional visits with their Lyra provider. They can also access mental health physicians who can prescribe medication based on the client's needs.

5 Strong vendor partnership that optimizes a small benefits team's limited time

With a benefits team of just a few people, Palantir relies heavily on Lyra's resources to help drive awareness of the benefit and help employees cope with stress related to current events and common mental health challenges.

Alyssa Dunbar: "When the Capitol riot happened in January 2021, our customer success manager reached out directly with blog posts and toolkits that we could share with our employees. As a small benefits team, we are only as good as our partners, and having this support to make sure we're communicating with our employees at times they need it the most is really important."

To best make the internal case for investment in a comprehensive mental health benefit to company leadership, the Palantir HR team recommends this three-step strategy:

1 Appeal to what will uniquely resonate with your leadership

"Being a big data company, our leadership is very interested in being data driven when it comes to making benefits decisions. We leveraged our partners to compare what we were paying on average for in- and out-of-network mental health [visits]. Then we compared these costs to what we'd be paying for Lyra, and determined that there wasn't much of a difference between these two numbers," Dunbar said. She added that "a slightly higher cost for us was worth it because we were paying for an entirely different network of providers and being able to get people care they need when they need it. The data spoke for itself."

2   **Lay the foundation for the challenges employees face in the current mental health care system**

Dunbar advised, "Keep in mind that leaders may not always have the unique knowledge of what navigating the mental health system is like, so it's important to frame the challenge and the experience when building a case."

3   **Highlight the invaluable insights you'll gain into how your workforce is coping**

With typical EAPs, outcomes data is nonexistent. Working with Lyra enables Palantir to be a greater part of their employee journey thanks to high-level, anonymized outcomes data delivered monthly. Equipped with this up-to-date information, they can be mindful of how their general population is doing and iterate on their key company priorities. "Vendors should be able to clearly share best practices on driving utilization and tell you about what outcomes data they're measuring that will be available to you," said Dunbar. "Put your vendors in the driver's seat and ask them to help direct your justification of investment."

Alyssa Dunbar: "The thing that really resonated with our team and myself personally was: Can we afford to not invest in something like this right now? People are struggling right now, and spending the money up front to take care of people is really crucial."

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With Lyra in place, Palantir employees and eligible dependents are now getting the care they need, when they need it. In their first six months after launching Lyra, 99 percent of the members utilizing Lyra services were instantly matched with a provider, with a median of six days until their first visit. Members with more severe and immediate needs, or those who preferred to speak with someone sooner, were able to do so. At the same time, 81 percent of members in care have seen reliable clinical improvement or recovery from their mental health conditions.

The Palantir team is excited by employees' engagement in Lyra and the anecdotal feedback they've heard so far. Dunbar said, "Lyra has been such a game-changer for our people, and the sheer number of people who have engaged speaks volumes. The cost benefit analysis of this feels very strong because the people who are getting care are getting it in a timely fashion and in the manner in which they need it."

The final words:

Alyssa Dunbar: "Mental health isn't just a buzzword, and it isn't just the next fad in benefits. Mental health care is a broken system that we're battling against right now in a time when we need it to not be. People inevitably go through tough times in their lives, and it's on us to help them. You sleep easier at night knowing that you have good benefits in place for your team, and a good partner to help you with this. Lyra has been this partner for us."

Want to learn more?

Watch the **full webinar** or take a look at **"Making the Business Case for Workforce Mental Health: A Step-by-Step Guide"**.