

## PHILIPPINE NATIONAL BANK: INVESTING IN WELLNESS AT THE WORKPLACE



PBCWE Member since: 2019

 8,880  34%  66%

### Challenge

Recognizing that the employee well-being is one of the keys to the success of the business, the Philippine National Bank (PNB) provides its employees equal access to programs that can enhance productivity and improve quality of life. This approach has helped the bank adapt quickly to the challenges formed by the COVID-19 pandemic.



### Strategy

It is no secret that a healthy workforce is good for business. A healthy workforce can mean fewer sick days, reduced turnover & replacement costs, and increased productivity. Companies offer private health insurance to their employees to ensure access to medical services when needed.

A survey by Willis Tower Watson showed that only 16% of these health plans, however, cover mental health services like counseling. This is alarming, given that around 3.6 million Filipinos are now estimated to be suffering from mental disorders, according to initial results of a government study in 2020. The figure does not even consider mental health problems that are not as severe but can still have significant negative impacts on work performance and well-being.

At PNB, we put “People First” and strive to ensure the needs of our employees are met. Over the years, the company has rolled out a wide range of employee wellness programs to encourage healthy lifestyles and improve overall well-being. . As the Pandemic increased anxiety among employees, PNB focused on mental health programs to manage growing stress, fear of infection and disruption of normal life.

## Actions

The health and wellness programs of PNB stem from a culture that values not just performance but the overall well-being. PNB promotes work-life balance and holistic development. The bank has designed a lineup of programs that are readily accessible to push employees towards a healthier lifestyle.

### Leveraging technology

Before the pandemic, PNB employees could join a variety of physical activities organized by the company to improve health, build camaraderie, and boost engagement. These included fun runs; weekly Zumba, yoga, dance, and mixed martial arts classes; sports activities; onsite gyms; and discounts to gym memberships offsite. In 2019, PNB and its sister company even co-organized a one-day wellness fair complete with talks on health tips and a bazaar showcasing various health products and services.

Until it is once again safe to resume these activities face-to-face, PNB is utilizing online platforms to continue offering such wellness programs to its employees. It has already piloted an e-Zumba session for its anniversary celebration and shifted its wellness fair online. The digital wellness and sustainability fair featured weeklong webinars on popular topics like home workout routines, urban farming & sustainable eating, and smart investing, as well as online catalogues for essential goods.

PNB also publishes a monthly Health First Bulletin, an email advisory complete with eye-catching infographics on a specific health topic per month. In addition, it has introduced weekly email reminders on COVID-19 awareness and prevention.

PNB partnered with its health care provider on telemedicine consultations for its employees with accredited doctors to minimize risks from physical visits to a medical facility and ensure access to medical services.

### Amplifying mental health support

During the pandemic, PNB reinforced its mental health policy through additional programs catering to employees experiencing anxiety because of COVID-19.



## Employee Support Provided



- 24/7 mental health hotline
- Internal mental health helpline



- Mental health related webinars



- Free consultations with psychologists and psychiatrists

PNB tapped in-house talent – a training officer who is a certified psychosocial support facilitator – to come up with an internal mental health helpline, should employees want to talk to a fellow employee regarding their mental health concerns.

This internal helpline is supplemented by a 24/7 mental health hotline provided by the existing health care provider of PNB. Through this hotline, employees can reach out to general practitioners at any time for immediate mental health support. If necessary, cases may be referred to accredited psychologists and psychiatrists whom employees and their dependents can consult free of charge. PNB also initiates “kumustahan” calls to employees with COVID-19 in a proactive effort to see how they are doing and how else the bank can support them.

Parallel to these mental health services, PNB launched Mental Health in a Pocket, a two-hour webinar designed to raise awareness on mental health, train employees on identifying and managing mental health problems in the workplace, and break the stigma surrounding mental health.

## Outcomes

The wellness programs have been warmly received by PNB personnel. Participation in the Power Classes launched in 2019 ranged from 15 participants to as high as 100 attendees per session even if it was scheduled after office hours. The 2019 one-day wellness fair also drew a crowd of around a thousand individuals who attended lectures on healthy eats at work and relieving stress through hypnotherapy, among others, and visited booths offering sportswear, self-help books, and other wellness products and services.

Despite the shift to digital platforms, the turnout for the e-Zumba and wellness fair webinars was still substantial at 70 attendees for the special Zumba session and more than 100 attendees for each webinar.

On the other hand, the 12 runs of the Mental Health in a Pocket webinar garnered over 600 participants in total. Though this makes up only about 8% of the workforce, the relatively modest figures could be explained by the goal of PNB to manage the number of participants to ensure quality of learning. Instead of simply accommodating more participants per webinar, PNB made a conscious decision to limit the number of slots to help employees get the most out of a session. The strategy seems to have been effective, with PNB receiving positive feedback and messages of appreciation from its employees on the webinars and follow up sessions on the drawing board.

PNB was also honored by The Asian Banker, an international organization that recognizes achievements in the financial services industry, as the Best Managed Bank during COVID-19 in the Philippines. The award was given to PNB for demonstrating excellence on its response to the challenges brought about by the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) imposed due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

## Employee Experience



Industrial engineer graduate Melvin started working in PNB in 2019.

***“When I was looking for a job, an important consideration was what a company can give and how it treats its employees. PNB takes care of its employees and did not fall short during the pandemic”***

Before the pandemic, Melvin attended the PNB mixed martial arts classes with his fellow management trainees and even represented PNB in an interbank badminton tournament. The bank organizes these types of activities to encourage employees to work out and bond with one another.

Although COVID-19 may have put such programs to a halt, PNB was quick to identify another aspect of wellness that required immediate support: mental health. A report on the impact of COVID-19 on private sector workers in the Philippines by Investing in Women, an initiative of the Australian Government that advocates women empowerment in Southeast Asia, found that 43% of workers said that the pandemic had a negative impact on their mental health.

Therefore, Melvin and many other PNB employees regarded the Mental Health in a Pocket webinar as very relevant.

***“What is stressful now is the current setup. It is most stressful when I work onsite, and I am not sure if the people I encounter are virus-free. Expenses now are doubled because of the pandemic.”***

Although both men and women identified worries about the current situation as the top reason for negative impacts on their mental health, the Investing in Women report also found that the other top areas of concern for men were finances and isolation.

## Impact of COVID 19 on Mental Health

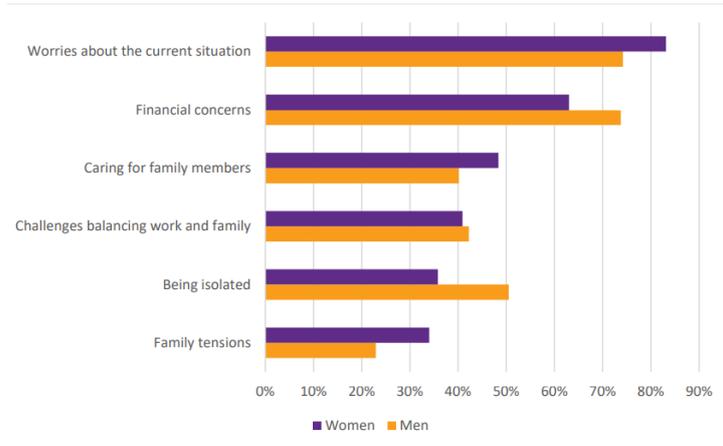


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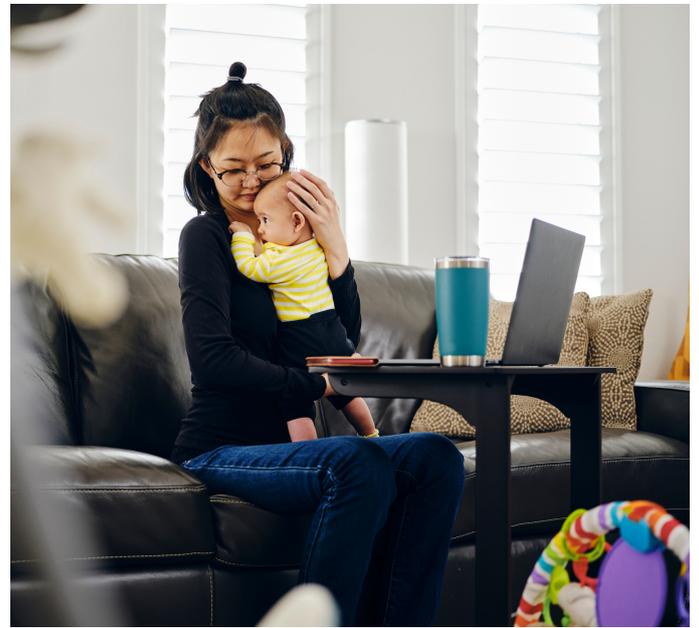


48%

### Reasons for the Impact on Mental Health



Source: IW Study on the Impact of COVID-19



With dual roles as a parent and as a daughter of an elderly parent, Tina is fortunate to receive support from other household members on domestic work. Other women are not as lucky. In most Filipino households, domestic and caregiving responsibilities often fall on the shoulders of female members. The pandemic heightened this unequal division of domestic work, with more women spending even more time on household and caring duties and less time for paid work (or study). The increased domestic burden has been linked to higher levels of exhaustion and stress among women.

Traditional notions about men and how they cope with stress may be discouraging them from seeking help, especially regarding mental health concerns. The PNB mental health webinars, internal helpline, and external hotline could be effective countermeasures against such toxic masculinity.

***“The webinar helped me to open up to those whom I trust. I usually do not open up to others about how I am feeling, but I realized that it is not bad to ask for advice from other people.”***

***PNB relationship officer Tina was also not spared from the stress brought about by the pandemic.***

Like Melvin, Tina also attended Mental Health in a Pocket. She learned coping strategies to shift her attention from worrying about the future. While some people have taken on a new hobby with more time at home, Tina devotes her attention to her family, particularly her son who has a disability.

***“After the seminar, I became aware on mental health and realized that consulting with specialists is not just for people with mental disabilities.”***

***“Nowadays, I focus on what is important: my job and my income. I have been with PNB for 25 years and I feel it has done its part as an employer. The Bank was able to adjust quickly during this time.”***

Through the years, PNB has proactively set up workplace policies and programs that protect the well-being and welfare of all employees – whether male or female, young or old. It is these support structures that will help employees and employers sail through the challenges of the times.

## Moving Forward

- Continue regular review and assessment so that wellness programs will remain relevant and match the needs and interests of employees. This includes spelling out the period or procedure for updating the company mental health policy which has primarily been prompted by external factors like the enactment of the Philippine mental health law in 2018 or the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.
- Mental health and other wellness programs may be further improved by applying a gender perspective. Although all programs are open to both males and females, there may be invisible barriers that prevent a particular group from availing of support. Support may need to be tailor-fitted to the needs of a particular group.
- Running a cost-benefit analysis may help ensure the long-term sustainability of wellness programs. Though PNB may already consider these as an integral part of its compensation and benefits package, linking them to returns and key performance indicators can strengthen grounds for the investment.



The Philippine Business Coalition for Women Empowerment (PBCWE) was launched in March 2017 through Investing in Women, an initiative of the Australian Government. In the Philippines, IW has partnered with the Philippine Women's Economic Network (PhilWEN) to create a business coalition to pursue Gender Equality (GE) in the workplace and Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) nationwide.

PBCWE is made up of influential businesses that are large employers who will take the appropriate steps to improve gender equity in their own workplaces and to influence businesses, both in their supply chains and other large businesses, and to also become better employers of women.



**PBCWE**  
PHILIPPINE BUSINESS COALITION  
FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT



**Australian Aid**

**INVESTING IN WOMEN**  
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AN INITIATIVE OF THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT



The first universal bank in the Philippines to be certified as gender-equal after receiving its Economic Dividends for Gender Equality (EDGE) Certification.

LinkedIn's 2021 Top Companies list  
in the Philippines

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