

## **U.S. Employers Prioritizing Leave Management Nearly Doubles Since 2014, According to Guardian Study; Increased productivity and improved employee experience reported by roughly 7 in 10 employers that focus on reducing absenteeism**

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### **Body**

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In its fourth biennial study, Guardian Absence Management Activity IndexSM and Study—"The Value of Leave Management Integration," The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America® (Guardian), finds more companies than ever are prioritizing leave management. The study, released today, shows the proliferation of new and proposed state paid family and medical leave laws has **focused employer** attention on compliance and absence policies, and companies continue to step up their absence-management efforts.

Guardian's Absence Management Activity IndexSM and Study measures the effectiveness of **employer** leave management activities and best practice adoption, such as return-to-work programs and reporting. This year's study found taking a more holistic approach through broad benefit offerings, centralization and an underlying **focus** on the employee experience positively impact companies' leave management outcomes.

Compared with the 2014 study, nearly twice as many companies say their senior leadership places a high priority on leave management and reducing absenteeism. This new study also found **employers** are more mindful of the federal and state Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and statutory disability, workers' compensation and leave laws, and are working to design their absence plans and policies accordingly.

The study uses an index, designed in 2012, that reflects the level of **employer** activity on ten elements of an absence management program. This year's study found the average index score for all **employers** surveyed increased 14% from two years ago and is up 35% from 2012. A greater proportion - 47% of **employers** - achieved either "Advanced" or "Leader" status based on their index scores, compared with 22% in 2014.

"**Employers** are continuing to refine their approach to absence management and they're making this a business priority," said Marc Costantini, Executive Vice President, Commercial and Government Markets, Guardian. "Whether it's pressure from new regulations, a recognition that absenteeism hits the bottom line, or simply trying to create a better experience for employees, companies are taking action."

**Employers**, Particularly Small Firms, Continue to Improve Leave Management ProgramsIncreasingly more complex state leave laws are contributing to the uptick of **employer** activity in adopting new and best practices to manage absenteeism and improve compliance. The study showed that small- and medium-size **employers**, especially those with fewer than 250 employees, have made the most progress. For example, more small **employers** are centralizing their FMLA and short-term disability (STD); up 35% since 2016 among firms with 50-99 employees.

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Moreover, firms with fewer than 1,000 employees have achieved the most significant gains on the Activity Index since 2014. They are strengthening their documentation and return-to-work policies as well as striving for consistency across the organization. And, the percent of small firms (50-499 employees) now considered "highly advanced" in their leave management practices has doubled since 2014 (43% vs. 19%).

Benefits Integration is on the RiseAs **employers** expand the range of benefits to meet increased workforce demand, more **employers** are streamlining the management of leave-related benefits with a single internal department or vendor. Guardian's study found, in the past four years, more **employers** are integrating benefits, such as Short-Term Disability (STD) and FMLA with Long-Term Disability and health management programs, like Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), health-risk appraisals, and disease management. In fact, since 2012, the percentage of **employers** centralizing their STD and FMLA administration has doubled.

Organizations with a higher level of benefits integration not only report a better employee experience compared with those with low to no integration, but they are also more likely to cite improved productivity and reduced time off. For example, **employers** with a high level of integration report an 80% increase in productivity compared to 65% of **employers** with a low level of integration.

Increased **Focus** on Employee ExperienceEmployers have also made leave management an employee-centric process by establishing clear, concise and consistent absence policies while emphasizing benefits integration, which is key to the employee experience. Guardian's study found organizations that **focus** on the employee experience see a reduction in absenteeism (76%) and also achieve better overall employee experience (83%).

This year's study confirms U.S. **employers** continue to make progress in absence management and have prioritized taking a holistic approach through broad benefit offerings, a high degree of centralization and an underlying **focus** on the employee experience.

Call-to-Action (CTA): For more information about the 2019 Guardian Absence Management Activity IndexSM and Study, visithere or follow us onFacebook,LinkedIn,Twitter andYouTube.

Notes to Editors: The fourth wave of the Guardian Absence Management Activity Index<sup>SM</sup> and Study was conducted in the second quarter of 2018. It consisted of an online survey completed by decision-makers to monitor changes in **employer** absence management practices. The study was conducted for Guardian by Spring Consulting Group and serves to build upon prior year efforts. A total of 1,204 individuals working for **employers** ranging in size from 50 employees to 5,000 or more were surveyed. A threshold number of respondents was included in each category to allow analysis of the results by organization size.

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Unless otherwise noted, the source of all information is from the 2019 Guardian Absence Management Activity IndexSM and Study - "The Value of Leave Management Integration."

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