

Report: Workforce Mental Health Issues Cost Northern Virginia \$8 Billion Annually

A new study shows an alarming trend taking a devastating economic toll: Northern Virginia has lost more than \$16 billion in unrealized gross regional product over the past two years due to the impaired mental health of its workforce—with no end of the losses in sight.

The new report, *The Economic Impact of Mental Health in Northern Virginia*, is a collaboration between the [Center for Regional Analysis](#) at George Mason University's [Schar School of Policy and Government](#) and the nonprofit Community Foundation for Northern Virginia. It will be released to the public during a presentation on Thursday, October 12, at the foundation's headquarters in Fairfax, Virginia. Registration details can be found [here](#).

The new study, the third in the foundation's Center for Community Research *Insight Region* series on the subject of mental health, shows that about half of the workers in Northern Virginia currently are experiencing some level of anxiety and/or depression, with about one in four falling into the clinical range. Productivity losses due to absenteeism or diminished functioning at work increase the likelihood of labor force exits, creating workforce shortages and a staggering loss of economic vitality.

The more than \$8 billion in annual productivity losses carry a discrete economic impact, one that until now had not been quantified locally. The losses stemming from mental health challenges have far reaching consequences, not just on regional industry but also to the families, friends, and the workers coping with the complications of mental health impairment.

"The toll mental illness exacts on individuals and families has been studied. Its economic impact, on the other hand, has not been well understood," said Eileen Ellsworth, president and CEO of the Community Foundation for Northern Virginia. "For the first time we have a window into the true economic cost of mental illness and workforce productivity.

"Simply stated, the study makes clear that the mental health of our workforce is an individual, social, and economic growth issue across Northern Virginia that all sectors of our society need to effectively address."

While the researchers do not make policy recommendations, they said those who lead the region face daunting challenges.

"The dollar size of productivity loss was not a big surprise once we got over the shock of how many workers in our region are reporting stress and other mental health challenges that are impacting their work," said [Terry Clower](#), director of Mason's Center for Regional Analysis. "The apparent reasons for elevated stress and anxiety are diverse, which means that it will take sustained effort by employers and workers, with the possible support of the public sector, to identify and implement programs to get these employees on a pathway to better mental health.

"Our conservative estimates of the economic loss associated with mental health challenges provide evidence that investing in employee mental health is a business and economic imperative."

About the Community Foundation for Northern Virginia

Founded in 1978, the Community Foundation has been the premier charitable partner trusted by thousands of generous Northern Virginians for decades. Our mission is to advance equity through philanthropy and community leadership. Comprised of donor advised funds, permanent funds, giving circles, and other charitable endowments, the Community Foundation's vision is to build a community that works for everyone. Our Community Foundation serves the entire region, including Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William Counties and the Cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas and Manassas Park. For more information please visit us at www.cfnova.org or follow up on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

About the Schar School

The Schar School of Policy and Government is one of the 10 schools and colleges of George Mason University, with approximately 2,000 students, 90 full-time faculty members, and 23 degree and certificate programs offered on Mason's campuses in Fairfax and Arlington, Va. Among the degree programs are government and international affairs, public policy, public administration, political science, international security, and international commerce and policy. The Schar School prepares undergraduate and graduate students to be leaders and managers who solve problems and advance the public good in all sectors and levels of government—in the United States and throughout the world. For more, contact Communications Manager Buzz McClain at bmclai2@gmu.edu.

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