



# 2025 BELL SEAL CRITERIA



# HOW TO APPLY

Follow these steps to apply:

1. **Submit an [interest form online](#)** and receive an email with the link to the online application within one business day. Please save this link for future submission.
2. **Prepare your application before you apply online.** Responses may need to be sourced from multiple departments or teams, including human resources, benefits, and employee resource or affinity groups, and is typically the most time-intensive part of the application process.
3. **Submit your application online.** The online form typically takes an estimated one to two hours to complete.
4. **Pay the application fee by check or credit card online** at the time of submission. The fee, which helps cover the costs of the certification process and ongoing support, ranges depending on the organization's industry and full-time equivalent (FTE) count and is listed on the [Bell Seal website here](#).
5. Submit your application between January 21 and April 4, 2025, to be considered for the 2025 Bell Seal application cycle. **The submission deadline is EOD Friday, April 4, 2025.**
6. Most questions about the process can be answered by visiting the [Bell Seal website](#). However, if you need additional support, email us at [workplace@mhanational.org](mailto:workplace@mhanational.org).

**Please note:** Mental Health America (MHA) reserves the right to reject any application, refuse to award certification, or withdraw or revoke certification from an employer for any reason, including but not limited to submitting false or inaccurate responses or engaging in any effort — through internal policies and practices, legislation, regulation, litigation, or other advocacy — that weakens the rights of employees living with mental health or substance use conditions or discriminates against persons with mental health or substance use conditions.

## REVIEW AND RESULTS

After submitting the application, please allow **up to 30 business days** to receive the results via email, including which level of recognition — Bronze, Silver, Gold, or Platinum — the employer qualifies for and how the employer scored in each section.

Employers with Bell Seal certification, at their discretion, receive:

- An evaluation and custom benchmarking report
- Access to the promotion toolkit, with a digital badge and templates for internal and external communications
- Recognition on the [Bell Seal website](#)
- Recognition in the annual [outcomes publication](#)
- Access to the quarterly Workplace Wellness newsletter
- Opportunities to promote certification, such as speaking engagements, resources, or blog spotlights

If the employer does not qualify or aspires to improve their score, MHA and its partners offer free resources and fee-based services to assist the employer in improving their score for the next application cycle. Visit [MHA's Workplace Wellness Resource Center](#) for free resources, or contact us at [workplace@mhanational.org](mailto:workplace@mhanational.org) to discuss direct services for workplace wellness leaders. Certified employers will be reminded to annually renew their certification in January.

**Want to learn more about past Bell Seal recipients?** Check out all 2024 recipients and the application cycle outcomes in the [Workplace Mental Health 2024 Report: Trends and Best Practices of Top Employers](#).

# APPLICATION QUESTIONS

MHA highly encourages you to leverage the Bell Seal application questions and certification process to meaningfully reflect on your organization's policies, practices, and benefits related to supporting your employees' mental health and well-being. To that effect, please review the following guidance to best prepare your application:

- The criteria and scoring are designed to accommodate workplaces of all industries and sizes. Before applying, take this [quick survey](#) to determine your organization's eligibility and potential recognition level.
- All questions that require an open-ended response are limited to 2,000 characters (or approximately 350 words) for each question. Responses that exceed the 2,000-character limit will not be reviewed or scored.
- Supplemental documentation is not required; however, all applicants are expected to answer each question honestly and to the best of their knowledge.
- Application responses will be kept confidential and secure on MHA's servers and used only for the Bell Seal program. MHA may use aggregated information in educational or promotional materials, including the annual [outcomes publication](#).



## SECTION 1: SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE

1. Has the employer conducted a survey that evaluates employee well-being and solicits feedback in the last 12 months? *The survey does not need to be exclusive to well-being. Examples include engagement, satisfaction, or pulse surveys.*
  - Yes
  - No
2. Did the survey include questions or items that explicitly reference stress, burnout, mental health, or well-being? [Example survey items can be found here.](#)
  - Yes
  - No
3. Did the employer consider how to reach all employees across functions and locations and adapt the survey methodology accordingly? *For example, a retail employer might email the survey to employees at its headquarters and encourage store managers to give frontline employees time to complete it during team huddles.*
  - Yes
  - No
4. What percentage of the organization's entire workforce completed the survey? *If more than one well-being survey was administered in the last 12 months, choose the survey with the highest participation percentage.*
  - No data available
  - 0-25%
  - 26-50%
  - 51-75%
  - 76-100%
5. Did the employer use an alternative method to evaluate employee well-being and solicit feedback in the last 12 months?
  - Yes
  - No



6. If yes, which methods were used to evaluate employee well-being and solicit feedback? Please check all that apply.
- Organization-wide town hall meetings
  - Focus groups or listening sessions
  - Department or team meetings
  - Manager and direct report 1:1 meetings
  - Employee resource or affinity groups
  - Appointed employee representatives
  - Anonymous suggestion box or forum
  - Other: (Please describe)
7. Did the employer incorporate employees' feedback and change an organization-wide policy, practice, or benefit resulting from the survey or other evaluation method in the last 12 months?
- Yes  No
8. If yes, describe one organization-wide change to a policy, practice, or benefit in the last 12 months that was informed by employee feedback. *Please limit your response to 2,000 or fewer characters.*
9. Does the employer have an organization-wide strategy to promote employee well-being and address mental health concerns?
- Yes  No
10. If yes, which statements about the employer's well-being strategy are true? Please check all that apply.
- Leadership investigates structural and cultural issues contributing to poor employee mental health.
  - The strategy identifies interventions that support employees at various points on the mental health continuum, from maintaining a positive well-being state to recovering from a serious mental health or substance use condition.
  - The strategy addresses various dimensions of its workforce, such as demographics, role or function, and work environment or location.
  - The strategy is rooted in equitable and inclusive practices.
  - The strategy involves collaboration at all organizational levels, from leaders and people managers to employee resource or affinity groups and mental health champions.
  - The employer effectively communicates the strategy at all organizational levels.
  - The employer evaluates the impact of its well-being strategy.
11. Describe the employer's organization-wide strategy to promote employee well-being and address mental health concerns. *Use question 10 to guide your response, even if you did not check all items. Please limit your response to 2,000 or fewer characters.*
12. Does the employer invest in developing fair and supportive people managers at all organizational levels?
- Yes  No

13. Does the employer advise or train people managers to abide by the following expectations as part of their supervisory responsibilities? Please check all that apply.
- Routinely check in with direct reports (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly)
  - Evaluate and assist with direct reports' workload
  - Provide clear and realistic expectations and guidance to their direct reports
  - Provide direct reports with autonomy (e.g., provide flexible working hours, value productivity over micromanagement)
  - Acknowledge how direct reports' roles and accomplishments contribute to the organization's mission and goals
  - Recognize and celebrate direct reports' individual and shared accomplishments
  - Reward direct reports' passion, commitment, and hard work
  - Practice emotional intelligence in daily interactions with their team and direct reports
  - Notice the signs of acute stress or burnout in direct reports
14. Describe how the employer invests in developing fair and supportive people managers at all organizational levels. *Use question 13 to guide your response, even if you did not check all items. Please limit your response to 2,000 or fewer characters.*
15. Are leaders and people managers held accountable for the fair and consistent treatment of all employees?
- Yes  No
16. If yes, describe at least one concrete example of how leaders and people managers are held accountable for the fair and consistent treatment of all employees. *Please limit your response to 2,000 or fewer characters.*
17. Does the employer routinely enforce a fair and transparent performance review procedure for all employees?
- Yes  No
18. If yes, which statements about the performance review procedure are true? Please check all that apply.
- Each employee has a standardized job description and can easily access it.
  - The procedure evaluates performance based on standardized measurable criteria.
  - Eligible employees receive merit-based salary increases.
  - Eligible employees receive available internal promotions based on performance.
  - Employees are encouraged to discuss their professional development goals.
  - Employees are encouraged to provide constructive feedback about their manager's performance.
  - Employees are encouraged to ask their manager for specific support, like routine check-ins or workload assistance.
19. Does the employer enact a fair and transparent compensation policy? *Examples include market-competitive salaries, published salary ranges or bands, and cost-of-living adjustments.*
- Yes  No
20. Does the employer provide employees with clear pathways and guidance for professional development? *Examples include outlining how positions align with the organization's goals and metrics, routinely communicating professional development opportunities, or providing mentorship or career coaching services.*
- Yes  No

21. What professional development opportunities does the employer offer? Please check all that apply.
- Conference registration or travel stipends
  - Education or certification reimbursement
  - Mentorship program
  - Professional courses or training
  - Other: (Please describe)



## SECTION 2: BENEFITS THAT SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH

22. Does the employer offer health insurance?  
 Yes  No
23. Do the employer's health insurance plans cover various mental health and substance use services?  
 Yes  No
24. If yes, which of the following mental health and substance use services are covered by the employer's health insurance plans? Please check all that apply.
- Dual diagnosis treatment
  - Outpatient care
  - Peer support
  - Psychiatry
  - Psychotherapy
  - Residential care
  - Substance use rehabilitation
  - Telehealth or virtual care
  - Wellness coaching
  - Other: (Please describe)
25. Does the employer routinely monitor or evaluate health insurance plan data to ensure parity between its plans' physical and mental health care services?  
 Yes  No
26. If yes, which of the following data does the employer routinely monitor or evaluate? Please check all that apply. *These quantitative measures evaluate mental health and substance use disorder (MH/SUD) network adequacy as outlined in the Model Data Request Form (MDRF) by the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions and the HR Policy Association. [Learn more about the MDRF.](#)*
- Out-of-network use of providers for MH/SUD versus medical/surgical (M/S) services
  - In-network reimbursement rates for MH/SUD versus M/S providers
  - Denial rates for MH/SUD versus M/S services
  - Actual participation rates by MH/SUD providers listed in the plan's directory (i.e., the directory provided to employees is up to date with MH/SUD providers who are in-network and accepting new patients)
27. Does the employer offer frontline workers the same health insurance options as executive leadership and upper management?  
 Yes  No

28. Does the employer offer health insurance to employees' family members? *Family members are defined as spouses, domestic partners, children, and other dependents.*
- Yes  No
29. If the employer does not offer health insurance, does it alternatively contribute to employees' health care needs? *Examples include increasing pay to supplement costs for insurance purchased on the exchange or contributing to a Health Savings Account (HSA) to assist with medical expenses.*
- Yes  No
30. If yes, describe how the employer alternatively contributes to employees' health care needs. *Please limit your response to 2,000 or fewer characters.*
31. Does the employer offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or a similar program?
- Yes  No
32. If yes, which statements about the employer's EAP are true? Please check all that apply.
- The EAP provides mental health and substance use services, like short-term counseling or provider referrals.
  - On average, the EAP schedules the first session within five business days of an employee's initial inquiry.
  - The EAP provides at least five free, in-person, or virtual sessions per issue.
  - The EAP coordinates transitional services for issues that require longer-term mental health care.
33. Does the employer offer short-term disability (STD) insurance or sick leave bank equivalent?
- Yes  No
34. If yes, which statements about the employer's short-term disability insurance are true? Please check all that apply.
- The STD policy includes coverage for mental health and substance use conditions.
  - The STD policy covers at least 60% of an employee's base salary.
  - The STD policy covers at least 12 weeks of leave.
  - The STD policy does not limit coverage for suicide attempts or self-harm.
35. Does the employer offer long-term disability (LTD) insurance or a sick leave bank equivalent?
- Yes  No
36. If yes, which statements about the employer's long-term disability insurance are true? Please check all that apply.
- The LTD policy includes coverage for mental health and substance use conditions.
  - The LTD policy covers at least 60% of an employee's base salary.
  - The LTD policy covers at least 24 weeks of leave.
  - The LTD policy does not limit coverage for suicide attempts or self-harm.
37. Does the employer offer a paid parental leave policy? *This policy should be separate from STD/LTD and Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) policies.*
- Yes  No

38. If yes, what percentage of an employee's base salary does the parental leave policy cover?
- <60%
  - 60-69%
  - 70-79%
  - 80-89%
  - 90-100%
39. What is the maximum number of weeks provided under the parental leave policy? *Please round to the nearest whole number.*
- <3 weeks
  - 3-5 weeks
  - 6-8 weeks
  - 9-12 weeks
  - >12 weeks
40. Does the employer hire part-time employees? *Part-time employees are defined as those who work fewer than 35 hours per week.*
- Yes  No
41. If yes, does the employer offer benefits to part-time employees? Please check all that apply.
- Employee assistance program
  - Health insurance
  - Short-term or long-term disability insurance
  - Paid time off
  - Other: (Please describe)
42. Does the employer place employees at part-time or contract status to render them ineligible for health insurance or other benefits?
- Yes  No
43. Does the employer assist employees in accessing or navigating their health insurance and other benefits? *Examples include integrated health insurance and EAP services, a benefits concierge service, a dedicated benefits coordinator, peer navigators, or an onsite health clinic or services.*
- Yes  No
44. If yes, describe at least one concrete example of how the employer assists employees in accessing or navigating their health insurance and other benefits. *Please limit your response to 2,000 or fewer characters.*
45. Does the employer educate new employees about mental health benefits and other support during orientation or onboarding? *Examples include sharing information about mental health screening, crisis lifelines, warmlines, or local support groups.*
- Yes  No





## SECTION 3: CARING BEYOND COMPLIANCE

46. Does the employer consider how its hiring practices are inclusive of people living with a mental health or substance use condition? *Examples include removing stigmatizing language from job postings, offering accommodations during interviews, or partnering with community organizations.*
- Yes  No
47. Does the employer enact recovery-ready practices to support employees in recovery from a substance use disorder (SUD)? *A comprehensive list of recovery-ready practices can be found in the [Recovery-Ready Workplace Toolkit](#) provided by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration.*
- Yes  No
48. If yes, which of the following recovery-ready practices does the employer enact? Please check all that apply.
- Hire people in recovery from SUD
  - Review policies and practices around alcohol use during work-related social events
  - Support the development of employee resource or affinity groups for employees in recovery
  - Facilitate peer recovery support services or peer mentoring
  - Permit temporary or permanent modification of job requirements or reassignment to a vacant position
49. Does the employer explicitly educate employees about their rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), specifically regarding mental health or substance use conditions?
- Yes  No
50. Have human resources or people managers received in-person or virtual training on ADA compliance and accommodations for employees who disclose living with a mental health or substance use condition in the last 12 months?
- Yes  No
51. Does the employer ensure its accommodations request procedure is streamlined and accessible for all employees? *Examples include reducing the number of forms needed or having a designated accessibility team or coordinator.*
- Yes  No
52. Does the employer have an FMLA or equivalent policy that allows employees to take unpaid leave for mental health or substance use condition recovery and guarantees their position upon return?
- Yes  No
53. Does the employer have a return-to-work procedure for employees who can no longer perform their responsibilities due to a mental health or substance use condition? *Examples of return-to-work activities include providing accommodations, alternative positions, or career transition services.*
- Yes  No
54. Does the employer have a clear and accessible procedure for employees to report incidents of unfair or unsafe treatment, harassment, or discrimination?
- Yes  No
55. Does the employer respectfully and promptly respond to and effectively address reported incidents of unfair or unsafe treatment, harassment, or discrimination?
- Yes  No

56. Does the employer have a procedure for responding to critical incidents, such as an employee death, natural disaster, or workplace violence?  
 Yes  No
57. Does the employer provide support to employees after a critical incident? *Examples include real-time debriefing, immediate referral to mental health resources, or leave for employees who experience a traumatic event.*  
 Yes  No
58. Does leadership effectively communicate major organizational changes and potential outcomes to all employees respectfully and promptly? *Examples of major organizational changes include workforce reduction, leadership change, restructuring, budget cuts, healthcare changes, or return-to-office mandates.*  
 Yes  No
59. If yes, describe at least one concrete example of how leadership effectively communicated a major organizational change and potential outcomes to all employees in the last 24 months. *If a major organizational change has not occurred in the last 24 months, describe leadership's plan to communicate a change. Please limit your response to 2,000 or fewer characters.*



## SECTION 4: HOLISTIC WELLNESS AT WORK

60. Does the employer have a designated team or individual to promote employee well-being and address mental health concerns? *Examples include a committee, workgroup, employee resource or affinity group, task force, wellness coordinator, wellness champion, or mental health ambassador.*  
 Yes  No
61. If yes, what are the team's or individual's primary responsibilities? Please check all that apply.
- Develop or implement the organization's well-being strategy
  - Serve as the liaison between employees and leadership
  - Raise awareness and educate employees on mental health
  - Provide peer support or mentoring to employees with mental health concerns
  - Other: (Please describe)
62. How does leadership support the team or individual? Please check all that apply.
- Allocate work hours for participation
  - Provide a dedicated budget or salaried position
  - Sponsor or participate in the team's activities
  - Formally recognize or communicate the team or individual's efforts on their behalf
  - Other: (Please describe)
63. Are the team or individual encouraged to provide recommendations to leadership or participate in decision-making processes?  
 Yes  No
64. Does the employer conduct mental health awareness or literacy campaigns to promote mental health and available resources?  
 Yes  No

65. Has the employer provided at least one in-person or virtual mental health training for people managers or employees in the last 12 months? *Training should address mental health or related topics.*
- Yes  No
66. If yes, which topics did the training(s) address? Please check all that apply.
- Active listening or emotional intelligence
- Stress management or work-life balance
- Suicide awareness and prevention
- Supporting employee mental health concerns
- Toxic work environment and bullying prevention
- Trauma-informed cultural humility
- Other: (Please describe)
67. Does leadership include an individual who talks openly about their lived experience with a mental health or substance use condition? *Leadership is defined as board members, executive leadership, human resources, upper management, or employee resource or affinity group lead.*
- Yes  No
68. Does the employer provide opportunities for employees to connect socially or emotionally with their peers? *Examples include employee resource or affinity groups, culture committees, staff retreats, support groups, or virtual connection platforms.*
- Yes  No
69. If yes, describe at least one concrete example of how the employer provides opportunities for employees to connect socially or emotionally with their peers. *Please limit your response to 2,000 or fewer characters.*
70. Does the employer offer additional benefits or resources that support a healthy work-life balance or personal matters outside of work?
- Yes  No
71. If yes, which of the following benefits or resources does the employer offer? Please check all that apply.
- Adoption or fertility assistance
- Emergency or disaster relief funds
- Financial education and planning
- Gym access or paid membership
- Pet care services (veterinary telehealth, dog walking, or boarding services)
- Physical health education (smoking cessation, heart health)
- Nutrition education or support
- Retirement preparation services
- Student loan assistance or repayment
- Subsidized childcare costs or onsite childcare
- Volunteer opportunities
- Wellness stipend or Lifestyle Savings Account (LSA)
- Other: (Please describe)
72. Does the employer consider and address how the physical work environment impacts their employees' physical and mental health? *Examples include offering a wellness or break room, providing ergonomic and accessible work equipment, or encouraging walks in nature.*
- Yes  No

73. Does the employer offer eligible employees the option to work remotely from home or another location?  
 Yes  No
74. Does the employer offer flexible work arrangements to eligible employees? *Examples include flexibility in structuring an employee's work schedule around start and end times, appointments, or other personal matters.*  
 Yes  No
75. How many days of paid time off (PTO) are offered to eligible employees in their **first year of employment**? *PTO includes vacation, sick time, mental health days, federal and administrative holidays, and personal time. Eight hours is equivalent to one day of PTO. Please round to the nearest whole number.*
- <15 days
  - 15-24 days
  - 25-29 days
  - 30+ days
76. Can employees use their PTO to care for family members with mental health conditions? *Family members are defined as grandparents, elderly parents, spouses, domestic partners, children, or other dependents.*  
 Yes  No
77. Does the employer actively encourage employees to use their PTO to care for their mental health and well-being?  
 Yes  No
78. If yes, how does the employer encourage employees to use their PTO to care for their mental health and well-being? Please check all that apply.
- Communicate about PTO usage frequently in emails, newsletters, or other means
  - Encourage leaders and managers to model healthy behaviors
  - Ensure managers have a plan for addressing employees' work responsibilities in their absence and allow employees to disengage during PTO
  - Implement organization-wide planned closures
  - Monitor PTO usage and send reminders to employees with high balances
  - Require employees to take a designated amount of time off annually
  - Require managers to routinely check in with direct reports about their usage
  - Other: (Please describe)
79. **Optional:** Describe relevant information or address any application questions requiring further explanation. *Please limit your response to 2,000 or fewer characters.*