

# MOMENTUM

**Health & Wellness Supplement  
for MAEA Members**

**Workplace Wellness  
Programs for Women**

Why they are worth the investment.

**Human-Digital Twins**

What are they? Why they may be the future of workplace wellness.

**LVBCH and NEPA  
MAEA Partnership**

The potential benefits and what it could mean for your business.



# A Letter from Our President

As we close out the year and prepare for the opportunities ahead, I want to take a moment to reflect on an issue that affects every organization—workplace health and wellness. Supporting our teams' well-being isn't just about fostering a positive work environment; it's about creating a foundation for sustainable productivity, retention, and overall success. That's why I'm thrilled to introduce this year's Health and Wellness Supplement, a resource designed to help MAEA member companies navigate the challenges and embrace the opportunities of workplace wellness.

The data paints a clear picture of the work ahead. According to a November 2024 Gallup report, only 21% of employees strongly agree that their organization cares about their overall well-being. This figure ties the record low from early 2024 and underscores a significant disconnect between employer intentions and employee perceptions. For employers like us, this is a call to action—an opportunity to bridge that gap and create environments where our teams feel genuinely valued and supported.

*Leadership is also pivotal in creating a culture of wellness. When leaders actively support and participate in wellness initiatives, employees take notice.*

One of the key challenges highlighted in this year's supplement is the impact of workplace stress. Research from Mental Health America's 2024 Workplace Wellness Research reveals that three in four employees report workplace stress negatively affects their sleep. Stress not only takes a toll on health but also affects productivity, morale, and retention. For MAEA members, this statistic is a reminder of the importance of addressing workplace culture and implementing strategies that reduce stress and promote balance.

Mental health, in particular, remains a critical area of focus. The 2024 Voice of the Workplace Report by Calm Business highlights the growing reliance on digital mental health platforms, such as virtual therapy and mindfulness apps. These tools provide employees with accessible resources to manage stress and anxiety, making mental health support more inclusive and impactful. Incorporating these solutions into workplace wellness programs not only helps employees but also strengthens the overall resilience of the organization.

Technology continues to reshape workplace wellness. From fitness trackers to apps that promote mindfulness, the tools available today allow businesses to tailor programs to meet employees where they are. This level of personalization makes wellness programs more engaging and effective. For industries like ours, where efficiency and retention are priorities, leveraging technology in wellness efforts is no longer optional—it's essential.

Leadership is also pivotal in creating a culture of wellness. When leaders actively support and participate in wellness initiatives, employees take notice. This involvement not only improves participation rates but also reinforces the organization's commitment to its people. A workplace where health and well-being are championed at every level becomes a place where employees want to stay, grow, and contribute their best.

This supplement provides actionable strategies and insights to help you build or expand wellness programs in your organization. Whether it's addressing mental health through digital tools, creating opportunities for physical activity, or improving workplace culture to reduce stress, the steps you take now will have lasting impacts on your teams and your business.

As we move into 2025, let's make workplace wellness a priority. Together, we can create environments where employees thrive and businesses succeed.



*Darlene J. Robbins*

**Darlene J. Robbins**

*President*

Northeast PA Manufacturers  
& Employers Association

**4** How Workplace Wellness Programs Deliver Big Returns

**6** Women's Health and Family Building Are Taking Center Stage

**8** Human-Digital Twins

**11** Evernorth Pharmacist Displays Heroics During Hurricane Beryl

**14** Walking Pneumonia is on the Rise

**16** The Stargate Project

**18** The LVBCH-NEPA MAEA Partnership

**19** Empowering Women at Work

**20** Eye on the Community: SEAPA



How Workplace Wellness Programs

# DELIVER BIG RETURNS



Imagine investing a dollar and getting \$3.27 back. That's the kind of return workplace wellness programs are delivering for businesses, according to research published in *Health Affairs*. For members of the Northeast PA Manufacturers and Employers Association (MAEA), this isn't just a nice statistic—it's proof that taking care of your workforce's well-being directly supports the bottom line.

Wellness programs are more than just feel-good initiatives. They address the real challenges companies face every day: reducing absenteeism, lowering healthcare costs, and improving productivity. At the same time, they foster loyalty, engagement, and a workplace culture that prioritizes care and community. These programs don't just work—they transform workplaces into healthier, more productive environments.

## Why Wellness Programs Make Financial Sense

The financial benefits of wellness programs are impossible to ignore. Every dollar spent on these initiatives leads to an average savings of \$3.27 in healthcare costs, as detailed in the *Health Affairs* study. Companies that incorporate preventive care measures like health screenings or flu shots consistently report reduced medical expenses over time.

These savings aren't just about cutting insurance costs. Employees who feel healthy and supported are less likely to call in sick, and they show up ready to work. For MAEA members, who often rely on a skilled and specialized workforce, this is critical. When workers are present, engaged, and healthy, productivity flourishes.

## The Growing Focus on Mental Health

Mental health has emerged as one of the most important components of workplace wellness. Issues like stress, anxiety, and burnout are major contributors to absenteeism and lower productivity. The *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* highlights the benefits of mindfulness programs and virtual therapy, showing that these efforts reduce stress and healthcare costs while improving morale.

For companies throughout PA, investing in mental health isn't just about supporting employees—it's a strategic move to retain talent. Workers who feel their mental health is valued are more likely to stay loyal to their employers, contributing to a stable, engaged team.

## How Technology is Changing Wellness

Technology has reshaped how companies deliver wellness programs. From fitness trackers to mental health apps, these tools make it easier than ever for employees to participate on their own terms. Data from the "2024 Employee Wellness Industry Trends Report" confirms that organizations leveraging technology see significantly higher participation rates than those relying on traditional approaches.

For MAEA members, this is a game-changer. Tools like virtual coaching and personalized health apps allow companies to scale their wellness programs while maintaining a personal touch. These innovations also make it possible to track progress and adjust programs based on real employee feedback, ensuring they remain effective and engaging.

## Starting Small Can Lead to Big Results

One of the great things about wellness programs is that they don't need to be large-scale to make an impact. Even simple efforts, like subsidizing gym memberships or providing healthy snacks, can lead to meaningful improvements. A study in the *American Journal of Health Promotion* found that even modest physical activity programs result in reduced healthcare costs and higher workplace energy levels.

For companies just starting out, small steps send a powerful message to employees: their well-being matters. These smaller initiatives also build momentum for more comprehensive programs in the future.

### Prevention: A Key to Success

Prevention-focused wellness initiatives are some of the most effective ways to keep a workforce healthy and productive. Regular health screenings, flu shots, and smoking cessation programs can catch potential health problems early, saving companies significant costs down the line.

For industries like manufacturing, where deadlines and efficiency are paramount, prevention is essential. A healthy workforce means fewer disruptions, better morale, and higher productivity overall.

### Leadership is the Driving Force

Wellness programs thrive when leadership actively supports them. Employees are far more likely to participate when they see managers and executives modeling healthy behaviors or attending wellness events themselves.

The *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* emphasizes that leadership involvement is directly tied to program success. For MAEA members, leaders who embrace wellness—by joining fitness challenges, promoting mental health initiatives, or simply being vocal supporters—create a culture where employee well-being is a shared priority.

### Adapting Wellness Programs to Employee Needs

The most successful wellness programs aren't static; they evolve based on employee feedback. What works for one workforce might not resonate with another. Regular surveys and open communication help companies refine their programs to better meet employee priorities.

Some workers may prioritize physical fitness, while others might value mental health support or financial wellness education. By tailoring programs to address these diverse needs, companies can ensure their

efforts remain relevant and impactful.

## Building a Wellness Strategy

For businesses looking to improve or create a wellness program, the path forward is clear:

- Start small. Introduce initiatives like fitness challenges or healthy snacks to spark interest.
- Use technology. Leverage apps, trackers, and virtual tools to make participation easy and measurable.
- Lead by example. Encourage managers to participate and promote wellness.
- Focus on prevention. Offer screenings and vaccines to minimize future health risks.
- Listen to your workforce. Gather feedback to continuously refine your approach.

## Wellness: A Strategy That Works

Workplace wellness programs are a win-win. They save money, boost productivity, and create a healthier, happier workforce. For MAEA members, these programs are especially valuable in retaining skilled workers and maintaining high efficiency.

Beyond the financial benefits, wellness initiatives demonstrate a company's commitment to its people, fostering a culture of care and loyalty. Whether you're starting with simple steps or launching a comprehensive program, investing in employee well-being is one of the smartest decisions any organization can make. When your employees thrive, so does your business.



# WOMEN'S HEALTH AND FAMILY BUILDING ARE TAKING CENTER STAGE

*\*And They Aren't Stepping Back*



Throughout my 25 years in reproductive endocrinology and obstetrics/gynecology, I have witnessed first-hand the tremendous improvements that have been made in women's health. Are they coming fast enough? Not to my liking. Has it been a straight trajectory? Not always, but it's hard to find anything in healthcare that is.

One thing is certain, however: the opportunity for positive change has never been greater. The convergence of medical and technological advancements; the rise in patient education and public advocacy; and the sheer desire of women to demand better all stand now to make 2025 a year that we will all be proud of. Here's how I see things shaping up.

To deliver the trusted care women and families deserve, we must recognize the root of the problem.

To achieve the progress we need to see in women's health and family building, it's necessary first to confront the hard historical facts. It is baffling to me when I look back and consider the degree to which women's health, at a global scale, has been sidelined, siloed, and deprioritized. We're still playing catch-up from the decades where women were excluded from clinical trials, and subject to the long-held belief that we can just suck it up and keep forging ahead despite pain or illness (though this is also a testament to our collective resilience and strength).

Women have also historically put the health of others ahead of our own. As the go-to caregivers in most families, the responsibility for managing the health of children, spouses, and aging parents can be all-consuming, leaving little time to focus on our own care. A recent Deloitte survey of US consumers finds that women are 35% more likely than men to have skipped or avoided care over the past year. Along with competing demands for our time, out-of-pocket costs present a higher barrier to care for women, who the same survey shows require nearly 10% more services than men on average—even excluding maternity-related care. While the drivers of this imbalance are varied and complex, the result is starkly simple: women are not getting the individualized focus and quality care we deserve.

Fragmented care is not serving women, or employers.

While the surge of investment and innovation in women's health is a significant and welcome breakthrough, much of this progress has unfolded in a way that's not advantageous to meaningful care delivery. The result? A jagged landscape of siloed point solutions, each addressing specific needs, conditions, or life stages, yet failing to account for the interconnected nature of women's health. With so much of women's care happening outside of primary care and little coordination among providers, these fragmented solutions often miss the bigger picture. This can lead to delays in diagnosis, ineffective treatments, and, ultimately, worse outcomes for women.

Take endometriosis, for example, a chronic, estrogen-dependent condition that affects roughly 1 in 10 women of reproductive age globally and, untreated, commonly leads to infertility. Despite its prevalence and devastating effects, average time to diagnosis ranges from 6 to 11 years globally. Why? Because women's care is scattered across such a wide range of providers, it can take years to assemble the puzzle pieces to arrive at an accurate diagnosis, let alone effective treatment. For example, a woman experiencing pelvic pain may see their gynecologist or PCP but may not think to inform them they're already seeing a GI for rectal bleeding or abdominal pain, or that they've been in and out of the ER for debilitating menstrual pain.

When the picture finally comes together, first-line treatment tends to be hormonal suppression before surgery. If she gets to the point of surgery, odds are high that the endometriosis surgeon she needs will be out-of-network.

It doesn't have to be this way. When women's health and family building needs are integrated from pre-conception through mid-life and entrusted to providers trained and credentialed and accessible across the full spectrum of women's needs, life-impacting conditions like this can be caught and treated early, minimizing suffering and improving outcomes.

A tidal shift is underway, as more women advocate for the care they deserve.

Fortunately, change is in the air. In just the past several years, the women's health landscape has been reshaped by a convergence of forces: from within the medical community to health-tech entrepreneurs and government-funded research—and from women themselves demanding better. Women's health has benefited from heightened awareness of gender bias and inequities in health outcomes, a surge in innovation (check out my post from the Forbes Health Summit), and empowerment of women everywhere to leverage new digital resources to learn more and advocate for their needs.

While post-election there is an air of uncertainty—if not unease—about everything from the economy to healthcare policy to reproductive rights, one thing is certain: women refuse to turn back on the gains we've made. As we head into 2025, the question is not whether we will advance the cause and build on recent momentum, but how to do so in a way that sets a new standard of clinical excellence and outcomes for women, their families and employers.

In 2025, let's set a new standard of care for women globally.

As we enter this new year, let's pause to celebrate the progress made in advancing women's health. The influx of innovation and focus on this historically underserved space has been nothing short of transformational. But momentum alone is not enough to address the fundamental issues that persist. It's time for a new paradigm.

Let's make 2025 the year we drive women's and family care from the edges of the healthcare system to its center.

Let's continue to break down silos and create pathways for underserved areas, from pre-conception to pregnancy, parenting and menopause.

Let's demand high quality, accredited specialists who are trained and credentialed across the spectrum of women's and family health needs.

Let's raise the standard of care to include accountability for outcomes and a trusted care path, so each of us can realize our individual health and family-building goals.

We're on this journey together.



**Janet Choi, MD**  
*Chief Medical Officer,*  
Progyny





# HUMAN-DIGITAL TWINS

Imagine a workplace where your needs are anticipated and addressed in real time—where proactive solutions replace generic surveys, and every employee is supported through personalized insights. This vision is becoming a reality with "human-digital twins," a groundbreaking technology that creates virtual replicas of individuals. By analyzing real-time data, these digital counterparts are transforming how companies approach employee wellness, making workplaces smarter, healthier, and more efficient.

## What Are Human-Digital Twins?

Human-digital twins are detailed virtual models of individuals, created using data collected from wearables, sensors, and historical health records. These twins act as a dynamic bridge between the digital and physical worlds. By continuously analyzing information such as posture, movement, heart rate, and environmental conditions, they provide actionable insights to enhance safety, health, and productivity.

Dr. Jeremy Nunn, founder of Workmetrics, describes human-digital twins as a two-way system: changes in the physical world are reflected in the digital model, and adjustments made to the digital twin can guide real-world decisions. For example, if a worker's digital twin detects repetitive strain in their posture, the system might recommend changes to their workstation setup before the discomfort develops into a chronic issue. This ability to provide tailored, real-time recommendations represents a significant departure from traditional, one-size-fits-all approaches to employee well-being.

## Preventing Injuries Before They Happen

One of the most promising applications of human-digital twins is their ability to prevent workplace injuries. In high-risk environments such as manufacturing or construction, safety hazards are a constant concern. Human-digital twins can analyze workflows and identify patterns that increase the likelihood of accidents.

Rene Schulte, director at Valorem Reply, explains how this technology is already being used for virtual safety inspections. For instance, if workers are frequently entering restricted zones near heavy machinery, the system can flag these behaviors and recommend immediate changes, such as reconfiguring workspaces or providing additional safety training. This proactive

approach reduces the likelihood of accidents, creating safer work environments for all employees.

Beyond high-risk industries, human-digital twins are equally effective in office settings. By analyzing posture, movement, and workspace ergonomics, they can suggest adjustments to desk layouts, chair heights, or monitor positions. These small but meaningful changes help prevent musculoskeletal issues, such as back pain or repetitive strain injuries, improving both comfort and productivity.

## Tackling Stress and Burnout with Data

Stress and burnout are significant challenges in today's workplaces, often going unnoticed until they lead to serious health issues. Human-digital twins address this problem by monitoring physiological and environmental data to detect early signs of mental strain. Metrics like heart rate variability, sleep quality, and workplace conditions are continuously analyzed to identify patterns of stress or fatigue.

When signs of burnout emerge, the system provides tailored recommendations. These might include encouraging an employee to take a break, adjusting their workload, or connecting them with mental health resources. The ability to intervene early is crucial, as it prevents minor issues from escalating into long-term problems.

AI integration further enhances the effectiveness of human-digital twins. For example, research by McKinsey & Company highlights how AI-driven twins can predict burnout and recommend targeted interventions, such as mindfulness exercises or access to therapy. These proactive measures reduce absenteeism, improve employee morale, and foster a healthier, more engaged workforce.

## Personalization: A Key Advantage

Unlike traditional wellness programs, which often rely on generalized strategies, human-digital twins excel at providing personalized care. Each twin is unique, reflecting the specific needs and behaviors of the individual it represents. This level of customization ensures that every employee receives the support they need to thrive.

## Optimizing Ergonomics

Digital twins equipped with motion sensors analyze how employees interact with their workspaces. For

example, if a worker's twin detects poor posture or repetitive movements, it might recommend adjustments such as raising their desk height or improving their chair's lumbar support. These small, personalized changes not only enhance day-to-day comfort but also prevent long-term injuries, creating a healthier workplace environment.

### Addressing Mental Health Holistically

Human-digital twins also play a critical role in supporting mental health. Integrated AI chatbots can engage employees in private, personalized conversations about their well-being. If signs of chronic stress or anxiety are detected, the system might suggest stress-relief techniques, such as deep breathing exercises, or connect the employee with a mental health professional. These interventions are immediate, private, and easily accessible, breaking down barriers that often prevent individuals from seeking help.

### Real-World Applications of Human-Digital Twins

Despite sounding futuristic, human-digital twins are already being implemented with impressive results across various industries.

In healthcare, companies like Bayer and AstraZeneca have used digital twins to simulate patient outcomes and refine treatment protocols. During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital twins played a vital role in redesigning office layouts to ensure safe social distancing. By tracking traffic patterns with IoT-connected sensors, organizations were able to make data-driven adjustments that minimized the risk of virus transmission.

Manufacturing firms have also leveraged digital twins to streamline workflows and enhance efficiency. In one case, a company identified a bottleneck causing unnecessary stress on workers. By addressing the issue, they not only improved productivity by

15% but also reduced employee stress levels by 20%. These examples demonstrate the versatility and effectiveness of this technology across different contexts.

### Addressing Challenges and Ethical Considerations

While the benefits of human-digital twins are significant, their implementation raises important challenges, particularly around data privacy and ethics. Since these systems rely on sensitive personal data, ensuring robust security measures is essential. Dr. Nunn emphasizes the importance of transparency, noting that employees must understand how their data is being collected and used, as well as have control over it.

Data accuracy is another critical factor. The effectiveness of a digital twin depends on the quality of the data it receives. If the input data is incomplete or inaccurate, the recommendations provided by the twin may be flawed, potentially undermining trust in the system. Additionally, ethical considerations are particularly relevant when monitoring mental health.

Employers must use this technology responsibly, focusing on support rather than surveillance, to foster a culture of trust and respect.

### The Future of Workplace Wellness

Human-digital twins represent a transformative step forward in workplace wellness. By addressing physical, mental, and emotional health in real time, they empower both employees and employers to create healthier, more productive environments. For employees, this means personalized support that prevents issues before they arise, whether it's optimizing ergonomics or detecting early signs of burnout. For employers, the insights provided by these twins enable smarter decision-making and significant cost savings.

As Rene Schulte aptly puts it, "Human-digital twins offer unparalleled opportunities to create workplaces where safety, health, and productivity go hand in hand." With this technology at the forefront, the future workplace promises to be not only more efficient but also more compassionate, innovative, and attuned to the well-being of every individual.



# How an Evernorth specialty pharmacist's efforts helped ensure access to lifesaving medications during Hurricane Beryl

Michelle Hamilton, pharmacist-in-charge of Accredo's Houston care delivery site, went above and beyond to ensure patients were able to access their specialty medications amidst catastrophic Hurricane Beryl.

In the world of specialty pharmacy, ensuring patients have access to their medications is critical. These patients often face complex health conditions that require life-sustaining therapies – medications that cannot wait to be administered, regardless of external circumstances.

At Accredo by Evernorth, we are committed to overcoming any obstacle to deliver these essential treatments to our patients and have robust continuity plans in place – including leveraging our expansive footprint and real-time tracking.

Recently, Michelle Hamilton, pharmacist-in-charge of Accredo's Houston care delivery site, went above and beyond to ensure patients were able to access their specialty medications amidst catastrophic Hurricane Beryl. Michelle's story represents the above and beyond care that Evernorth's specialty pharmacy team provides to patients every day.

On July 7, 2024, as Hurricane Beryl made landfall in Texas, Michelle faced a daunting challenge: power outages and flooded streets threatened the operations of Accredo's Houston site, which houses critical specialty medications for thousands of patients, many of which are stored in

medical-grade coolers.

Despite the risks, Michelle's dedication to patients propelled her as she navigated through flooded streets on foot to reach the site and ensure that the generator was operational and the medications were secure and did not need to be replaced and/or dispensed at another location. In the days that followed the storm, Michelle coordinated the delivery of critical medications to more than 150 patients in the Houston area alone.

Her story is a testament to the importance of proactive planning, open communication, and a deep calling to serve patients. As a born-and-raised Houstonian who has weathered many storms, her motivation is deeply rooted in the desire to support her community. The lives of our patients are what inspire her to persevere in times of crisis.

For a more detailed account of Michelle's experience, please **watch her video interview here:** [www.evernorth.com/hurricane-beryl](http://www.evernorth.com/hurricane-beryl).

For more content like this, please **sign up for the Evernorth newsletter:** [www.evernorth.com/newsletter](http://www.evernorth.com/newsletter).

## PATIENT IMPACT

- + Provided medications to 150 patients
- + 9 emergency couriers





# Having the right PBM partner matters

Express Scripts by Evernorth® manages pharmacy services and lowers drug spend for health plans, employers, labor unions and government agencies. We simplify complexities and provide holistic, condition-focused care and clinically superior pharmacy benefit solutions for our clients and the people they serve:

-  **We create** safe, affordable access to medications across our network
-  **We support** clients on the creation of formularies that include safe, effective and affordable medications
-  **We negotiate** with pharmaceutical manufacturers who set the price of prescriptions drugs
-  **We provide** clinical expertise and programs that help people get and stay on the medications they need



To get more facts on Express Scripts, visit [evernorth.com](http://evernorth.com) or contact Todd Trzeciak at 732.589.3330 or [todd.trzeciak@express-scripts.com](mailto:todd.trzeciak@express-scripts.com)

## Express Scripts

By EVERNORTH®



Our **Seltzer1** model allows us to serve as your single point of contact for **ALL** insurance needs.



**Business Insurance | Personal Insurance | Employee Benefits | Risk Management |  
Credit Insurance | Bonds**

888.366.1000 • [WWW.SELTZTERGRP.COM](http://WWW.SELTZTERGRP.COM)

# REPORT ELDER ABUSE

# 1-800-490-8505

SPONSORED BY:  
SCHUYLKILL ELDER ABUSE  
PREVENTION ALLIANCE  
SEAPA, INC.

"FOR NO OTHER REASON  
THAN WE WILL ALL BE OLD"

## Smarter benefits for life's milestones

Progyny's unique approach to family building and women's health consistently delivers superior health outcomes, cost savings, and member experiences.



Fertility & Family  
Building



Pregnancy  
& Postpartum



Menopause  
& Midlife

Visit [progyny.com](https://progyny.com) to learn how you can support your workforce across milestone moments



Scan the QR code  
to connect with us.





# Walking Pneumonia is on the Rise

Walking pneumonia is a mild form of pneumonia that often develops gradually and can linger for weeks or months.

Respiratory infections spike during colder months, and this year walking pneumonia—a milder form of pneumonia caused by *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*—is drawing attention. While it often allows individuals to continue their daily routines, symptoms such as fatigue, chest discomfort, and a persistent cough can disrupt workplaces and schools for weeks.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued an alert in late 2024 noting an unusual rise in *M. pneumoniae* infections, particularly among young children. Emergency room visits and lab data suggest the surge began in late spring and has remained high, though the illness's mildness and lack of mandatory reporting make exact numbers difficult to quantify. Walking pneumonia is often mistaken for a lingering cold, which complicates efforts to limit its spread.

## Understanding Walking Pneumonia

Walking pneumonia is a mild form of pneumonia that often develops gradually and can linger for weeks or months. Symptoms include:

- Persistent dry or wet cough
- Fatigue and weakness
- Low-grade fever

- Sore throat and headache
- Mild chest discomfort or pain
- Occasionally, gastrointestinal symptoms in children, like nausea or diarrhea

Many people dismiss the condition as a cold or allergies, only realizing it's more serious when symptoms fail to resolve. Diagnosing walking pneumonia can be challenging due to its overlap with illnesses like flu, RSV, or COVID-19. Healthcare providers often rely on physical exams and tests such as PCR swabs, chest X-rays, or sputum cultures to confirm *M. pneumoniae*. However, mild cases are often managed based on symptoms without lab confirmation.

The current surge in cases reflects broader respiratory illness trends. During the COVID-19 pandemic, masking and distancing curbed exposure to many pathogens, leaving immune systems less prepared for infections like *M. pneumoniae*. Additionally, colder weather drives people indoors, where poor ventilation can facilitate transmission. Walking pneumonia cases also tend to peak every three to seven years, and some experts speculate that the current strain may be more transmissible than previous ones.

## Managing Walking Pneumonia in the Workplace

Walking pneumonia's mild symptoms often lead to delays in addressing its spread, as individuals often mistake the illness for a common cold or a minor flu. This delayed response can result in a higher risk of transmission in environments such as workplaces, where close contact and shared spaces facilitate the spread of airborne illnesses. Employers, however, can implement a range of proactive measures to protect their teams and maintain a healthier work environment.

Improving workplace ventilation is one of the most effective ways to reduce the spread of airborne bacteria and viruses, including those responsible for walking pneumonia. This involves upgrading existing HVAC systems to include high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters, which are designed to trap fine particles, including bacteria and viruses. Additionally, portable air purifiers can be strategically placed in high-traffic or poorly ventilated areas to further enhance air quality. Ensuring that fresh air circulates through workspaces is equally important. This can be achieved by opening windows where possible, adjusting HVAC settings to increase the intake of outdoor air, or even redesigning workspaces to optimize airflow. These measures collectively create a cleaner, safer atmosphere, reducing the likelihood of illness spreading among employees.

Encouraging employees to stay home when they feel unwell is another critical step in preventing the spread of walking pneumonia and other contagious illnesses. However, simply asking employees to avoid the workplace is often not enough. Employers need to back this guidance with supportive policies, such as flexible sick leave options or work-from-home arrangements. Employees who feel pressured to work while sick due to financial or job security concerns are more likely to come to the workplace, potentially spreading illness to others. Offering paid sick leave or temporary remote work opportunities can significantly reduce this risk, fostering a culture where health is prioritized over presenteeism.

Good hygiene practices within the workplace also play a fundamental role in controlling the spread of walking pneumonia. Employers can take tangible steps to encourage these practices by providing accessible hygiene supplies throughout the workplace. For example, hand sanitizer stations should be placed at entry points, near shared equipment like printers or coffee machines, and in common areas such as break rooms. Disinfectant wipes should be made available to clean shared surfaces, including desks, keyboards, and door handles. Posters or digital reminders in visible locations can reinforce the importance of regular handwashing and proper respiratory hygiene, such as covering coughs and sneezes with tissues or elbows.

Education is another powerful tool in combating the spread of walking pneumonia. Employers should

ensure their teams are well-informed about the symptoms of the illness, which can include persistent cough, fatigue, low-grade fever, and chest discomfort. Because these symptoms often overlap with those of less severe conditions, it's vital to highlight that walking pneumonia tends to linger longer and may require medical attention. Employers can distribute educational materials through internal communications, such as emails, newsletters, or workplace posters, explaining when to seek care and how early intervention can prevent complications. Additionally, hosting health workshops or inviting healthcare professionals to give presentations on respiratory illnesses can deepen employees' understanding and promote a proactive approach to health.

Finally, fostering a supportive workplace culture around health and wellness can amplify the effectiveness of these measures. When leadership models healthy behaviors—such as staying home when sick or wearing masks during flu season—it sets a tone that prioritizes employee well-being. Regularly communicating the importance of health initiatives, offering flu shots or other preventative care on-site, and providing access to resources like employee assistance programs can create an environment where employees feel empowered to prioritize their health without fear of judgment or repercussions.

By combining these strategies—improved ventilation, supportive sick leave policies, robust hygiene practices, and comprehensive health education—employers can significantly mitigate the risk of walking pneumonia spreading through their teams. Proactively addressing these concerns not only protects individual employees but also promotes overall productivity and morale, ensuring a safer and healthier workplace for everyone.

### Treatment and Prevention

Most cases of walking pneumonia resolve with rest, hydration, and over-the-counter symptom management. In confirmed cases, antibiotics like macrolides (e.g., azithromycin) are commonly prescribed, though alternative treatments may be necessary in areas with antibiotic resistance. Preventative measures, including regular handwashing, avoiding close contact with sick individuals, and staying up to date on flu and pneumococcal vaccines, can reduce overall susceptibility to infections.

### The Takeaway for Employers

Walking pneumonia may not be life-threatening, but its disruptive effects can ripple through workplaces and schools. By fostering a culture of health awareness, improving air quality, and supporting employees in recognizing symptoms, employers can mitigate its impact. Early action and preventative measures are essential to protecting teams and maintaining productivity during the respiratory illness season.

# The Stargate Project

## TRANSFORMING THE MEDICAL INDUSTRY THROUGH AI

The Stargate Project, a \$500 billion initiative to create advanced AI infrastructure across the United States, holds the potential to revolutionize the medical industry. Backed by technology leaders such as OpenAI, SoftBank, and Oracle, this bold venture seeks to push the boundaries of innovation.

Healthcare, a field already benefiting from AI advancements, stands to gain significantly from the project's success, particularly in diagnostics, treatment personalization, and drug development.

AI's ability to analyze vast datasets with precision has already begun transforming how diseases are detected and diagnosed. Advanced tools can process medical images like MRIs and X-rays with exceptional accuracy, identifying conditions such as cancer and cardiovascular disease at earlier stages.

Early detection not only improves patient outcomes but also reduces the overall cost of care by enabling timely interventions. With the Stargate Project's enhanced infrastructure, these capabilities could be further refined, offering healthcare providers faster, more reliable tools to support critical decisions.

This technological leap promises to reduce diagnostic errors and improve access to high-quality care, particularly in underserved areas where specialists may be scarce. By enabling remote consultations supported by AI, patients in rural or economically disadvantaged regions could receive the same level of care as those in urban centers. The result is a more equitable healthcare system where geography and access to specialists no longer limit the quality of care available to patients.

### Personalized Medicine: A Revolution in Care

The era of one-size-fits-all treatments is gradually giving way to personalized medicine, a field where AI

plays a pivotal role. By analyzing a patient's unique genetic makeup, lifestyle, and medical history, AI-driven systems can predict responses to specific treatments, guiding doctors toward interventions that are both effective and tailored to the individual. This approach reduces trial-and-error prescribing, minimizing side effects and improving outcomes.

AI's ability to synthesize large datasets makes it an ideal tool for advancing pharmacogenomics, the study of how genes influence drug responses. Through targeted analysis, AI can identify patterns that would be impossible to discern manually, providing insights that enable more precise medication selection. This not only benefits patients but also reduces costs for healthcare systems by eliminating ineffective treatments.

The Stargate Project's focus on infrastructure expansion could accelerate advancements in this field. With greater computational power, AI systems can process increasingly complex datasets, refining predictions and uncovering new therapeutic pathways. As personalized medicine becomes more accessible, it has the potential to shift healthcare from reactive treatment to proactive prevention, fundamentally changing how diseases are managed.

### Streamlining Drug Development

Drug development, traditionally a lengthy and expensive process, stands to be one of the most transformative areas of AI application. On average, it takes more than a decade and billions of dollars to bring a new drug to market. AI can streamline this process by modeling biological systems, predicting drug interactions, and identifying promising compounds for further study.

The Stargate Project's infrastructure would provide the computational capacity needed to scale these



OpenAI



SoftBank





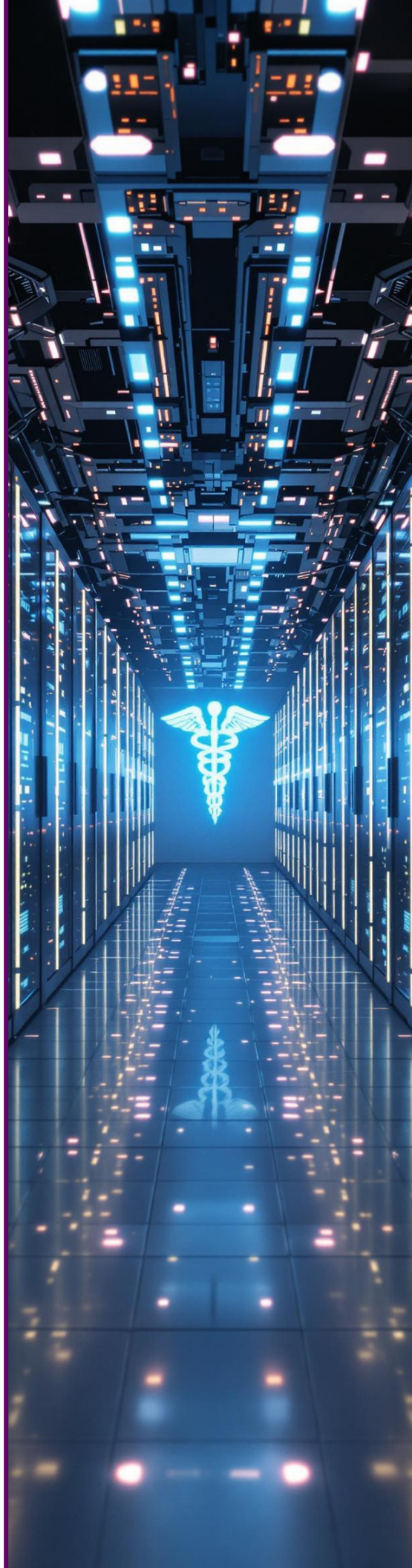
capabilities, enabling pharmaceutical companies to conduct virtual screenings of thousands of compounds simultaneously. By simulating how drugs interact with the human body, AI can identify candidates with the highest potential for success, reducing the number of trials needed and cutting development costs.

AI's role extends beyond discovery to include optimizing clinical trials, a critical phase in drug development. By using AI to identify suitable trial participants and analyze data in real-time, researchers can shorten timelines while maintaining rigorous safety and efficacy standards. These advancements not only speed up the development process but also ensure that life-saving treatments reach patients sooner.

### **Challenges, Ethics, and Equity**

The integration of AI into healthcare also brings challenges that must be addressed to ensure its success. Privacy and data security are paramount in handling sensitive medical information. Patients and providers alike need assurance that data will be protected and used responsibly. Building trust in AI-driven solutions requires transparent policies and robust safeguards against breaches.

As AI takes on a larger role in decision-making, ethical considerations surrounding accountability and transparency come to the forefront. While AI can enhance the efficiency and accuracy of healthcare, human oversight remains critical. Striking a balance between leveraging technology and maintaining the expertise of healthcare professionals is essential to ensure that patient care remains at the heart of the system.



The Stargate Project also raises questions about the accessibility of AI-driven healthcare innovations. Advanced technologies often carry high costs, creating the risk of widening disparities in access to care. Efforts to make these advancements equitable—such as public health partnerships, subsidized programs, and inclusive policies—will be critical to ensuring that all communities benefit from AI's potential. Addressing these challenges is not only a matter of fairness but also key to maximizing the impact of AI on global health outcomes.

### **A Transformative Moment for Healthcare**

The Stargate Project represents an ambitious investment in the future of AI and its potential to transform industries. Nowhere is this transformation more significant than in healthcare, where the project's advancements could redefine how diseases are diagnosed, treated, and prevented. By addressing long-standing challenges in diagnostics, personalized medicine, drug development, and clinical trials, the initiative has the potential to improve patient outcomes and make healthcare more efficient and accessible.

The road ahead will require careful navigation of ethical, practical, and social considerations. Privacy concerns, the equitable distribution of resources, and the role of human oversight are all critical factors that must be managed thoughtfully. If these challenges are addressed with care, the Stargate Project could mark a turning point in medical innovation, paving the way for a healthcare system that is more precise, efficient, and equitable. The stakes are high, but so too is the opportunity to improve the lives of millions through the thoughtful integration of AI into medicine.



Your employee benefits package is more than just an operational line item—it's a critical tool for attracting and retaining top talent while controlling costs. In today's competitive job market, offering high-quality, affordable benefits isn't just a nice-to-have feature; it's a necessity that reflects your company's commitment to its workforce. This is where the partnership between the Northeast Pennsylvania Manufacturers & Employers Association (NEPA MAEA) and the Lehigh Valley Business Coalition on Healthcare (LVBCH) comes into play, providing businesses with unparalleled access to cost-effective and comprehensive employee benefits.

### What Is LVBCH and Why Does It Matter?

The Lehigh Valley Business Coalition on Healthcare (LVBCH) is a trailblazing coalition that pools the purchasing power of employers to negotiate high-quality, cost-effective healthcare benefits. For over 40 years, LVBCH has partnered with top-tier providers to offer a range of services, including medical, dental, vision, prescription drug coverage, and mental health programs.

The coalition's mission is simple but impactful: to ensure employees receive exceptional care while helping employers control expenses. By leveraging the collective buying power of its members, LVBCH provides small and medium-sized businesses with the kind of cost savings and program options typically reserved for large corporations. This focus on both affordability and quality ensures employees access the care they need without breaking the bank.

### How the Partnership Works

As a NEPA MAEA member, your business gains exclusive access to the benefits negotiated by LVBCH. This partnership isn't just about reduced premiums—it's about transforming the way you manage employee benefits. Whether your business is looking for traditional medical plans, robust wellness initiatives, or holistic employee support programs, LVBCH delivers options tailored to your unique needs.

Through this partnership, NEPA MAEA members can take advantage of reduced administrative service rates, cost-effective benefit packages, and expert guidance to navigate the often-complex world of healthcare benefits. With LVBCH's support, you're no longer navigating a maze of providers and plans alone.

Instead, you'll have access to a network of vetted vendors and a streamlined process that simplifies benefits management.

### Comprehensive Benefits for Every Employee Need

One of the standout features of this partnership is its holistic approach to employee benefits. It's not just about offering medical coverage; it's about addressing the whole person. Here's a closer look at the types of benefits available through LVBCH:

- **Medical Plans:** Choose from fully insured or self-insured options that fit your workforce's needs.
- **Dental and Vision Coverage:** These essential benefits are designed to improve employee health and satisfaction.
- **Prescription Drug Plans:** Affordable access to necessary medications ensures employees can maintain their health without financial stress.
- **Behavioral Health and Wellness Programs:** Mental health is a priority, with offerings like managed mental health services, Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), and wellness initiatives.
- **Work-Life Services:** From financial planning assistance to counseling, these services support employees in navigating life's challenges.

### Expanding Access Across the Region

While LVBCH originated in the Lehigh Valley, its reach now extends across more than a dozen Pennsylvania counties, including Luzerne, Schuylkill, Berks, Allegheny, and Wayne. This geographic expansion ensures that businesses throughout the region can benefit from the coalition's expertise and resources, no matter their location.

For NEPA MAEA members, this collaboration represents a unique opportunity to simplify benefits management, maximize resources, and deliver a benefits package that strengthens company culture, enhances employee satisfaction, and keeps your business competitive. If you haven't yet explored the possibilities this partnership offers, now is the perfect time. Your employees—and your bottom line—will thank you.

# EMPOWERING WOMEN AT WORK



## The Case for Tailored Wellness Programs

Women's wellness programs are essential for fostering a workplace that values and supports the unique challenges women face. These programs address physical, mental, and emotional well-being, driving improvements in productivity, retention, and job satisfaction while building a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

Women make up a significant portion of the workforce, yet their distinct health needs are often overlooked. Issues such as menopause and caregiving responsibilities frequently go unaddressed, despite their substantial impact on workplace performance and retention. In the U.S., challenges associated with menopause alone are estimated to cost businesses billions of dollars annually due to lost productivity, underscoring the need for tailored workplace solutions. Additionally, research from Gallup reveals that 17% of women report addressing personal or family responsibilities at work daily, compared to 11% of men. This imbalance contributes to higher stress levels and burnout among female employees, further emphasizing the importance of targeted wellness initiatives. By developing programs that address these specific concerns, organizations can create environments where women feel empowered to thrive professionally and personally.

Effective workplace wellness programs focus on both physical and mental health. Many women, particularly those in physically demanding industries such as healthcare, benefit from initiatives like ergonomic adjustments and fitness programs, which reduce strain and improve overall well-being. Mental health support is equally vital, as women often juggle a range of professional and personal responsibilities that can take a toll on emotional well-being. Providing access to counseling, mindfulness workshops, and stress management tools fosters a culture of support and inclusion, allowing employees to feel emotionally safe and better equipped to handle challenges.

Flexibility is critical to the success of wellness programs, particularly for women who balance caregiving and professional responsibilities. Rigid, in-person-only programs

can unintentionally exclude those who need support the most. By offering hybrid or virtual options, such as on-demand stress management modules or virtual fitness classes, organizations make it easier for employees to engage in wellness initiatives on their own terms. This flexibility increases participation rates and ensures that programs remain accessible to a diverse range of employees.

The business case for investing in women's wellness programs is compelling. These initiatives contribute to lower absenteeism, improved employee retention, and enhanced overall productivity. Tailored programs that address specific needs can reduce workplace injuries, minimize sick days, and foster a healthier, more engaged workforce. By prioritizing wellness, organizations not only demonstrate a commitment to their employees but also benefit from improved efficiency and long-term cost savings.

Creating a culture of wellness requires more than implementing individual programs—it involves embedding support and inclusivity into the fabric of the organization. Leadership plays a key role in this process. When managers actively participate in wellness activities or advocate for supportive policies, they set the tone for a workplace that prioritizes health and well-being. Regular feedback from employees is equally important, allowing organizations to adapt their wellness offerings to meet evolving needs. This not only improves participation but also creates a workplace where women feel valued and supported, paving the way for greater engagement, satisfaction, and success.

Women's wellness programs are not a passing trend but a fundamental part of building inclusive, thriving organizations. By addressing the unique challenges women face with flexible, thoughtful initiatives, businesses can foster a supportive culture that allows employees to succeed both professionally and personally. The result is a healthier, more engaged workforce that drives organizational success. Investing in women's well-being is, ultimately, an investment in the future of work.

# EYE ON THE COMMUNITY



## Schuylkill Elder Abuse Prevention Alliance (SEAPA)

Did you know that approximately 1 in 10 older adults in the United States experiences some form of elder abuse each year? Despite this staggering statistic, elder abuse remains one of the most underreported issues in our communities, with only 1 in 24 cases ever making it to the authorities. For members of the Northeast PA Manufacturers and Employers Association (MAEA), this issue hits close to home, as many of us have aging loved ones or employees navigating caregiving challenges.

Elder abuse can take many forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, financial, and even self-neglect. Its impacts are devastating, not only on victims but also on families, workplaces, and communities. But the good news is that local

organizations, such as the Schuylkill Elder Abuse Prevention Alliance (SEAPA), are working tirelessly to address this issue and provide resources for those in need.

### **Why is Elder Abuse So Prevalent?**

Elder abuse remains a widespread issue, often hidden in plain sight due to a combination of societal, emotional, and structural factors. One of the primary reasons for its prevalence is underreporting. Many victims feel ashamed or fear retaliation if they speak out against their abuser, who is often a family member or trusted caregiver. In other cases, victims may not even realize they are being abused, especially in instances of financial exploitation where the abuse can be subtle and manipulative.

Adding to this is the strain faced by caregivers. Caregivers, especially those juggling full-time work and family responsibilities, can experience extreme stress and burnout. This pressure sometimes leads to unintentional neglect or emotional outbursts, creating a harmful environment for the older adult. Caregiver stress doesn't excuse abuse, but it highlights the importance of support systems for those in caregiving roles.

Social isolation also plays a critical role. Loneliness, a common issue among older adults, not only increases the likelihood of depression and health complications but also makes individuals more vulnerable to abuse. Without a strong social network or someone to advocate for them, many older adults are unable to report abuse or seek help.

Underlying all these factors is ageism, a societal attitude that often devalues older adults. Ageist beliefs can perpetuate neglect and indifference, making elder abuse a lower priority for intervention or attention. This lack of urgency compounds the issue, leaving many seniors to suffer in silence.

### **The Role of Local Resources: Schuylkill Elder Abuse Prevention Alliance**

For families and seniors in Pennsylvania, the Schuylkill Elder Abuse Prevention Alliance (SEAPA) serves as a vital resource in combating elder abuse. This organization is dedicated to raising awareness, empowering communities, and ensuring that older adults are treated with dignity and respect. SEAPA's work bridges the gap between victims and the support they need, fostering a safer and more compassionate environment for the elderly.

A cornerstone of SEAPA's mission is education. The organization offers training and resources designed to help the community recognize the signs of elder abuse and understand how to respond. Through workshops and materials tailored for caregivers, families, and professionals, SEAPA equips individuals with the tools to identify abuse and take action.

Beyond education, SEAPA provides critical support for victims of elder abuse. The organization connects older adults with essential services, including counseling, legal aid, and emergency housing, to help them regain stability and security. This comprehensive support system ensures that victims have access to the resources they need to heal and rebuild their lives.

SEAPA is also a leader in prevention. By partnering with local businesses, healthcare providers, and law enforcement, the organization works to address elder abuse proactively. These partnerships strengthen community awareness and help

create systems that deter abuse before it occurs.

### **Recognizing the Signs of Elder Abuse**

Preventing elder abuse starts with awareness. Recognizing the warning signs can save lives and bring much-needed intervention to those in danger. Physical indicators, such as unexplained bruises, burns, or injuries, are often the most visible signs. These injuries may be dismissed as accidents, but consistent patterns or poorly explained incidents should raise concern.

Behavioral changes are another red flag. Older adults who withdraw from social interactions, display heightened anxiety, or appear fearful around certain individuals may be experiencing emotional or psychological abuse. These changes can be subtle, but they often signal underlying issues that warrant attention.

Financial exploitation is a particularly insidious form of elder abuse. Warning signs include sudden changes in bank accounts, missing belongings, or unexpected modifications to wills or financial documents. These actions are often hidden until significant damage has been done, making vigilance critical.

Neglect, another common form of abuse, is often characterized by poor hygiene, malnutrition, or untreated medical conditions. Older adults who appear unkempt or in declining health may be victims of caregivers failing to meet their basic needs.

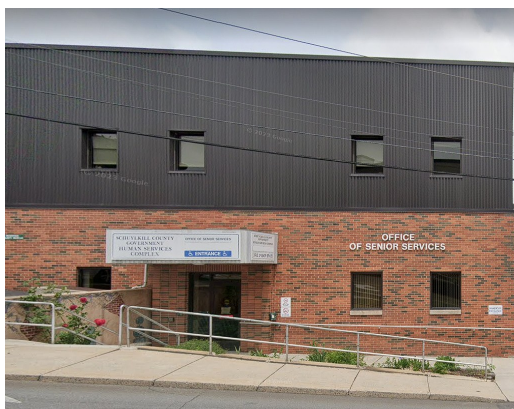
Workplaces have an important role in recognizing these signs, particularly among employees who are also caregivers. Employers can provide education and resources to help their teams identify abuse and encourage

open conversations about caregiving challenges. By fostering an environment of awareness and support, workplaces can be a powerful ally in preventing elder abuse.

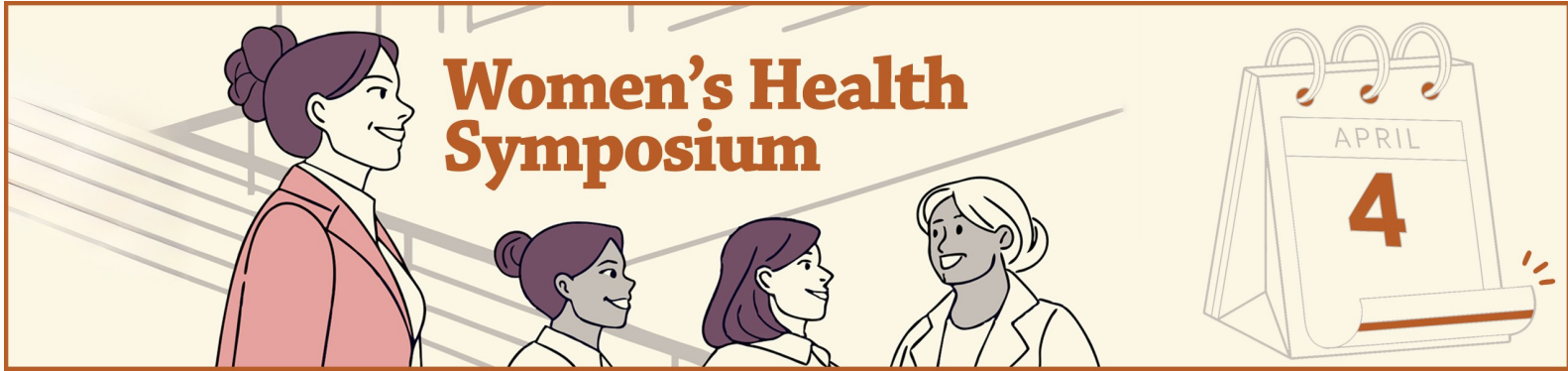
### **A Call to Action**

Elder abuse is a pressing issue that requires collective action. For MAEA members, supporting organizations like SEAPA and fostering awareness in your workplaces and communities can make a meaningful difference. By taking these steps, we can protect our seniors, honor their contributions, and ensure they live with dignity and respect.

The fight against elder abuse starts with each of us. Whether it's advocating for a loved one, supporting a colleague, or volunteering with a local organization, every action counts. Let's work together to create a safer, more compassionate community for our older adults.



SEAPA's location in Pottsville at 110 E Laurel Blvd. You can reach them at (570) 622-3103



# Women's Health Symposium



The 1st Annual LVBCH & MAEA Women's Health Symposium, hosted by the Northeast Pennsylvania Manufacturers and Employers Association (NEPA MAEA) and the Lehigh Valley Business Coalition on Healthcare (LVBCH), will take place on Friday, April 4, 2025, at Mountain Valley Golf Club in Barnesville, PA. This year's event, titled "Perspectives on Healthcare Consolidation and the Employer Impact," will examine the effects of hospital mergers and acquisitions, providing employers with research-driven insights into cost, access, and quality. While consolidation can streamline care, it also raises concerns about rising expenses and limited choices. The symposium aims to equip employers with the knowledge needed to navigate these changes, ensuring informed decisions about healthcare benefits, employee well-being, and cost management.

**Agenda Highlights**

The event kicks off at 9:00 AM with registration, an exhibit hall, and a networking breakfast, followed by opening remarks from Darlene J.

Robbins (NEPA MAEA) and Carl Seitz (LVBCH).

A keynote presentation by Progyny, the presenting sponsor, will discuss evolving benefits to support women's health milestones. With a focus on fertility, maternity, and personalized healthcare solutions, this session will explore how companies can better support women through key health moments.

Following a networking break, a series of educational presentations will cover various topics, including pharmacy benefits, mental health resources, and the impact of peri/menopause in the workplace. These sessions, led by industry experts, will provide employers with actionable strategies for improving healthcare offerings.

The event concludes at 2:00 PM with closing remarks, wrapping up a day of valuable discussions and networking.

Registration information and additional details to follow in the coming weeks.

# NORTHEAST PA Manufacturers & Employers ASSOCIATION



**Darlene J. Robbins**  
*President*  
drobbins@nepamaea.com



**Eileen Kuperavage**  
*Director of Employer Engagement*  
ekuperavage@nepamaea.com



**Joan Trosterud**  
*Marketing & Administrative Coordinator*  
jtrosterud@nepamaea.com



**Nichole Jenan**  
*Administrative Assistant*  
drobbins@nepamaea.com