



GLOBAL WELLNESS
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Awareness Action Kit - NEURODIVERSITY -

Global Perspectives on Inclusive Well-Being:
The Role of Health and Wellness Coaching in
Fostering Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and
Belonging

Empowering Individuals, Leaders, Service
Providers, and Advocates of DEIB Through the
Lens of Health and Wellness Coaching

- 2024 -



WELLNESS COACHING INITIATIVE
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Welcome!

We are thrilled to introduce you to our **Awareness Action Kit**, designed to kickstart your journey into understanding the invaluable intersection of Health and Wellness with Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging.

This kit offers you a practical, actionable, and easily digestible resource to delve into the profound impact that Health and Wellness can have in fostering a culture of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, And Belonging.

Directly excerpted from our comprehensive 130-page whitepaper, "Global Perspectives on Inclusive Well-Being: The Role of Health and Wellness Coaching in Fostering Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging," these resources are a simple gateway to a deeper understanding.

We invite you to download the complete whitepaper along with its accompanying PowerPoint presentation and 11-page infographic, available [HERE](#).

Within the whitepaper, you'll explore 10 distinct areas of diversity, each accompanied by its own Awareness Action Kit:

- 1. Race and Ethnicity**
- 2. Age and Generations**
- 3. Gender**
- 4. Sexual Orientation**
- 5. Religion and Spirituality**
- 6. Disability**
- 7. Socioeconomic Status and Social Determinants of Health**
- 8. Health Status**
- 9. Neurodiversity**
- 10. Weight Bias and Stigma**

Each kit provides insights into the definition of the specific type of diversity, why it's crucial, how Health and Wellness Coaching can play a pivotal role in supporting it, and real-life "Voices from the field" to enrich your understanding.

Additionally, each Awareness Action Kit comes complete with a "**Questions for Discussion Guide**" to prompt thoughtful reflection and dialogue, as well as essential "**Contact Information**" to reach out for further support or inquiries. There is an **(11th)** separate **Glossary of Terms Awareness Action Kit** to enhance your comprehension across all areas covered.

Happy discovering - we're excited you've joined us!
The Global Wellness Institute Wellness Coaching Initiative Team.

XVIII. Neurodiversity



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XV. Neurodiversity

- **What it is**

According to Harvard Health, Neurodiversity is "the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is not a single one 'right' way of thinking, learning, and behaving" (Baumer, 2021).

Neurodiversity is a concept that recognizes and celebrates the natural variation in neurological functioning among individuals. It emphasizes that neurological differences, such as those associated with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other conditions, are a normal and integral part of the human experience. Instead of viewing these differences as disorders that need to be fixed or normalized, the neurodiversity paradigm regards them as unique expressions of the diverse human brain.

Neurodiversity advocates argue for acceptance, understanding, and support for individuals with neurodivergent traits, promoting the idea that a neurodiverse society is richer, more innovative, and better equipped to solve complex problems. In essence, neurodiversity challenges societal norms by valuing and embracing the cognitive diversity that exists within the human population.

- **Why it matters**

Neurodiversity is integral to the DEIB conversation because it broadens the understanding of diversity to include neurological differences as a valuable aspect of human variation. In the DEIB framework, acknowledging and embracing neurodiversity fosters a more inclusive and equitable environment, challenging traditional norms that may stigmatize or marginalize individuals with neurodivergent traits.

In the DEIB conversation, neurodiversity emphasizes the importance of fair representation and equal opportunities for individuals with diverse neurological profiles. It encourages the creation of supportive environments that value the strengths and contributions of neurodivergent individuals while accommodating their unique needs.

Within this diverse environment, neurodiversity often results in highly attuned, high-achieving, high-potential individuals. Whether it is attention to detail, high focus or creativity, organizations, and wider society can benefit from diverse-minded employees (Blackburn, 2023).

By recognizing neurodiversity, both organizations and communities move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to accommodate a range of cognitive styles and perspectives. This inclusivity not only promotes a sense of belonging for neurodivergent individuals but also enhances the overall diversity within teams, fostering creativity, innovation, and problem-solving. In organizations, the benefits of embracing neurodiversity include productivity, innovation, culture, and talent retention. To cover all of this, accommodations will be needed, including greater flexibility in the way people work, that works for their reality (Price, 2022).

In essence, embracing neurodiversity is a crucial step toward building truly inclusive spaces that honor the richness of human cognitive diversity within the larger context of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

What is ADHD?

“Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder” or ADHD, is a nuanced medical condition often accompanied by prevalent stigmas. Understanding and navigating this complex neurodevelopmental disorder can be challenging for various stakeholders, including parents, educators, employers, and especially those diagnosed with ADHD. Even professionals specializing in the field may encounter difficulties in accurate diagnosis.

ADHD affects boys and girls equally, yet the diagnosis rates among girls significantly trail those of boys. Historically, the diagnostic ratio favored boys at 4-1, and though it has improved to 2-1, the underdiagnosis of girls remains a concern (Abdelnour et al., 2022).

The DEIB conversation gains significance in acknowledging that ADHD in girls is often explained as a product of personality rather than an organic disorder, perpetuating stereotypes of daydreaming, forgetfulness, or chattiness. Girls are more likely to conform to societal standards, seeking positive attention and meeting expectations, albeit at a significant emotional cost.

The outcomes of underdiagnosis in girls and women have direct implications for DEIB efforts. Untreated ADHD obstructs the realization of inherent potential, contributing to repeated failures, anxiety, and depression. Late diagnoses increase the likelihood of masking ADHD symptoms with anxiety or depression, presenting a false picture. Emotional, social, and behavioral challenges arise from undiagnosed women at a higher risk of psychiatric hospitalization. Recognizing the fluctuating nature of ADHD symptoms at different life stages, such as puberty, pregnancy, and menopause, underscores the need for tailored

approaches aligned with the woman's hormonal status within the broader DEIB conversation (Miller et al., 2012).

Why ADHD matters?

Adjusting for the global demographic structure in 2020, the prevalence of persistent adult ADHD (confirmed onset in childhood) was 2.58% and that of symptomatic adult ADHD was 6.76%, 139.84 million and 366.33 million, respectively, adding up to 506.17 million adults affected in 2020 globally (Song et al., 2021). While both persistent and symptomatic ADHD are defined by the presence of above-the-diagnostic-threshold ADHD symptoms in adulthood, only persistent ADHD has a confirmed onset in childhood.

Individuals with ADHD often contend with a range of comorbidities that span mental, emotional, and physical health domains. Mentally and cognitively, ADHD can be associated with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and learning disabilities. Emotionally, individuals may grapple with anxiety and depression. On a physical health level, there is an increased risk of injuries, struggles with weight management, sleep disturbances, substance abuse, and immunological dysregulation, including conditions like asthma, allergic rhinitis, and atopic eczema, along with altered gut microbiome functions. Additionally, considerations around medication adherence and lifestyle changes become crucial components in addressing the unique needs of individuals with ADHD. (Katzman et al., 2017).

- **How Health and Wellness Coaching can support this diversity**

Health and Wellness Coaches are uniquely equipped to address the specific health-related challenges that individuals with ADHD face. These challenges encompass adherence to ADHD medication and other health-related requirements, such as exercise, nutrition, stress management, and management of substance abuse (primarily caffeine and nicotine).

Within the realm of health, wellness, and medical coaching, these behaviors take precedence, prompting the implementation of tailored strategies. Coaches can focus on supporting clients in organizing tasks, managing distractions, regulating sleep patterns, supporting emotional regulation, and developing techniques for memory enhancement. Beyond these individual strategies, Health Coaches play a unique role in guiding individuals with ADHD to establish effective communication with their healthcare team, which may include primary care physicians, psychiatrists, and complementary health practitioners. Establishing open

communication fosters a collaborative approach, and favors a balanced management of ADHD and overall health.

Furthermore, Health and Wellness Coaches offer support through empathic communication skills, one-to-one conversations, where non-judgement and active listening encourages authenticity. Discussing what really matters, ambivalence is uncovered and handled adequately, as an effective coaching strategy. In the workplace, this approach not only enhances understanding and responsiveness to the unique needs of individual employees but also catalyzes the dismantling of mental health stigmas, fostering a more supportive and inclusive environment (Mahto et al., 2023).

- **Voices from the Field**

Coaching has gained recognition as a client-centered behavioral intervention for the management of ADHD as demonstrated below.

An 8-week collaboration between a psychiatrist and a Health and Wellness Coach had a double impact: the collaboration expanded what the psychiatrist had been able to achieve alone in working with a client with ADHD and resulted in client improvement in self-efficacy and in various functional impairments, including organizational skills and academic achievement. As a result, the client achieved her goal of resuming graduate studies and integrating and maintaining her behavioral changes for more than 6 months, successfully graduating from her program (Ahmann et al., 2020).

This case illustrates beneficial outcomes and the promising role of Health and Wellness Coaching in assisting individuals with ADHD in achieving successful behavior change. It opens many possibilities for integrating Health and Wellness Coaching with other modalities in interdisciplinary work, especially for neurodiverse people.

While health coaches may not provide direct therapeutic interventions for such disorders, they can support in various aspects that contribute to the individual's overall health and quality of life. Indeed, a recent hypothesis sees coaching's emergence as a partial challenge to medicalization of ADHD (Bergey, 2024), further strengthening the importance and unique role of health coaches in ADHD care.

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism is a complex developmental condition that affects social, sensory, and communication experience, and it may manifest differently in men

and in women. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition with many dimensions characterized by social challenges and repetition in behaviors (Khalifa et al., 2019). Individuals with ASD may have difficulty with executive function, sensory distractions, social connection and understanding social cues, motivation, and goal setting, as well as difficulty with individual living (Rudy, 2023).

In the context of the work environment, these difficulties might be manifested as persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction such as abnormal social approach, failure of normal back-and-forth conversation, reduced sharing of interests or failure to respond to social interactions.

Why it matters.

Clearly ASD characteristics might impact relationships and productivity in the work environment. On the other hand, a challenging thought is that it is not autism that holds people back at work, but discrimination (Praslova, 2021). Autistic professionals can be up to 140% more productive than the typical employee when properly matched to jobs. If included professionals on the autism spectrum bring valuable strengths to the workplace, including (but not limited to) understanding complex systems, independently focusing on tasks, reliability, and loyalty.

Also, there is a high comorbidity rate between ASD and ADHD with 30-50% of individuals with Autism meeting the criteria for an ADHD diagnosis and 66% of people with ADHD having Autistic Spectrum traits and 80% of people with Autism have ADHD traits (Understanding Autism - the Mind Practice, n.d.).

Health Coaching for Autism Spectrum Disorder

Coaching individuals with ASD can help with achieving goals to improve outcomes for that individual, and has been associated with improved behavioral, social, health-related, motivational, and career outcomes. A Health Coach will develop mutual trust, engage in a flexible relationship, support increased confidence and self-autonomy, while building health supporting habits (Hillier et al., 2021).

Successful workplace strategies for individuals with autism spectrum disorder were: minimizing distractions, reducing noise, and predictable job duties, along with environmental considerations. a positive work environment (Deloitte, n.d.). Health and Wellness Coaching can provide both support to employers and co-workers.

- **Voices from the Field**

The following is a testimonial from Sarah Doll-Steinberg, The Mind Practice, Certified ADHD and Nutrition Coach.

"As a life coach specializing in neurodiversity, I have many clients with Autism or Autistic traits. Every person is unique and the first step to supporting individuals with Autism is to understand their particular strengths, challenges, and needs. As a neurodiverse individual myself, I have firsthand knowledge of many of these challenges! Many clients tell me that just talking to someone who experiences the same issues makes them feel understood and reduces the stigma associated with symptoms.

Understanding the neuroscience behind the Autistic brain is an important part of coaching. There may be differences in processing information, sensory perception, social interactions, and communication from a neurotypical brain. These differences may negatively affect our thoughts and behaviors. For example, low interoceptive awareness is common with Autism, and we may fail to recognize symptoms of anxiety, hunger, fatigue, overwhelm, etc., Perhaps we regularly argue with our partner upon returning from work, not realizing we need time to recover from being overstimulated or stressed during the day. Or perhaps we don't recognize our loss of temper is due to hunger or the loud music someone is playing. Understanding our brain can help us to demystify these challenges. Identifying these internal sensations and building strategies for when they occur enables us to overcome the difficulties we experience.

Coaching conversations are client-led, but often include building self-confidence, daily living skills, behavioural strategies, emotional regulation or communication strategies. Working together to build these structures, at a pace that suits the client and with support when required, leads to lasting change".

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Want to contribute?

Health and Wellness Coaching Connection Blog Space.

It is our mission to empower individuals and businesses around the world to confidently partner with wellness coaches, optimizing health and well-being and clarifying wellness coach specialties and global guidelines through education and community resources. The GWI WCI Blog is one of these resources intended to advance the global Health & Wellness Coaching Community by providing accessible, evidence-based articles related to the field of Health & Wellness Coaching. Blogs will be posted on our area of the [GWI website](#) and cross-posted on LinkedIn.

Learn more here :

[Wellness Coaching Connection Contributor Guidelines](#)
[Blog-Newsletter Submission Form](#)

Please email us (gwiwci2023@gmail.com) if anything is unclear or if you have questions. We look forward to receiving your submissions!

Questions for Discussion Guide

Complementing our research, this Questions for Discussion Guide serves as an organized tool to facilitate ongoing discussion and contemplation on the pivotal role of Health and Wellness Coaching within the realms of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Intended for educators, students, and readers, this guide provides a structured framework for further exploration, encouraging thoughtful analysis and collaborative dialogue to advance inclusive practices in the field.

- What does a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace/ world/ community where everyone belongs look like/feel like?
- What are the gaps in your organization around this type of diversity?
- How might you champion greater inclusion in your day to day?
- How can you champion more inclusion and awareness around this diversity?
- What might be a personal obstacle to embracing this type of diversity?
- What unconscious bias might you have in this type of diversity?
 - How might you explore your unconscious bias?
- What is the greatest challenge for you concerning this type of diversity and why?
- Who might support you to better understand this type of diversity?
- In what context might you find this type of diversity most relevant (i.e. Workplace? Schools? Community?)
- Where (country, location, venue) might this type of diversity NOT be a challenge and why?
- What has been your personal experience with this type of diversity - from the outside or inside?