

Employee Identity Protection: An Essential Part Of Every Wellness Program

| A comprehensive approach to employee wellness

 By [Ammon Curtis](#)

The phone rings, and Amy silences it.

It's 6 PM on the east coast, and that means only one thing: It's dinner time. For the next 60 minutes, there will be no texts, no emails, no status updates — just quality time with the family. And in that blissful, distraction-free hour, her life is completely changed.

Amy doesn't recognize many of the missed calls she received, but there is one she knows well. It's her youngest daughter's daycare. A nervous office manager explains that Amy's recent payment was declined, which he assured her must be some sort of processing error.

It wasn't.

Over the next six months, Amy will be in the fight of her life. She will testify in courts, appear before countless doctors, and struggle to keep her family together. She is smart and tough and committed to justice, but there are times when she breaks down.

Unless you've personally been a victim of identity theft, it's difficult to imagine what Amy is going through.

That's because not every issue caused by identity theft is as obvious as credit card fraud. Victims often suffer not just financially, but physically and mentally as well. In today's article, we'll look at a few of these hidden areas and how employers can protect their employees.

The Financial Impact of Identity Theft

Many of the financial burdens caused by identity theft are clear. Thieves use a victim's credit profile to rack up enormous debt and open new lines of credit. Unfortunately, suffering occurs in many less obvious ways as well.

Let's take a look at three of them.

First, identity theft victims often miss a significant amount of work. Depending on when the identity theft was discovered and the tactics the thieves used, it can take victims hundreds of hours to fully resolve. That translates into a lot of missed work and often a reduction in take-home pay.

Second, identity theft victims are denied access to critical financing. Whether an employee is applying for a mortgage, trying to complete an education, needing reliable transportation, or paying for a loved one's

medical bills, identity theft can postpone plans for months or even years.

Third, combating identity theft can cost a small fortune. In addition to exorbitant court costs and attorney fees, many victims also incur medical records request fees, CPA fees, childcare fees, and more.

Each year, the Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC) surveys identity theft victims who used its remediation services. In 2018, it discovered [many victims were not financially prepared for identity theft](#).

- Nearly 39 percent of victims were forced into using their savings
- More than 40 percent of responders said they couldn't pay their bills
- Nearly 43 percent said they are now in debt as a direct result of identity theft
- Almost 30 percent had to borrow money from family and friends while restoring their identity
- More than 37 percent reported going without important services and products because they could not afford them

How Identity Theft Impacts a Victim's Health

Although the connection may not be immediately clear, identity theft can severely impact an employee's health as well.

In recent years, [the number of medical identity theft cases](#) has increased exponentially. This is particularly bad news for healthcare providers, insurers, and employers, who collectively lose around \$41 billion each year to medical identity theft.

Of course, the greatest impact happens when an identity is stolen. When an identity thief uses a victim's healthcare information to fill prescriptions, visit an emergency room, or undergo a costly procedure, the thief's medical records become intertwined with those of the victim.

According to Ann Patterson, senior vice president of the Medical Identity Fraud Alliance, this type of [fraud can pose serious health risks](#):

"About 20 percent of [medical identity theft] victims told us that they got the wrong diagnosis or treatment, or that their care was delayed because there was confusion about what was true in their records due to the identity theft."

Medical identity theft isn't the only way a victim's health is impacted. According to ITRC's findings, the vast majority of identity theft victims suffered mentally and physically — even when medical records weren't compromised.

- Nearly 57 percent reported suffering from persistent aches, pains, headaches, and/or cramps
- More than 84 percent reported issues with their sleep habits
- Around 77 percent reported increased stress levels
- More than half suffered from fatigue or decreased energy

The Impact of Identity Theft on Mental Wellbeing

In addition to the physical and financial burdens identity theft victims must overcome, many take a hit emotionally and psychologically. In fact, more than 85 percent reported often feeling worried, angry, and frustrated as a result of their identity theft.

The ITRC also discovered:

- Nearly 84 percent felt violated
- Almost 70 percent reported feeling unsafe
- More than 67 percent said they were overcome by a sense of powerlessness or helplessness
- Nearly 60 percent reported struggling with sadness and depression
- Half of all victims reported losing interest in activities or hobbies they once enjoyed
- Almost a third of victims sought mental health support

Why is an employee identity protection benefit critical to a wellness program?

If you were asked to define wellness, how would you do it? Would you point to the latest healthcare data and ideal body metrics? Would you use acronyms like BPMs and BMIs?



Probably not.

HR professionals understand that employees are more than numbers on a page or statistics in an app. They are human beings, with friends and families and lives that continue after they leave work each day.

HR's commitment to protecting and developing employees is staggering, and nowhere is that more evident than in the rise of the employee wellness program. According to the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans, [more than 90 percent of businesses now offer some type of wellness initiative](#).

We have done a remarkable job when it comes to recognizing the need for employee wellness and making a commitment to protecting our employees.

However, we still have quite a ways to go when it comes to ensuring wellness programs take a comprehensive approach to protection — one that safeguards an employee's finances, as well as their physical and mental health.

Does your employee wellness program do that?

If not, there's still work to be done. The good news is there's no one better suited to handle it than you.

A great place to start is by speaking with your broker about identity protection benefits designed specifically for employers. They'll work with you to select a provider that's right for your business. Too type A for that? We get it!

[This editable checklist](#) will allow you to compare the features of top providers so you can offer the best protection possible to your employees.

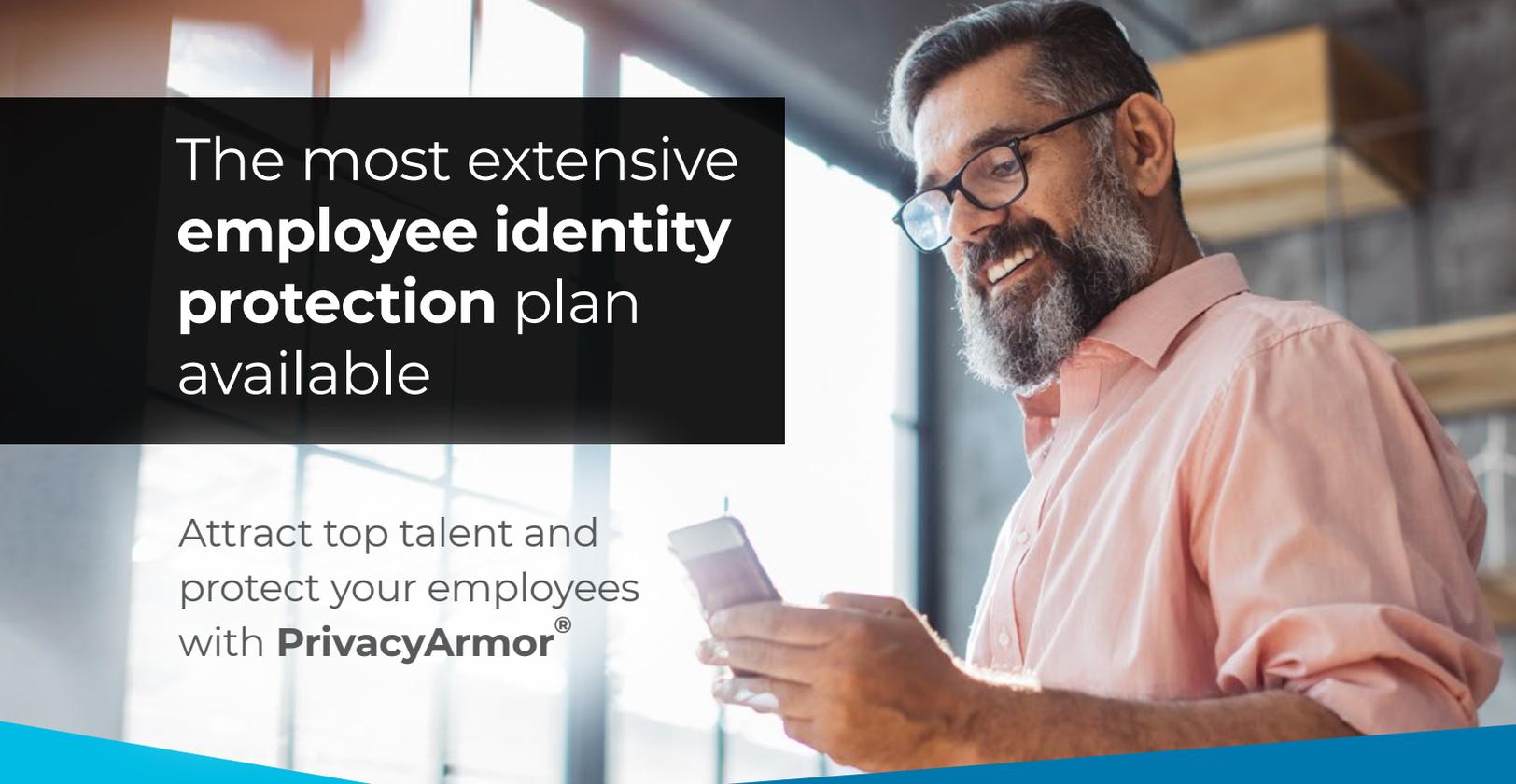
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