

THE AMERICAN LAWYER

Why One California Firm Invested Thousands in Attorney Wellness and Biometric Screening

By Samson Amore

October 30, 2025

What You Need to Know

- Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp tested an employee wellness program with 20 lawyers, and is planning to expand it.
- The program utilizes biometric screening from a startup called Viome to identify health risks.
- Mitchell Silberberg also paired attorneys and staff with dietitians and taught them healthier eating habits.

"I think our firm is suffering from chronic inflammation."

That was the line in Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp Chief Operating Officer Douglas Gold's pitch to management that convinced the firm's board to invest thousands in a new employee wellness program aimed at producing healthier lawyers and staff.

The high-paced job of lawyering involves a less-than-ideal combination of long, stressful hours and for many, a copious amount of caffeine. None of these things, in the long term, are components in a recipe for a healthy human gut. And according to the annual Law.com Compass Mental Health Survey of the Legal Profession



Credit: LeoWolfert/Shutterstock.com

released last May, nearly half of the 2,500 respondents said they thought mental health problems and substance abuse were at a "crisis level" in the legal field.

Combined with rising health care costs—the average premium for an American family with workplace health insurance is around \$27,000 annually, up 6% year-over-year in 2025—workplace wellness programs are becoming increasingly important.

Gold wasn't concerned lawyers at his Los Angeles-based midsize firm were developing substance abuse issues, but he was increasingly worried about the havoc that our cultural approach to health and diet was wreaking on his staff.

"It was concerns that I started having about the long-term trajectory of the health and wellness of our organization and our people that come to work every day," Gold said, that prompted him to consider a new wellness plan.

Firmwide wellness initiatives aren't new, but Gold sought to revamp the traditional program. Mitchell Silberberg launched a pilot program with 20 participants earlier this year and soon expanded it to 25 people in the following cycle, with plans to continue.

Gold said he worked with the law firm's health insurance broker to set up a program that included mental health resources, advice from dieticians and chefs on cooking healthy meals, and one-on-one coaching. The broker also held all the lawyers' confidential health data, and the measurements shared with the firm were only displayed in anonymized, group form to preserve privacy.

The firm limited the program to 25 participants in part at the advice of its insurer. "The people that are more likely to stay in it and do it all the way are those that feel like they've had to invest a little bit and volunteer information," Gold said.

About nine years ago, Gold's wife was diagnosed with cancer, and through her journey to remission she discovered Viome, a Washington-based startup that uses genome testing and traditional lab work to help monitor her health.

"We really wanted it to be comprehensive," Gold said of Mitchell Silberberg's wellness plan. "I thought, why couldn't we take what we've been doing [in my family] and apply it to the firm in a meaningful way, and not just hand out \$100 monthly subsidies for gym memberships," he said.

Part of the program included providing Viome's testing free to each participant and partnering them with registered clinicians and dieticians who could help each lawyer figure out how to "tune" their own gut, he said. Viome's tests start at \$399 per person, plus a monthly subscription.

"There was a blood test, a spit test, and a poop test, and it helped determine what our gut microbiome was, what's in our systems that digest food, and how it's individual for each of us and we have to handle that," said Los Angeles partner David Rugendorf, a participant in this year's wellness cohort. While the pilot program Rugendorf was part of is technically concluded, he said participants are still continuing their work, adding, "the firm is providing us with some ongoing resources, [and] we're invited to the online portion of the presentations that are given to the newer group."

In total, "we spent a high five figures on the entire program, a big chunk of that was the Viome platform," Gold said.

The testing was done by lawyers at home and handled through Viome's labs. Rugendorf said he lost nearly 25 pounds during the six-month program, and added, "my skin, cholesterol, blood sugar and digestion all improved, and my energy and sleep are so much better as well."

Pam Burchette, a practice support coordinator who has worked at Mitchell Silberberg since 2006, said she joined the program in part to address her weight, high blood pressure and other chronic health conditions. "I have a family and I wanted to be around for them," she said. "It was successful, I am successful, I'm still going, it's not like the pilot ended and I'm done."

Burchette said she lost 45 pounds and "gained something even more important, an understanding of what my body actually needs to thrive."

Communication and teamwork were key parts of the initiative; Rugendorf said he and his fellow health buffs in the program frequently swapped recipes, tips on grocery shopping and meditation. "If everyone is so burdened by the cost of health-care, the best way to get control is to make radical changes to make people healthier," he said, adding, "it is such an obvious, positive choice."