



*Championing better
work and working lives*

Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s

Submission to the Cabinet Office and Department of Health and Social Care

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

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Background

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has over 155,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Our membership base is wide, with 60% of our members working in private sector services and manufacturing, 33% working in the public sector and 7% in the not-for-profit sector. In addition, 76% of the FTSE 100 companies have CIPD members at director level.

Public policy at the CIPD draws on our extensive research and thought leadership, practical advice and guidance, along with the experience and expertise of our diverse membership, to inform and shape debate, government policy and legislation for the benefit of employees and employers, to improve best practice in the workplace, to promote high standards of work and to represent the interests of our members at the highest level.

CIPD has a number of resources available for members to support better workplace health and well-being, including:

- the CIPD's [Well-being at work factsheet](#)
- the CIPD's [Mental health in the workplace factsheet](#)
- the CIPD's [Top tips](#) for managers to help their teams thrive
- the CIPD'S [Let's talk menopause](#) guidance – a suite of resources for employers, people professionals and people managers
- the CIPD/Simplyhealth [Health and well-being at work 2019](#) survey report
- policy positioning report: [Growing the health and well-being agenda](#)
- joint DWP Disability Confident and CIPD [guide for line managers](#) on employing people with a disability or health condition
- joint CIPD and Mind guidance, the [People managers' guide to mental health](#) – with practical advice and templates to help managers facilitate conversations about stress and mental ill health



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Introduction

Employee health and well-being is at the heart of our CIPD purpose: to champion better work and working lives by improving practices in people and organisation development for the benefit of individuals, businesses, economies and society. Creating a healthy workplace is therefore not merely about managing a physical and cultural environment with the limited aim of not causing harm to employees. It requires organisations to have in place the necessary people management practices to support workers' physical and mental health and wellbeing and prevent ill health where possible. We believe that placing people's health and well-being at the heart of the corporate agenda makes the workplace a more productive, attractive and corporately responsible place to work. It can also benefit the local community and, more broadly, the country as a whole because well people require less support from health services. As the green paper reminds us, 'good work is good for health' and employers have a central role to play here in providing good work, as well as health professions in recognising work as a key clinical outcome.

This is the ethos we actively promote to our members, backed up by a wide range of CIPD practical resources, courses and good practice guidance. It is also reflected in the thought leadership thread running through our public policy work and evidenced through membership feedback as well as a substantial body of our own research.

Our response

The workplace has a vital role to play in prevention

The CIPD welcomes the focus on prevention in public health interventions set out in the green paper *Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s*. We believe that employers also have a vital role to play in supporting this agenda by creating workplaces that promote good mental and physical health, thereby helping to prevent ill health where possible.

The green paper highlights the other live public consultation [Health is everyone's business](#) focused on employment-related measures to reduce ill health-related job loss (on which we are fully engaged with the Work and Health Unit and will be responding to). However, we believe there is greater scope to align the aims and actions set out in the health prevention green paper with reforms aimed at employers, for example in relation to encouraging healthy lifestyles such as smoking cessation, health screening and healthy eating. The green paper acknowledges that for the Government's aim to 'put prevention at the centre of all decision our decision-making' to succeed 'individuals and communities must play their part too' – but we would welcome more explicit reference to the importance of employers also playing their part in this 'shared responsibility'. The green paper refers to 'pushing for a stronger focus on prevention across all areas of government policy' and we urge government to ensure that the workplace is a firm element of this focus and that public policy in this setting reflects the government's public health goals and reforms.

Our research¹ shows that employers support for employee health and well-being has come a long way during the past decade, and there is growing evidence of a much broader understanding and application of holistic health and well-being approaches in many workplaces. We have detected a marked shift in responsibility for people's well-being towards enterprises and voluntary action on the part of good employers, which we fully support. This shift and the crucial role played by workplaces in promoting health and well-being was underlined by Professor Dame Carol Black's review of the health of the working age population in 2008². UK workplaces can play an important role in improving people's well-being through interventions such as health promotion, through early detection of some symptoms and by encouraging lifestyle changes.

Year on year our health and well-being research at the CIPD shows that employers, although recognising the need to create healthy workplaces, put more emphasis on providing support when people become ill rather than helping to prevent poor health and well-being in the first place. Of course, not all health conditions are preventable and it's vital that organisations have in place more reactive provision such as a clear reasonable adjustments policy and good rehabilitation practices to support an effective return-to-work

after sickness absence. However, a strong focus of our messaging to organisations and members is that they need to take more proactive steps to promote good health and well-being, for example by identifying and preventing the main risks that cause work-related stress, such as excessive workload, a lack of autonomy, poor relationships at work for example as a result of bullying or a lack of support or training. In all, this the role of the line manager is key as they are typically the individual most responsible for managing the employment relationship between employee and organisation.

The main causes of ill health and disability at work

The green paper rightly points out that ‘the things that kill us are not always the same as the things that make us unwell’. Our research³ of over 1,000 employers across the economy shows that mental ill health, stress, musculoskeletal injuries and acute medical conditions are the top causes of long-term absence, with mental ill health increasingly prevalent as a cause of both short- and long-term absence. The average level of employee absence, 5.9 days per employee or 2.6% of working time lost, is the lowest ever recorded in the 19 years of running this survey.

However, the drop in the headline absence rate across UK workplaces comes with a caveat, and organisations need to look much deeper than sickness absence levels to understand what is driving people’s attendance and well-being. For example this year’s results again confirm the rising culture of ‘presenteeism’ (working when unwell) in UK workplaces, with 83% of organisations observing this unhealthy behaviour and most doing nothing to discourage it. This trend could be artificially contributing to a drop in sickness absence levels while masking more deeper-seated organisational issues that could be undermining people’s health and well-being at work, such as unmanageable workloads (again, by far the greatest cause of stress at work).

Creating mentally healthy working environments

It’s clear we have some way to go before the majority of workplaces achieve the important ‘parity of esteem’ highlighted in the green paper in relation to the attention that good mental health receives compared with physical health, and the confidence and openness with which this aspect of health is treated. Our research³ shows that stress-related absence has increased over the last year in nearly two-fifths of organisations, and reported common mental health conditions have increased in nearly three-fifths of organisations.

We have seen welcome but incremental progress in this area over the past five years, with an increase in the number of organisations raising awareness of mental health issues across the workforce, for example. This year 70% of respondents report that their

organisation's well-being activity is designed to promote mental health to a large or moderate extent, up from 63% last year.

However, our research still shows a trend of reactive measures when it comes to how most employers support people with mental health issues. For example, the steps that employers take to identify and reduce stress at work need to have a stronger focus on risk prevention – our research finds that less than half carry out risk assessments or stress audits, just 15% use the HSE's Management Standards and 27% carry out stress management training for the whole workforce.

As stated earlier, the role of line managers is fundamental to supporting people's psychological well-being and yet just 40% train line managers to support staff with mental ill health and around 50% train managers to manage stress. And yet it is line managers who will often be the first port of call if an individual is experiencing distress or stress, or work overload, or wants to talk about a mental health issue and/or needs a workplace adjustment.

The aim for employers should be to consider the health and well-being of the whole person and make sure employees are aware of the services and support available to them and how to access them. It's also crucial that employers promote an open and inclusive culture so that employees feel confident about discussing a mental health issue – or indeed any health issue or disability – and discussing the challenges they are experiencing. It is only through disclosure that an individual can access the support and adjustments they may need to continue being effective in their role.

Health promotion and support provided by employers

Our research finds that most organisations provide one or more well-being benefit to employees with the vast majority (94%) offering one or more health promotion benefit (most commonly free eye tests) and some form of employee support (87%). As in previous years, access to counselling services and employee assistance programmes are the most common forms of benefit provision on offer. Moreover, our findings suggest that the proportion of organisations providing these services has increased over the past few years.

A key focus of the green paper is encouraging a smoke-free society, thereby reducing the considerable health risks from tobacco. The CIPD/Simplyhealth survey finds that just under a quarter (23%) of organisations provide 'stop smoking support' for all employees while a further 7% provide this support dependent on grade/seniority. This is clearly an area where workplaces would benefit from greater focus and support from government

and alignment with public health interventions, so that a greater number of people are able to tap into this kind of smoking cessation support. The CIPD is currently conducting research into drug and alcohol use at work and working with experts to update its good practice guidance for employers.

Maintaining a healthy weight and diet is another key focus of the green paper, which is to be welcomed. We share the government's concern about the increase in obesity and it's crucial that people are encouraged to develop and maintain healthy habits in relation to physical health at work too. Physical activity is a key element, and our research shows that 61% of employers report their organisation's well-being activity is designed to promote physical health to a large or moderate extent but just under half (49%) say well-being activity is focused on good lifestyle choices such as diet and smoking cessation. There is much stronger focus on both these areas where organisations have a standalone well-being strategy in support of their wider corporate plan, underlining the importance of a strategic approach by employers that prioritises people's health and well-being.

Our survey³ also finds that:

- 41% provide advice on healthy eating/lifestyle (5% dependent on grade/seniority)
- 40% of organisations provide an in-house gym and/or subsidised gym membership for all employees (8% do so dependent on grade/seniority)
- 33% provide access to physiotherapy and other therapies (13% dependent on grade/seniority)
- 32% hold well-being days such as an event devoted to promoting health and well-being services to staff (7% dependent on grade/seniority).
- 31% provide health screening for all employees (17% dependent on grade/seniority)
- 31% provide programmes to encourage physical fitness such as walking/pedometer initiatives like a Fit bit (9% dependent on grade/seniority)
- 25% provide on-site relaxation or exercise classes such as yoga, Pilates (8% dependent on grade/seniority)

Fostering menopause-friendly workplaces

We very much welcome the inclusion of the menopause and women's health in the green paper and its recognition as a key health condition requiring more awareness and support, particularly in the context of active ageing and maintaining a healthy and productive working life. We feel that the menopause has been largely neglected as an economic, workplace and equality issue throughout recent government strategies and policy papers. The *Modern Industrial Strategy*, *Fuller Working Lives Strategy*, *Ageing Grand Challenge*, and *Improving Lives Strategy* all address key economic challenges such as keeping



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people in work for longer, reducing the gender pay gap and employee health and well-being, and yet none of these mention the menopause.

Supporting women through menopause transition strikes at the heart of a number of high-profile and pressing public policy issues – employee health and well-being at work, the economic participation of women, and gender equality and inclusion in the workplace. Women in the age bracket typically experiencing menopause transition are the fastest-growing employee group in the labour market. They are also typically at the peak of their skills, knowledge and careers, representing a highly skilled and experienced talent pool for employers.

The CIPD has recently published a range of menopause-related guidance⁴ which was developed following extensive collaboration with experts and HR professionals as well as a YouGov survey of more than 1,400 working women experiencing menopausal symptoms. The CIPD research shows that, for every ten women experiencing menopausal symptoms, six say it has a negative impact on their work. Further, a quarter of women who had been unable to go into work due to menopausal symptoms had not felt able to disclose their symptoms to management. The result is that many women suffer in silence while often a few small practical adjustments at work could make a world of difference to someone experiencing menopause transition. Overall, less than 1 in 10 organisations we surveyed said they had any guidance, policy or framework on the menopause: we aim to address this gap and building awareness of the menopause as a key workplace issue is the focus of an active and ongoing campaign for the CIPD.

Therefore, we are calling on the Government to:

- Nominate a Menopause Ambassador to represent the interests of women experiencing menopause transition across Departments
- Ensure that menopause is referenced as a priority issue in public policy publications relating to work, gender and age
- Support an employer-led campaign to raise awareness of the menopause as a workplace issue.

Conclusion

As the voice of a worldwide community of almost 155,000 HR professionals working in the fields of people management and development, we can inspire the very people who are most likely to be in a position to make a real difference to workplace health and well-being. Affecting change in organisations may start with the core of our membership, who will have the strategic vision to embrace health and well-being and the practical capability to integrate it in their organisations in a way that supports business goals and employees.



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But our reach goes much further in terms of influencing wider management practice in organisations. Given that responsibility for implementing the many aspects of a holistic health and well-being model is likely to fall on line managers, this wider reach is essential.

References

1. For example, CIPD research such as:

- the CIPD/Simplyhealth [Health and well-being at work 2019](#) survey report
- policy positioning report: [Growing the health and well-being agenda](#)

2. BLACK, C. (2008) *Working for a healthier tomorrow: Dame Carol Black's review of the health of Britain's working age population presented to the Secretary of State for Health and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions [online]*. London: Stationery Office. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-for-a-healthier-tomorrow-work-and-health-in-britain>

3. The CIPD/Simplyhealth [Health and well-being at work 2019](#) survey report

4. The CIPD'S [Let's talk menopause](#) guidance – a suite of resources for employers, people professionals and people managers