

**Mental health and wellbeing plan: discussion paper  
and call for evidence**

Submission to the Department of Health and Social Care

## **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 more than 160,000 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 the 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 the 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.

The CIPD is a Disability Confident Leader, serves on the Department for Work and Pensions Disability Confident Professional Advisers' Group, and Chief Executive Peter Cheese represents the CIPD on the Mental Health at Work Leadership Council. We have worked with the DWP and Disability Confident on important guidance for line managers: [Recruiting, managing, and developing people with long-term health conditions](#), and have published this joint [mental health guide](#) with Mind for people managers in the workplace.

As the professional body for HR and people development, our response focuses on the questions relating to mental health in the workplace.

## **Evidence gathering**

The CIPD/Simplyhealth [Health and Wellbeing at Work survey report 2022](#) explores how UK organisations create mentally healthy workplaces. The survey was sent to HR and L&D professionals (CIPD members and non-members) and was conducted online from late November to mid-December 2021. The analysis is based on responses from 804 organisations in reference to 4.3 million employees. Respondents come from organisations of all sizes and work within a wide range of industries. Overall, 57% work in the private sector (42% of respondents in private sector services, 15% in manufacturing and production), 27% in the public sector, and 16% in voluntary, community, and not-for-profit organisations. The results of the survey will form the backbone of our response to the consultation questions, along with our survey findings from the annual [2022 UK Working Lives survey](#). Each year, we survey more than 5,000 workers across different sectors and occupations about key aspects of their work and employment, including health and wellbeing.



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In addition, to gather qualitative data for our response, we held a policy roundtable discussion with our members in the Midlands region as well as a Policy Forum roundtable with experts and members on Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) reform. The latter roundtable helped to inform CIPD's policy paper on [What should an effective sick pay system look like?](#) which was also based on an employer survey.

## **Executive Summary**

Mental ill-health has been a significant and growing concern for organisations over the past few years, and the most common cause of long-term absence.

There has been good progress over the past decade in employers' recognition that they have a responsibility to look after people's mental, as well as their physical health

**Recommendation:** Optimise Government schemes such as Disability Confident and Access to Work and launch a well-resourced workplace mental health publicity and education campaign

CIPD research shows a tendency for organisations to put more emphasis on providing support when people become ill rather than helping to prevent work-related stress and poor mental health in the first place

Education, training, and awareness-raising for individuals on mental health issues is a positive step, but they need to be part of an organisational framework that is focused on prevention and early intervention

There is a tendency on the part of some employers to focus more on quick fixes rather than sustainable action that will improve mental health outcomes in the long-term

Line managers play a fundamental role in supporting people's mental health and wellbeing. As well as managing absence and return to work, they implement all of the policies, like flexible working, that help to create 'good work' and help people stay well

**Recommendation:** Invest in people management capability in UK employers, particularly in SMEs

**Recommendation:** Work with employment stakeholders to encourage employers to implement the Mental Health at Work Commitment

Employers have an important role to play when intervening early to support mental health: where possible, employees experiencing stress or mental ill-health should be able to access support and flexibility at work before problems escalate

If there's a supportive dialogue between the employee and their line manager, the organisation can hopefully ensure employees can access support

There is a serious need to reform Statutory Sick Pay, to raise the level of payments and also make it more flexible

**Recommendation:** Implement pressing reforms to SSP and carry out a further



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consultation on long-term reforms

There has been more awareness about the importance of supporting people's mental health at work over the past few years, while mental health is the top focus of most employers' wellbeing activity, but many organisations still need to develop more effective approaches to support good mental health outcomes

There is much that employers can do to improve the lives of working-age adults who live with a mental health condition. It means addressing the whole lifecycle of employment, from recruitment, through keeping people well and managing a disability or ill health at work, to supporting people to return to work after a period of absence

There is also much work to do to improve job quality to ensure it improves mental health outcomes, such as by providing more flexibility

**Recommendation:** Work with employers to underline the importance of good jobs and good working conditions in promoting better mental health outcome

**Recommendation:** Strengthen the flexible working agenda and improve labour market enforcement

Employers play an important role in creating a supportive mental health environment that recognises, but does not focus solely on, the risk of suicide. This is also about recognising particularly difficult and stressful situations and putting additional care and support in place when needed by employees

One of the most difficult and emotionally challenging situations as an HR professional or manager is dealing with an employee who discloses suicidal thoughts, or has already attempted suicide. Managers cannot act as a counsellor, and it's important that they have boundaries and know when/how to refer someone to more specialist sources of help where needed.

CIPD has worked with experts such as Samaritans, Mind, the Charlie Waller Trust, Acas, and mental health specialists for HR professionals on how organisations can educate their workforce and open up the culture to talk about suicide

Improving employers' capability to monitor, measure, and report on mental health and wellbeing, and disability, issues is an important focus.

There is a range of potential benefits for organisations in collecting and reporting on employee health and disability information including improving its external reputation as a business or service provider by signalling its commitment to fairness, equality, and human rights.

Embedding transparency by measuring and publishing key metrics and progress will help to encourage more openness and conversations in workplaces.

A key challenge to making an organisation's reporting meaningful is the lack of confidence of many people in sharing information about a disability

**Recommendation:** Voluntary reporting on disability, mental health and wellbeing

**Chapter 1: how can we all promote positive mental wellbeing?**

**Question: How can we help working age adults to improve their own wellbeing?**

***Current employer practice and priorities***

*‘Organisations clearly have a role, both legally (eg Health and Safety at Work Act and Equality Act), ethically, and also in relation to driving performance.’ [CIPD roundtable participant]*

[CIPD research](#) shows mental ill-health has been a significant and growing concern for organisations over the past few years, and the most common cause of long-term absence. Further, in 2022 nearly four-fifths (79%) of respondents report some stress-related absence in their organisation over the last year, and this figure rises to 90% of large organisations (with more than 250 employees). UK workplaces play an important role in improving mental health outcomes of working-age adults through their culture, support, and resources. This includes, for example, promotion of good mental health, early detection of some symptoms and early referral to expert support, and by ill health prevention activities including providing ‘good work’ for people that helps to optimise their wellbeing:

*‘Recognise that mental health isn’t just part of the wellbeing strategy. Our mental health is impacted by every element of our experience at work. It also aligns with other areas of HR focus such as equality and diversity, due to increased risk factors amongst different groups of employees including gender, ethnicity, age.’ [CIPD roundtable participant]*

Our research also shows there has been good progress over the past decade in employers’ recognition that they have a responsibility to look after people’s mental, as well as their physical health. In our [2022 survey](#) (covering over 800 organisations with a combined workforce of 4.3 million), organisations with wellbeing activity were asked which aspects of wellbeing their efforts are designed to promote: mental health remains the most common priority with more than half (53%) reporting their activity is focused on this area *to a large extent*. Access to counselling services and employee assistance programmes remain the most common wellbeing benefits provided.

A quarter of HR respondents (25%) are extremely concerned about the impact of the pandemic on employees’ mental health and a further 41% are moderately concerned (just 2% report they are not at all concerned). Findings from the CIPD’s 2022 [UK Working Lives survey](#) shows that 58% of UK employees describe their mental health as very good/good, 18% as poor/very poor, and 24% as neither good nor poor (sample is a 6,177 representative sample of UK workers).

Encouragingly, most organisations are taking additional steps to support employee health and wellbeing in response to the pandemic, with *‘more focus on looking after employees’ mental health’* the main step taken (81% of organisations). However, the impact of employers’ efforts is not what it could be; for example, around half (52%) of HR respondents believe their organisation is effective in tackling workplace stress or in identifying and managing the mental health risks arising from COVID-19 (48%).

In [last year's survey report](#), with very high levels of concern about the impact of the pandemic on employees' mental health, we saw an increase in efforts to reduce stress and promote good mental health. [This year](#), levels of concern have slipped somewhat, although two-thirds (66%) of respondents remain concerned about the impact of the pandemic on employees' mental health (last year, it was 82%). This year, there's a corresponding reduction in the proportion of organisations taking a number of steps to address stress and promote mental health.

The longer-term trends are still encouraging in terms of organisations' focus on mental wellbeing. For example, more than two-thirds (68%) of respondents believe their organisation actively promotes good mental wellbeing and (64%) believe that employees are well informed about organisational support for mental health.

However, it's disappointing we're not seeing stronger leadership on this issue; just over two-fifths (42%) agree that senior leaders encourage a focus on mental health through their actions and behaviour. Authentic and visible leadership, combined with strong management capability, are the pillars that support a mentally healthy workplace. Without both, an organisation's efforts to create an inclusive culture and improve mental health outcomes will be shortlived. CIPD research consistently shows that 'poor management style' is one of the top three causes of work-related stress, demonstrating how detrimental the impact can be on people's mental wellbeing if line managers are not capable and confident in this area.

Individuals also have a responsibility to look after their own health, at home, and at work – organisations can encourage basic self-care practices and communicate these to employees. Working with occupational health services where available, employers can also build in awareness of self-management of ongoing health issues as part of their health and wellbeing frameworks.

*'Whilst organisations have a role to play, we also each have to take ownership for our own behaviours that are supportive or detrimental to our health (mental and physical) – much like the shared duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work Act. In some of the training, I do I challenge people around their behaviours relating to work which are unhelpful and detrimental to their wellbeing, many of which it is in their power to change.'* [CIPD roundtable participant]

### **Key public policy recommendation**

- **Optimise Government schemes such as Disability Confident and Access to Work** and launch a **well-resourced workplace mental health publicity and education campaign**: There needs to be much greater promotion of available support and schemes like *Disability Confident* and *Access to Work* by the Government as part of a well-funded national campaign, in collaboration with employers, and relevant special interest group and stakeholders. This approach could help to raise tackle the stigma around mental health issues at work and raise employer awareness to encourage a culture of inclusion and disclosure.

**Chapter 2: how can we all prevent the onset of mental ill-health?**

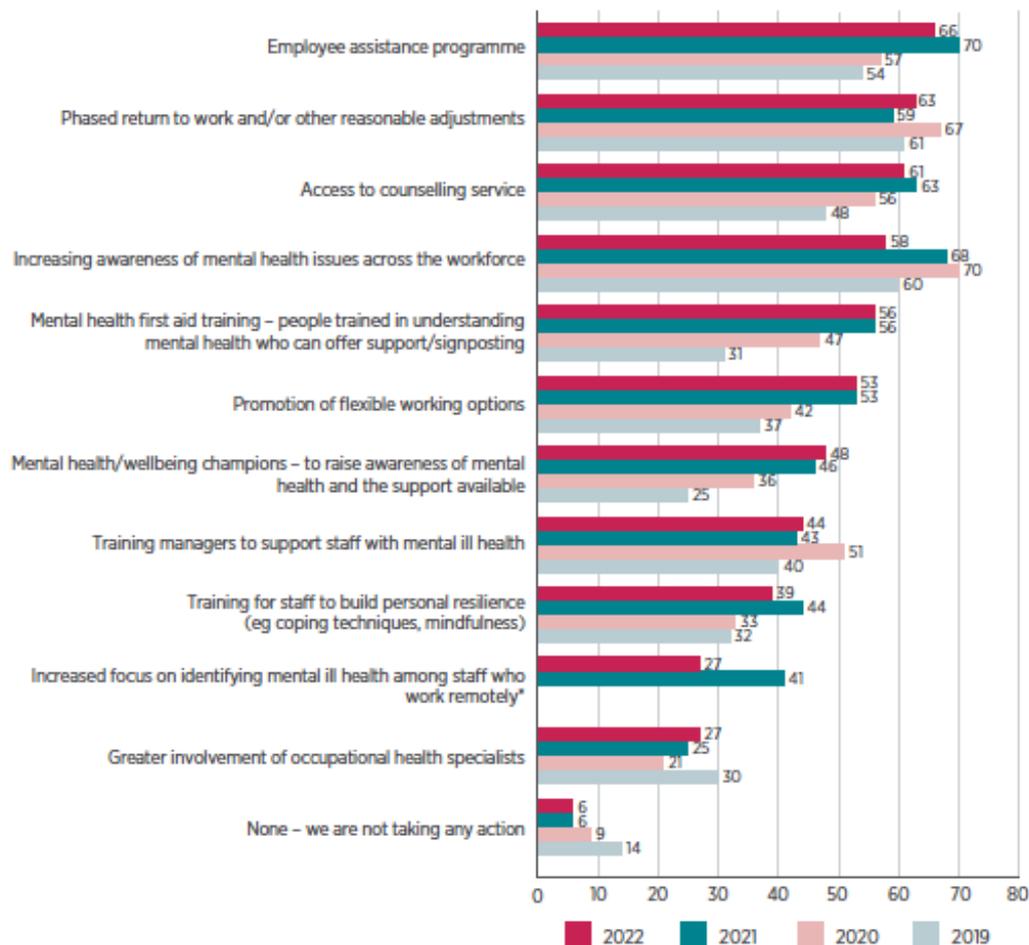
**Question: Do you have ideas for how employers can support and protect the mental health of their employees?**

## Current employer practice and priorities

*'Move the narrative to promoting mental health from mental illness. Put more focus on earlier prevention, again not just wellbeing initiatives but creating a work environment that is conducive to mental wellbeing, for example boundaries around working hours, realistic workloads, transparent communication.'* [CIPD roundtable participant]

Our [2022 survey](#) shows that many organisations take a wide range of actions to support employees' mental health at work.

Figure 17: Actions taken to manage employee mental health at work (%)



Base: 606 (2022); 471 (2021); 751 (2020); 675 (2019).  
 \* No comparable figures for previous years, as this was a new option.

However, our research also shows a tendency for organisations to put more emphasis on providing support when people become ill rather than helping to prevent work-related stress and poor mental health in the first place. Support pathways are very important and there will undoubtedly be times when an employee needs to take time off because of a mental health condition. But we also need to see more organisations taking stronger preventative steps to promote good mental wellbeing. There has been some improvement - our [2022 survey](#) finds that 36% of HR professionals report their organisation is much more reactive (taking action when

people have gone off sick) than proactive (promoting good wellbeing) compared with 47% agreeing in 2018, for example.

In the same vein, the measures that employers take to identify and reduce stress at work need to reflect a more systematic framework with a sharper focus on risk prevention. In terms of managing work-related stress, 58% of organisations carry out risk assessments or stress audits, three in ten (30%) carry out stress management training for the whole workforce and just one in five (21%) use the Health and Safety Executive's Management Standards. Education, training, and awareness-raising for individuals on mental health issues is a positive step, but they need to be part of an organisational framework that is focused on prevention and early intervention with effective people management capability at its core. This means creating the working conditions and environment that manage and mitigate the main health risks and provide 'good work' to support good wellbeing. It has long been proven that [Good work is good for health](#) and can reduce health and economic inequalities.

There is a tendency on the part of some employers to focus more on quick fixes rather than sustainable action that will improve mental health outcomes in the long-term. For example, we have seen a significant and steady increase in the use of mental health first aid training which is now more widespread than training for line managers to support people's mental health and twice as common than making more use of occupational health services.

*'MHFA England is campaigning for them to be a legal requirement in the same way as physical first aiders. I am not so sure as whilst it may send a message that physical illness is equal to mental illness it will not change behaviours. It is also not realistic to 'make' someone become a mental health first aider due to the emotive topic and skills required. Properly implementing MHFA is about a lot more than training mental health first aiders – supporting them, debrief options, role parameters, reporting, wider awareness training, etc'* [CIPD roundtable participant]

Line managers play a fundamental role in supporting people's mental health and wellbeing. As well as managing absence and return to work, they implement all of the policies, like flexible working, that help to create 'good work' and help people stay well.

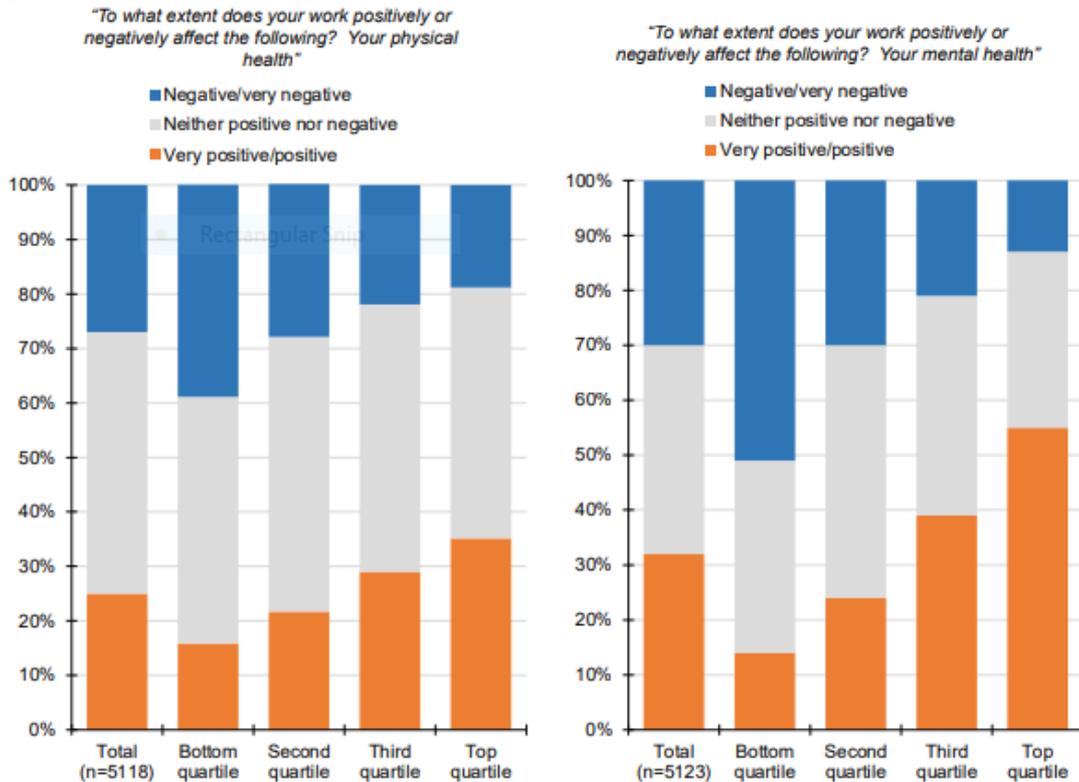
It is line managers' people management skills that will build trust and positive working relationships while helping to manage and prevent stress in the workplace. CIPD research finds employees who report their line managers treat them fairly, communicate well, and provide constructive feedback and support when needed, are much less likely to say that their work has a negative impact on their mental health compared to workers who don't rate their managers highly in these respects.

See figure x below. Based on analysis of the CIPD annual Good Work Index, respondents with low-rating managers in the bottom quartile are over three times more likely to report their work has a negative effect on their mental health (51%) than staff with high-ranking managers in the top quartile (13%). The line manager's effect on employee wellbeing also applies to workers' physical health.

Managers that demonstrate key 'soft' people management skills are much more likely to create positive trust-based working environments where stress is prevented or managed effectively. This will boost people's resilience and ability to cope if they have challenges in their lives outside work including those relating to their mental

health. Workers are also more likely to be comfortable disclosing a sensitive issue such as a mental health matter if their manager has earned their trust through being consistent, fair, and supportive over a period of time.

Figure x



Source: UK Working Lives survey 2020.

Managers are typically the first port of call if an employee is stressed or struggling, or needs a workplace adjustment to support their mental health. Crucially, they should:

- check in regularly on people’s wellbeing
- spot any early warning signs of poor mental health
- build trust to foster psychological safety
- facilitate sensitive discussions about health issues
- signpost to expert sources of help where needed.

Further, our [2022 survey](#) shows that HR professionals are not positive regarding the skills and confidence of managers to support people’s mental health. Well under half (38%) agree that managers are confident to have sensitive discussions and signpost people to expert sources of help when needed and even fewer (29%) that they are confident and competent to spot the early warning signs of mental ill-health. This does not mean that organisations can expect managers to act as counsellors or medical experts, or give advice. They need to understand the boundaries of their role in supporting wellbeing and know when to refer to expert help.

The continuing impact of Covid-19 and other pressures mean they will be managing a potentially complex mix of personal situations in their teams. To meet the considerable expectations on them to support mental wellbeing, employers need to ensure line managers have the training, competence, and time to manage people



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well and support their wellbeing. How line managers behave and the relationships they build will be instrumental in how effectively they support employee wellbeing. The CIPD has developed [these resources](#) to help managers explore and develop their management capability.

Most people in the UK are employed in small firms with no access to HR or occupational health advice. CIPD research into building HR capability in small firms (*Building HR capability and ambition in small firms, 2017*) found many small firm owner managers need support to enable them to get the very basics of people management in place - until these foundations are in place owner managers are unlikely to invest in higher value added activities like support for people's mental health. Consequently, there is a need to improve the quality of business support to small firms on HR/people management at a local level delivered via key stakeholders such as Local Enterprise Partnerships and Growth Hubs and through providing additional resources to Acas. CIPD's view, based on a number of pilots it has run in different parts of the UK, is that SMEs need improved access to high-quality bespoke, face to face advice and support on HR and people management if they are to improve their practices in these key areas.

It is by boosting people management capability in this way that organisations will be able to improve line manager support for people's mental health while also enhancing employment relations and productivity.

### **Key public policy recommendations**

- **Invest in people management capability:** Invest in England to provide high-quality HR support to small firms via the Local Enterprise Partnership/Growth Hub network to support efforts to boost job quality and workplace productivity at a local level. Based on the flexible CIPD People Skills HR support model used in the pilots, this type of service could be rolled out across the Growth Hub network at a cost of about £13m a year. This level of funding would provide up to one day of free HR consultancy support for nearly 20,000 firms a year in England.
- Provide consequential funding to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to improve the availability of accessible HR support and health advice for small firms across the UK.
- **As part of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan,** work with employment stakeholders to encourage employers to implement the Mental Health at Work Commitment which provides a systematic and action focused framework to create a mentally healthy workplace.

**Chapter 3: how can we all intervene earlier when people need support with their mental health?**

**Question: How can organisations (beyond the NHS) better identify and respond to signs of stress or mental ill-health in employees?  
How can we all intervene earlier when people need support with their mental health?**

## **Current employer practice and priorities**

*'Raise wider awareness and increase understanding across the whole workforce of the signs and symptoms of mental ill health, to both identify in ourselves and to support others. Normalise conversations about mental health so it is discussed in the same way as physical health. Reduce the stigma surrounding it.'* [CIPD roundtable participant]

Employers have an important role to play here: where possible, employees experiencing stress or mental ill-health should be able to access support and flexibility at work before problems escalate. If there's a supportive dialogue between the employee and their line manager, the organisation can hopefully ensure employees can access support (such as occupational health services, counselling, an employee assistance programme, a GP appointment, referral to mental health/IAPT services).

The CIPD's 2022 [UK Working Lives survey](#) shows that 74% of employees think their immediate supervisor, line manager or boss is supportive if they have a problem and 62% believe their manager is open and approachable on issues like mental health and disability. These are encouraging findings but indicate room for improvement because every employee should feel comfortable to talk about their mental health and seek support. Our joint [mental health guide](#) with Mind for people managers in the workplace has a chapter '*Early intervention: spotting the signs of stress and poor mental health*' that covers this area in detail, outlining practical advice for managers in areas such as the importance of managers being alert to the potential workplace triggers for distress or poor mental health, and understanding how external triggers may also have an effect on an employee's mental health and wellbeing.

Flexibility is a vital tool to help individuals manage the impact of any health symptoms on their work. As well as offering helpful workplace adjustments, such as changes to workload or working hours, organisations need to have consistent, but also responsive and flexible, sickness absence policies. The **UK's Statutory Sick Pay system** does not currently support such an approach. A key barrier is the current rigidity of the SSP system and its lack of flexibility to support people with long-term fluctuating symptoms, typically associated with many mental health conditions. Reform is needed so that SSP can be paid on a part-time basis to encourage a phased return to work where appropriate and help prevent people with mental health issues falling out of work. The [CIPD response](#) to the government's [Health is everyone's business](#) consultation supported the reform of SSP to make it more flexible and payable on a part-time basis. The [CIPD response](#) to the Government's [Health is everyone's business](#) consultation supported the reform of SSP to make it more flexible and payable on a part-time basis. In our survey of 1,051 HR professionals, three in four HR professionals (75%) supported this change. The Government's own [response](#) highlights the benefits of phased returns, shown to be '*particularly effective in supporting individuals with musculoskeletal and mental health conditions*', and that respondents were 'broadly supportive' of phased returns to work.

Inadequate levels of SSP could also be contributing to the worrying levels of unhealthy 'presenteeism' (working when ill) in many organisations. Our [2022 survey](#)

shows the overwhelming majority of organisations had observed ‘presenteeism’ among employees during the previous 12 months.

Despite the reform of SSP being a key focus of several UK Government consultations the 2021 response to the consultation on [reducing ill-health related job loss](#) stated that there are no plans to take forward any substantive proposals to improve the system. CIPD believes there’s a strong case for implementing all of the proposed SSP reforms from that consultation and our employer research supports this view. This [CIPD policy paper](#) makes recommendations for Government and for employers to outline how public policy and employer practice should work together to support people’s health and employment outcomes.

### **Key public policy recommendations**

#### **Implement pressing reforms to SSP and carry out a further consultation on long-term reforms, including:**

- Extend protection to those on the lowest incomes and act now to:
  - Expand eligibility for SSP by abolishing the lower earnings limit (LEL).
  - Raise the level of SSP to be closer to the equivalent of someone earning the National Minimum Wage/National Living Wage (based on a pro-rata daily rate covering time taken off work sick, so a daily rate of £65.40 for someone working a 7.5 hour day).
  - amending SSP rules to allow for phased returns to work
  - permanent removal of the three qualifying days for payment of SSP
- Carry out a further consultation on wider reform of SSP, including issues such as:
  - whether or not SSP should be linked to earnings level
  - if/how SMEs can be better supported, in particular very small employers
  - whether or not there should be a new payment structure whereby financial responsibility is shared between the state and employers. Explore (via consultation) various cost-sharing options, for example, employers only covering up to a maximum of four weeks’ enhanced SSP costs over the course of a year with the Government picking up the remaining SSP costs if an employee is off work sick for longer periods of time (for example, from five to 26 weeks).

**Chapter 5: how can we all support people living with mental health conditions to live well?**

**Question: What do we (as a society) need to do or change to improve the lives of working age adults who live with a mental health condition?**

### **Current employer practice and priorities**

Work can have a huge impact on people’s mental health – it can promote wellbeing or trigger problems. The kind of health and wellbeing programmes and quality of work that employers provide can therefore play a significant role in helping working-



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age adults with a mental health conditions to live well. Crucially, employees need to be able to access the support that enables them to manage their condition, and the impact of their symptoms on work, so that they can thrive at work.

There has been more awareness about the importance of supporting people's mental health at work over the past few years. [CIPD research](#) shows mental health is the top focus of most employers' wellbeing activity, but many organisations still need to develop more effective approaches to support good mental health outcomes. It's still the case that many employees are reluctant to raise the subject, for fear of discrimination, while managers often shy away from the subject, afraid of saying the wrong thing and making matters worse or provoking legal consequences. We have some way to go before there is parity of esteem in terms of the importance and openness attached to mental, compared with physical, health issues at work.

This culture of silence means undetected mental health issues can spiral into a crisis, resulting in sickness absence, higher levels of presenteeism, and increased staff turnover. Also, many employers still feel uncertain about their responsibilities around protecting employees set out in the Equality Act 2010 such as how to make suitable reasonable adjustments for employees experiencing a mental health condition.

There is much that employers can do to improve the lives of working-age adults who live with a mental health condition. It means addressing the whole lifecycle of employment, from recruitment, through keeping people well and managing a disability or ill health at work, to supporting people to return to work after a period of absence. They need to ensure managers can facilitate conversations about stress and mental health issues and put in place support so employees can stay well and in work. To create mentally healthy workplaces, employers need to have a holistic framework that recognises the inter-relationship between people's mental and physical health. They need to train and educate managers about mental health issues, raise awareness among the whole workforce, and foster an open and inclusive culture where it's okay to talk about mental health. Leaders have a vital role to play, and need to show visible leadership by ensuring there is mental health support in place and there is no stigma attached to mental ill-health.

There is also much work to do to improve **job quality** to ensure it improves mental health outcomes. Employers should design jobs with realistic workloads and targets, and put enough resources in place to avoid overwork. They should ensure managers are trained and capable to set realistic performance objectives, monitor workloads, and manage by outcomes.

Further, in terms of **utilising flexibility to help support people's mental health**, the Government's flexible working agenda can play a key role. The decision to delay the Employment Bill could be a missed opportunity in this respect, but we await the Government's response to the consultation on making flexible working the default. The CIPD believes the right to request flexible working should be a day one right and is something the CIPD has been campaigning for through its [#FlexFrom1st campaign](#). Our research shows that, while the pandemic has resulted in a significant boost to homeworking, there has been little change in the use of flexible hours arrangements which can also ensure that many workers with a health issue, including chronic mental health symptoms, can also benefit from support to help them balance work with their health.

The CIPD believes there are also major weaknesses in the UK labour market in terms of **enforcement of employment regulation**, including in relation to health and wellbeing issues, [as our policy paper outlines](#). More effective enforcement of SSP is one area that could be improved – we hope through the proposed creation of a Single Enforcement body (SEB) which would hopefully assume responsibility for SSP enforcement. We hope the Government brings forward legislation to enable this to happen as soon as parliamentary time allows. There's a need to significantly boost the number of inspectors and increase the number of proactive inspections of workplaces if the new body is to be more effective than existing enforcement mechanisms. We also recommend the reinstatement of employment tribunals' ability to make wider recommendations to employers to improve their people management, and health, safety, and wellbeing practices. The SEB or relevant enforcement body such as the HSE could be responsible for following up on these orders to monitor compliance. Further, HSE's enforcement activity in relation to work-related stress could be expanded so that more employers are investigated and Improvement notices and other enforcement action implemented.

### ***Key public policy recommendations***

Work with employers to underline the importance of **good jobs and good working conditions in promoting better mental health outcomes** following the review into [the future of work](#)

**Strengthen the flexible working agenda:** Make the right to request flexible working a right from day one of employment and work with organisations such as the CIPD on myth-busting around flexible working to dispel the notion that it cannot work for certain employees or job roles.

### **Improve labour market enforcement**

- Expedite the introduction of a well-resourced **Single Enforcement Body (SEB)** to carry out proactive inspections in high-risk sectors to boost employer compliance with SSP.
- Reinstatement of the ability of employment tribunals to make wider recommendations to employers to improve their people management, and health, safety and wellbeing practices.
- Expand HSE's enforcement activity in investigating work-related stress to ensure appropriate and proactive action is taken where workplace environments are causing stress and poor mental health.

## **Chapter 6: how can we all improve support for people in crisis?**

**Question: How can we all improve support for people in crisis?**

**Question: What is the most important thing we need to address in order to reduce the number of working age adults who die by suicide?**

### ***Current employer practice and priorities***

*'Understand it is about more than a return to work interview! Recovery from mental illness is not a smooth trajectory, there will be bumps along the way and organisations need to understand and support this.'* [CIPD participant policy roundtable]

Our [2022 survey](#) shows a lack of awareness and provision in organisations regarding suicide risk and prevention among working age adults; fewer than four in ten (39%) organisations have provision (such as policies, guidance, awareness-raising or line manager training) covering this crucial area to a moderate or large extent. There can be extensive stigma in talking about suicide, including in the workplace. Our findings show too few employers have frameworks that encourage the kind of climate where people can talk to someone about suicide and find ways to seek help. Most managers and employees have never received education or training to deal with a situation where someone discloses suicidal feelings.

This gap in workplace awareness and support prompted the CIPD to work with experts such as Samaritans, Mind, the Charlie Waller Trust, Acas, and mental health specialists to develop [practical advice and guidance](#) for HR professionals on how organisations can educate their workforce and open up the culture to talk about suicide. Their approach should be embedded as part of the organisation's wider framework to promote good mental health.

Employers play an important role in creating a supportive mental health environment that recognises, but does not focus solely on, the risk of suicide. This is also about recognising particularly difficult and stressful situations and putting additional care and support in place when needed by employees. Employers' approach to mental health and wellbeing should expressly address the risk of suicide and incorporate a prevention strategy. By creating a non-stigmatising culture and a safe space to talk, employers can have an important role in signposting people to the right sort of professional support.

If someone is struggling, knowing they can approach a colleague or a manager and be listened to with empathy and without judgement could be the first step in them accessing the help they need. Organisations also need to ensure it provides appropriate support for any individual who listens to someone who's having suicidal thoughts.

Key areas covered by our guidance include:

- Managing the risks related to workplace stress and preventing unfair treatment, such as bullying and harassment, will help to create a mentally healthy workplace, which, in turn, can help to address some of the potential risks associated with suicide. As such, employers have an important role in creating the kind of environment where people can seek help if they are experiencing suicidal thoughts.
- If someone knows their concerns will be listened to with empathy and understanding, this can help that person to take the first step in accessing support services and securing the help they need.
- Warning signs might be different for everyone, but a manager having a good relationship with their team, and the ability to recognise change in behaviour, can prompt a conversation about whether someone is okay.
- Employers should engender a compassionate culture that harnesses openness and supports staff to talk about their thoughts and feelings, which is key to tackling the taboo around mental health and suicide. People who have

poor mental health can also thrive at work if they have the right adjustments made and support in place.

- People managers need to be competent and confident to have sensitive and supportive conversations with people, and signpost to expert sources of help.
- Disciplinary processes can be hugely stressful, and support needs to be provided by someone who is not also conducting the process. Concern for the health and welfare of anyone involved in a disciplinary, dismissal, or redundancy procedure should be a priority at every stage, and suspension should be a last resort.

One of the most difficult and emotionally challenging situations as an HR professional or manager is dealing with an employee who discloses suicidal thoughts, or has already attempted suicide. Managers cannot act as a counsellor, and it's important that they have boundaries and know when/how to refer someone to more specialist sources of help where needed. The organisation should make this signposting clear to managers and colleagues in any guidance it disseminates. A core principle is that, if someone is in distress and tells a manager or colleague they are thinking about suicide, guidance should urge them to contact their GP in the first instance. If the crisis is immediate and someone is in imminent danger of taking their own life, they should dial 999. There is further practical guidance in our accompanying [guide for line managers](#).

## Next steps and implementation

**Question: How can we improve data collection and sharing to help plan, implement and monitor improvements to mental health and wellbeing?**

### ***Current employer practice and priorities***

*'Organisations (HR) need to be better at identifying and using metrics to understand the impact of reduced mental wellbeing on performance. Consider accident rates, accuracy, customer service levels, innovation, problem solving, etc not just overall performance.'* [CIPD roundtable participant]

Improving employers' capability to monitor, measure, and report on mental health and wellbeing, and disability, issues is an important focus. These metrics and reporting outcomes could contribute to Government goals and help to develop public policy to improve mental health outcomes for working-age adults in the UK. To this end, the CIPD recently responded to the Disability Unit's [consultation](#) on disability workforce reporting.

There is a range of potential benefits for organisations in collecting and reporting on employee health and disability information including improving its external reputation as a business or service provider by signalling its commitment to fairness, equality, and human rights. The revised UK Corporate Governance Code requires improved reporting on diversity including how companies have applied their diversity policy such as links to progress on achieving company objectives, and so health, inclusion, and disability workforce reporting can help such employers meet such requirements. This is an opportunity for an employer to set an industry example for Corporate



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Social Responsibility and help drive change on a wider stage, including across its supply chain. This approach can boost an employer's profile as an employer of choice and help it to tap into a wider pool of talent and skills at a time of skills shortages, thereby boosting performance and productivity. It is an opportunity for an employer to publicly demonstrate the value that inclusion and progression can bring to an enterprise.

Embedding transparency by measuring and publishing key metrics and progress will help to encourage more openness and conversations in workplaces. This in turn has the potential to build a more inclusive culture which is critical to people having the confidence to share their experience of health issues.

However, our evidence shows that awareness of the Government's [voluntary reporting framework on disability, mental health, and wellbeing](#) – launched in 2018 – remains limited. Just over a fifth (21%) of organisations (findings from the CIPD [Health and Wellbeing at Work survey report 2021](#)) were aware of the framework. Of these, nearly two-fifths (37%) had adopted at least part of the framework (21% in full, 16% in part) and a further 35% were working towards adopting it. Our research identified a number of barriers to collecting or publishing workforce data. Around two-thirds of organisations report the main barrier is lack of disclosure from employees while one in four (25%) report they lack the resources, systems/infrastructure, or guidance/support for good practice in workforce reporting.

A key challenge to making an organisation's reporting meaningful is the lack of confidence of many people in sharing information about a disability, which relates directly to the culture of an organisation. Therefore, we need clear guidance and case studies to build organisations' confidence and capability in fostering inclusive, open, and psychologically safe environments where people can talk about disability and health issues.

Government, in partnership with organisations like the CIPD, could do more to educate and engage with employers around the existing voluntary reporting framework. Since it was published, the CIPD has been using its reach and influence as a Disability Confident Leader and professional body of more than 160,000-plus HR professionals to increase awareness of the voluntary framework and improve organisations' capability in this area.

We need to shift negative misconceptions among many employers about disability and mental health workforce reporting necessarily being onerous and costly, and promote a greater understanding about the value it can bring to an organisation. There are a number of ways that the use of the voluntary reporting framework could be increased, as part of a wider, well-funded national awareness campaign to build mentally healthy workplaces in collaboration with employers, Disability Confident members, and relevant special interest groups and stakeholders.

### ***Key public policy recommendation***

**Voluntary reporting on disability, mental health and wellbeing:** We urge Government to launch a major, ongoing and well-resourced publicity and education campaign to raise awareness and take up of the Voluntary Reporting Framework, aligned with, the *Disability Confident* scheme. Such a campaign could specifically call on employers to measure and report on meaningful metrics and outcomes.



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## **Building the evidence base**

We welcome the Government's response to the [Health is Everyone's Business](#) consultation in relation to establishing the collaborative partnership with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Medical Research Council (MRC), the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM) and the independent Academic Forum for Health and Work to develop the proposal for a new Centre for Work and Health Research. We believe the Centre will help to achieve innovation in terms of helping employers to access quality OH services, and have written a letter of support Director General, Work and Health Services at the Department for Work and Pensions as well as serving on the initial Advisory Board.

The new Centre will be instrumental in developing the OH market as a critical component in helping individuals remain in and return to work, but we need to develop a broader robust, evidence-based approach to inform workplace practice on health and wellbeing to ensure that employers' policies have the desired impact and effect sustainable change. There are still significant challenges in terms of the ill health and disability employment gap and preventing people falling out of work, and the employment gap for mental ill-health is disproportionately high. The pandemic has exacerbated some of these challenges and also brought several changes to the way work is organised, designed, and managed. It has also provided opportunities for exploring how new ways of working, including flexible and hybrid working, can help to support people with health conditions to manage their symptoms and remain in work and thrive. There is also a need for practical research that gains greater understanding as to how employees' health can be better protected and promoted in line with the *Levelling Up* and *Build Back Better* agendas. Adequate funding needs to be made available in order to strengthen the evidence to build a compelling business case for employer action, and to inform organisational practice.

### ***Key public policy recommendation***

**Strengthening the evidence:** We urge Government to make available more funding to strengthen research on the evidence base. This should be focused on informing evidence based employer practice to improve health- and employment-related outcomes for people with health or disability issues, as well as prevent ill health, especially as it now relates to the benefits and some of the issues around hybrid and remote working.