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Mental health in the workplace

Do employers just tick the boxes when it comes to
the mental health of their employees?

Helen Smith,
Commercial Director and business sponsor for wellbeing strategy, Benenden Health

The author

I'm delighted to introduce our latest research exploring current attitudes to mental health support in the workplace.

Helping employers and employees work together to strive towards better health and wellbeing is central to my role as the business sponsor for wellbeing strategy at Benenden Health. So it's been a real privilege to delve deeper into the current wellbeing of UK employees.

Using both an extensive survey with 1,000 employees and in-depth one-to-one calls with 10 employees, we were able to understand more about the mental health conditions that UK employees are tackling and how their employers are reacting. By segmenting our research we were also better able to understand the variations between generations as well as genders.

The following report will examine these issues in greater detail and explore the current gap between what employees need from their workplace and what is currently on offer. Ultimately, we hope this report will highlight some key areas in which employers and employees can work together to improve workplace wellbeing and work towards a happier and more productive workforce.

Helen

Helen Smith,
Commercial Director and business sponsor for wellbeing strategy, Benenden Health

Foreword

Richard is Operations Director at Insight Healthcare. Insight is the largest, not-for-profit provider of primary care psychological therapies in the UK, handling some 80,000 referrals a year on behalf of the NHS, and is Benenden Health's mental health and wellbeing partner.

Mental health and wellbeing are increasingly being recognised as important issues, and a statistic often quoted is that '1 in 4 adults will experience a mental illness at some point each year in the UK'[1]. The prevalence of mental health issues is such that few of us remain untouched by mental ill health during our lives, either personally or through a family member, friend or colleague. But much less has been written about the particular dynamics and sensitivities that apply to mental health issues in modern workplaces, and the impact evolving working practices have had on the people within them.

Modern working life is chaotic and packed with new pressures, and whilst new technologies have brought new opportunities, they have also accelerated our 'always connected' lifestyles; extending the reach of the office beyond the traditional 9 to 5. In pressured circumstances it is natural that we will occasionally feel stressed, anxious or depressed and it is in everybody's interests that this is acknowledged and addressed. First and most importantly, help should be made available to individuals in times of need, but employers are also better served by a healthy, productive workforce, rather than one characterised by anxiety, stress and low levels of staff wellbeing.

Unresolved mental health issues may cause absence, loss of productivity and high staff turnover, and it is employers who bear the associated costs once they hit the bottom line. Organisations that take meaningful action to promote employee wellbeing will, therefore, enjoy a competitive advantage over those that don't, or that merely pay lip service to it.

In this context, it is important to be informed about the fast moving make-up of pressures in our modern workplaces and the factors driving the mental health and wellbeing of the people working in them. A well-designed and effective workplace wellbeing (or mental health) policy and programme, which gives access to appropriate therapy and other support, can be invaluable. This can then help nip problems in the bud before they escalate to the point where individuals, and the organisations that depend on them, are adversely affected. So I welcome this fascinating and important research for the insights it provides into wellbeing in modern workplaces, attitudes towards mental health, levels of support currently available, and how best we might improve from here. These insights will be of great value to those interested in the challenge of creating the conditions necessary to foster healthy, productive working environments. We will all be poorer if we don't rise to meet this challenge.

Richard

Richard Carlton-Crabtree,
Operations Director at
Insight Healthcare

[1] NHS Digital, 'Adult Psychiatric Morbidity in England', 2007

Executive summary

With a national emphasis on mental health, UK employers have never had a better opportunity to start a conversation with their employees about their wellbeing. And with seven in ten employees having suffered from a condition that's related to mental health – from stress to suicidal feelings – it has become even more to put employee wellbeing at the top of the corporate to do list.

Despite this, many UK businesses seem to be largely diminishing the importance of mental health in the workplace and instead a tick box culture has manifested in the place of genuine support. Case in point: more than half of employees surveyed either don't have a workplace mental health policy (27.9%) or they don't know if they have one (26.1%). Perhaps even more troubling, less than one quarter of employees said their company engages regularly with them on issues of mental health (23.8%). It's hardly surprising to learn that less than 1 in 10 employees would confide in their employer if they were suffering from a mental health condition.

A Business in the Community study found that **15% of the 3,000 employees surveyed said they faced dismissal, disciplinary action or demotion** if they talked about their mental ill health with their employer[2].

Only 23.8% of employees said their company regularly engages with them on issues of mental health

less than 1 in 10 employees would confide in their employers if they were suffering from a mental health condition
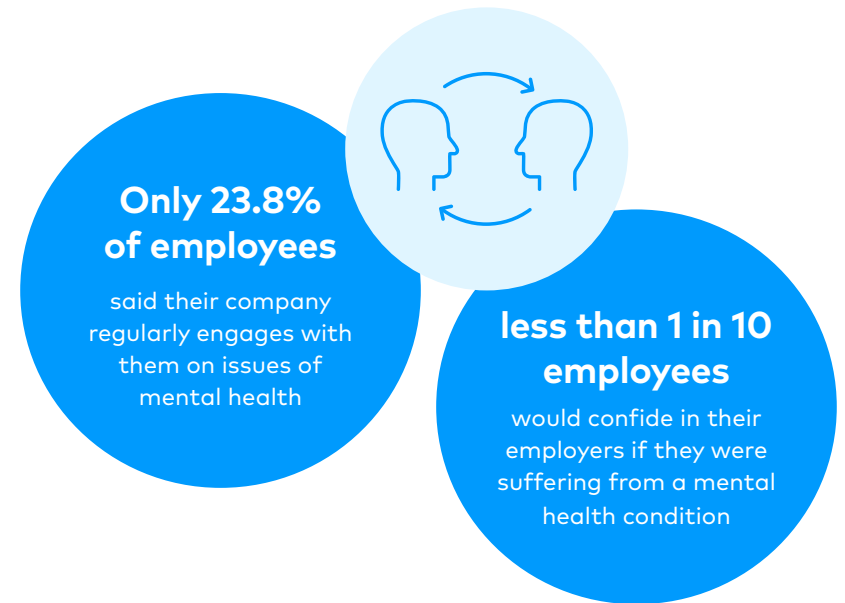
If we want a healthier, happier and more productive workforce, this has to change.

Of course, employee wellbeing is not the sole responsibility of the employer, but given how much time people spend at work, employers certainly play an integral role. Both parties need to work together to foster a culture which encourages honesty around mental health; one which supports rather than ignores – or worse yet – penalises.

[2] Business in the Community, 'Mental Health at Work and the elephant in the room', 2017
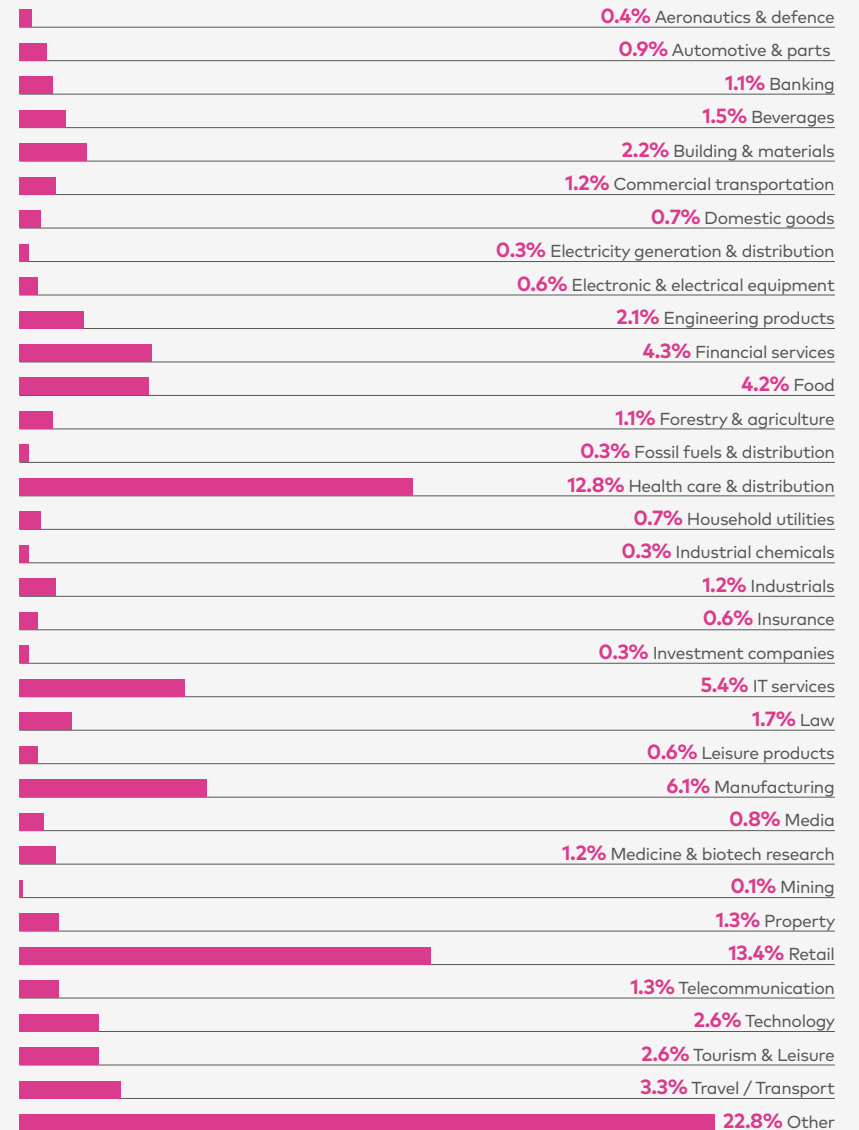
The research

Methodology and respondents

To ensure a detailed and comprehensive understanding of mental health in the workplace, we undertook both quantitative and qualitative research with a broad range of employees, in November 2017.

We surveyed 1,000 respondents - all of whom were employed, which was crucial given the nature of this research. The gender split was 50.4% male and 49.6% female respondents. Our sample included all ages of the working population and we also had respondents from every region in the UK to ensure our research wasn't biased towards urban, suburban or rural employees.

Almost half (48.2%) of those surveyed worked at a large business with over 250 employees, the remaining half worked at a fairly even split of small and medium sized businesses. In terms of sectors, our respondents represented most industries. There were, statistically speaking, a slightly higher proportion of those that worked in healthcare (12.8%) and retail (13.4%).

We also spoke with 10 employees in structured one-to-one phone calls, to gain vital contextual insight into the issue of mental health in the workplace. The participants represented a range of businesses sectors including, but not limited to, education, technology and manufacturing.

What sector do you operate in?

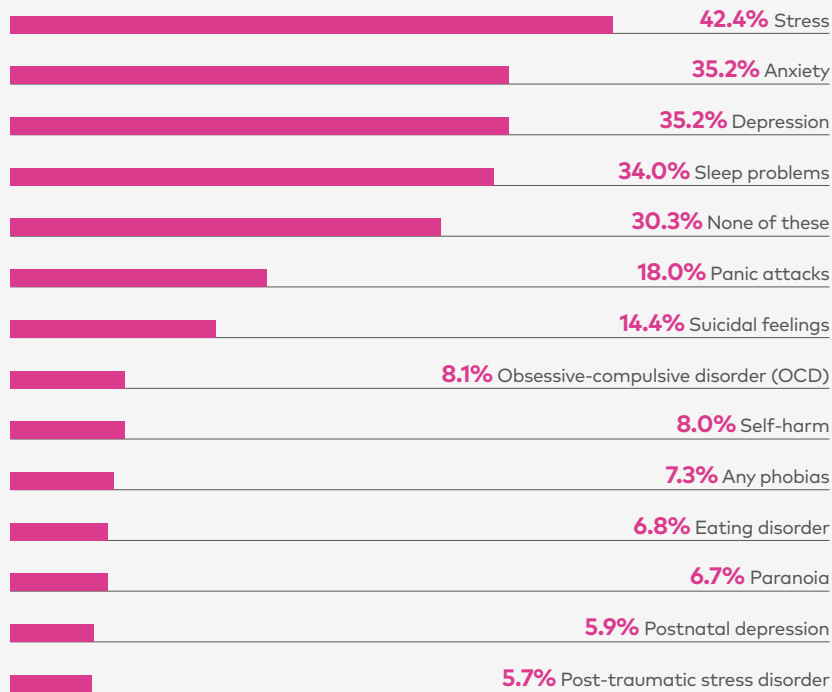| Percentage	Sector
0.4%	Aeronautics & defence
0.9%	Automotive & parts
1.1%	Banking
1.5%	Beverages
2.2%	Building & materials
1.2%	Commercial transportation
0.7%	Domestic goods
0.3%	Electricity generation & distribution
0.6%	Electronic & electrical equipment
2.1%	Engineering products
4.3%	Financial services
4.2%	Food
1.1%	Forestry & agriculture
0.3%	Fossil fuels & distribution
12.8%	Health care & distribution
0.7%	Household utilities
0.3%	Industrial chemicals
1.2%	Industrials
0.6%	Insurance
0.3%	Investment companies
5.4%	IT services
1.7%	Law
0.6%	Leisure products
6.1%	Manufacturing
0.8%	Media
1.2%	Medicine & biotech research
0.1%	Mining
1.3%	Property
13.4%	Retail
1.3%	Telecommunication
2.6%	Technology
2.6%	Tourism & Leisure
3.3%	Travel / Transport
22.8%	Other

Part 01

How much of an issue is mental health in the workplace?

The majority of employees we surveyed have experienced a mental health condition. From panic attacks to post traumatic stress disorder, UK employees are battling a range of complicated issues. Most agree the workplace is more stressful and work-life balance harder to achieve these days, so it's really little wonder employee wellbeing is suffering. And while there is some disparity amongst generations and genders, there is no denying that a significant proportion of your workforce is likely to experience a mental health condition at some point in their lives.

Have you ever suffered from one or more of the following?

42.4% Stress	
35.2% Anxiety	
35.2% Depression	
34.0% Sleep problems	
30.3% None of these	
18.0% Panic attacks	
14.4% Suicidal feelings	
8.1% Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)	
8.0% Self-harm	
7.3% Any phobias	
6.8% Eating disorder	
6.7% Paranoia	
5.9% Postnatal depression	
5.7% Post-traumatic stress disorder	

Prevalence of mental health issues

Our research discovered 70% of employees have suffered from a condition related to mental health. Yet despite this, only 43.8% of employees said they knew a colleague who has suffered from a mental health issue, meaning the topic is often avoided within the workplace.

The most common condition was stress (42.4%) followed by anxiety (35.2%) and depression (35.2%). Employees suffering from sleep problems followed closely behind (34%). Those who have suffered from panic attacks (18%), OCD (8.1%), self-harm (8%), eating disorders (6.8%), paranoia (6.7%), postnatal depression (5.9%) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (5.7%) might seem a lot less by comparison. However, in a business with 100 employees that means around 8 employees could have a history of self-harm. Suddenly it doesn't seem so insignificant.

8 in 100 employees have a history of self-harm

Broadly speaking, according to this survey, the older the employee, the less they say they have suffered from one of the listed conditions associated with mental health. For example, 1 in 4 (42.6%) 18-24 year olds said they suffered from anxiety compared with 1 in 10 (12.9%) employees over the age of 65. This could partly be explained by the effort in recent years to put mental health under the spotlight and make it a less taboo subject. As a result, younger people may have more confidence in talking about their mental health and more knowledge when it comes to spotting symptoms.

Conditions where this deviated from the norm included postnatal depression, which for obvious reasons affected women of a childbearing age disproportionality. Sleep problems also did not fit with this narrative, instead generally affecting people more with age. This ties in with the general expert consensus that as people age they struggle to get to and stay asleep[3].

Female employees also reported a higher level (73.2%) of mental health related issues overall than males (66.3%). This reflects previous research that found women are more likely to have 'internal' mental health issues such as depression and anxiety whereas men have more 'external' issues such as alcohol and anger problems[4]. This highlights the need for multiple approaches to support various sorts of mental health issues.

One of the most worrying results from the study is that 14% of employees have experienced suicidal feelings.

This is particularly concerning given the context of increased suicide rates in the UK, with female suicide rates at their highest in a decade[5]. Considering that suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-29 year olds globally according to the World Health Organisation, reports of suicidal feelings should not be ignored. Yet 1 in 3 (33%) of those experiencing suicidal feelings didn't seek help from anyone.

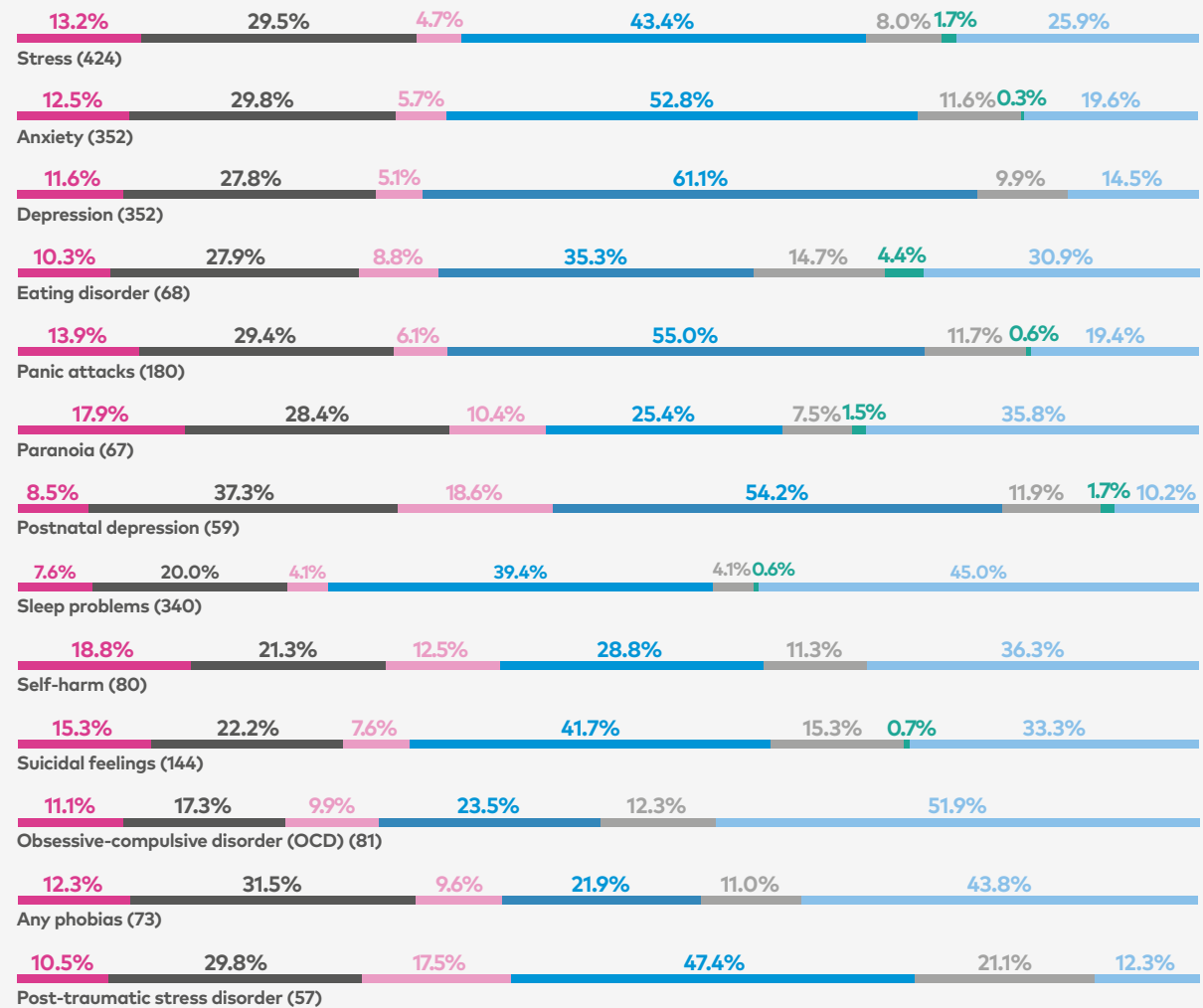[3] National Sleep Foundation, 'Aging and sleep', 2009
[4] The Guardian, 'Women 40% more likely than men to develop mental illness, study finds', 2013

[5] Samaritans, Suicide Statistics Report, 2017

Employees getting help

Most employees dealing with a mental health issue sought help from their GP. However, there were quite a few conditions where employees were more likely to deal with the problem alone rather than ask for outside help: OCD (51.9%), sleep problems (45%), any phobias (43.8%), self-harm (36.3%) and paranoia (35.8%).

Although, we didn't ask respondents to confirm if they were employed at the time of suffering from mental health related condition – less than 1 in 10 went to their employers for support.

Who did you seek help from to deal with the…?

● **Friends**   ● **Family**   ● **Employer**   ● **GP**   ● **Other professional help i.e. counselling**   ● **Other**   ● **No-one**

Condition	Friends	Family	Employer	GP	Other professional	Other	No-one
Stress (424)	13.2%	29.5%	4.7%	43.4%	8.0%	1.7%	25.9%
Anxiety (352)	12.5%	29.8%	5.7%	52.8%	11.6%	0.3%	19.6%
Depression (352)	11.6%	27.8%	5.1%	61.1%	9.9%		14.5%
Eating disorder (68)	10.3%	27.9%	8.8%	35.3%	14.7%	4.4%	30.9%
Panic attacks (180)	13.9%	29.4%	6.1%	55.0%	11.7%	0.6%	19.4%
Paranoia (67)	17.9%	28.4%	10.4%	25.4%	7.5%	1.5%	35.8%
Postnatal depression (59)	8.5%	37.3%	18.6%	54.2%	11.9%	1.7%	10.2%
Sleep problems (340)	7.6%	20.0%	4.1%	39.4%	4.1%	0.6%	45.0%
Self-harm (80)	18.8%	21.3%	12.5%	28.8%	11.3%		36.3%
Suicidal feelings (144)	15.3%	22.2%	7.6%	41.7%	15.3%	0.7%	33.3%
Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) (81)	11.1%	17.3%	9.9%	23.5%	12.3%		51.9%
Any phobias (73)	12.3%	31.5%	9.6%	21.9%	11.0%		43.8%
Post-traumatic stress disorder (57)	10.5%	29.8%	17.5%	47.4%	21.1%		12.3%

Mental health related absence

31.5% of respondents have taken time off work because of a mental health condition. That number might even seem a little bit low, given the prevalence of mental health conditions amongst employees. However when you take into account the amount of time taken off, the impact becomes clear. **43.5% of people who have taken time off of work for their mental health have taken over 10 days off.**

Younger employees take more time off; nearly 40% of 18-24 year olds have taken time off for a mental health condition compared with just 16% of those over the age of 65. Females were also more likely to take time off than males (33.7% vs 29.4%) as well as take more time off work with around half of those who said they have taken time off (50.9%) taking more than 10 days compared with just 35.1% of men who said they have taken time off. Those who worked at large companies were also more likely to take more than 10 days off (57.4%) compared with 34% at small and medium sized companies.

A total of 15.8 million working days were lost last year due to mental health conditions[6].

It's clear that poor mental health doesn't just affect the individual; it's bad for business too.

6 Office for National Statistics, 'Sickness absence in the UK labor market', 2016

How many days have you taken off work?

2.9% 1 day

35.6% 2-5 days

43.5% 10+ days

18.1% 6-10 days
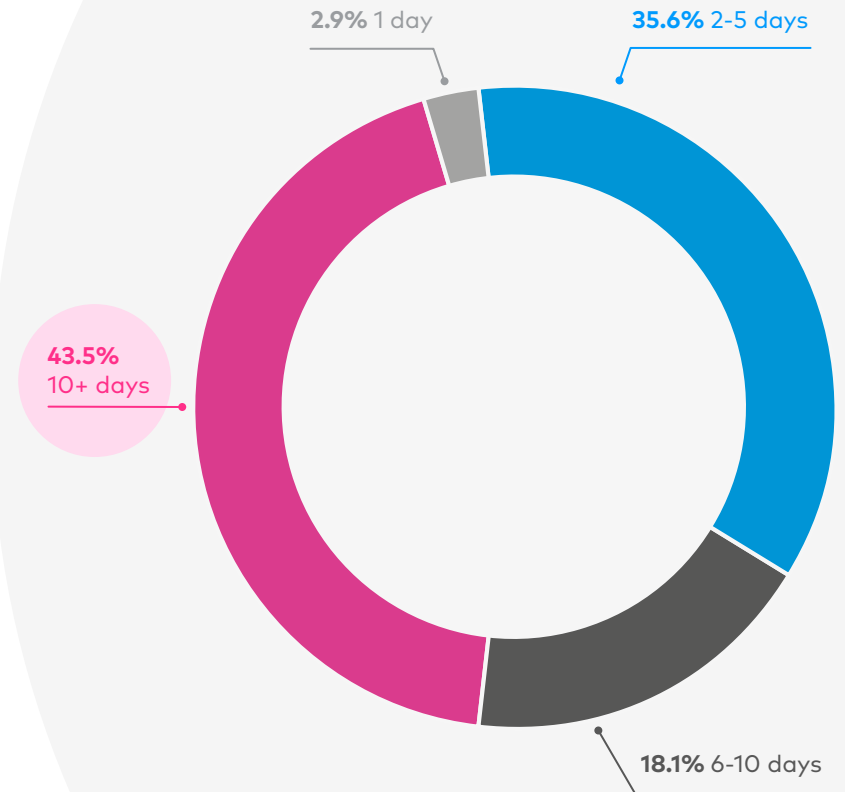
Causes of poor mental health

Why have 70% of employees suffered from a condition related to mental health? Employees cited increased workload (38.2%), financial concerns (17.9%) and workplace bullying (9.5%) as the top three causes of mental health issues in the workplace. Our interviews with employees revealed that many businesses place too much pressure on delivering to objectives at the expense of employee wellbeing.

« The workload is the biggest source of stress; there are never enough staff and there is too much to do. »

« They try to get as much out of you as possible, for the least cost. »

« This organisation does not reflect on what they can do to help people, they just want to deliver the business goals. »

In your opinion, what is the main cause of mental health issues in the workplace?

- **6.8%** Job insecurity
- **3.7%** Other (please specify)
- **7.3%** Workplace culture
- **3.7%** Managing clients or customers
- **38.2%** Increased work load
- **9.5%** Workplace bullying
- **4.2%** Managing people
- **8.7%** Hitting deadlines
- **17.9%** Financial concerns
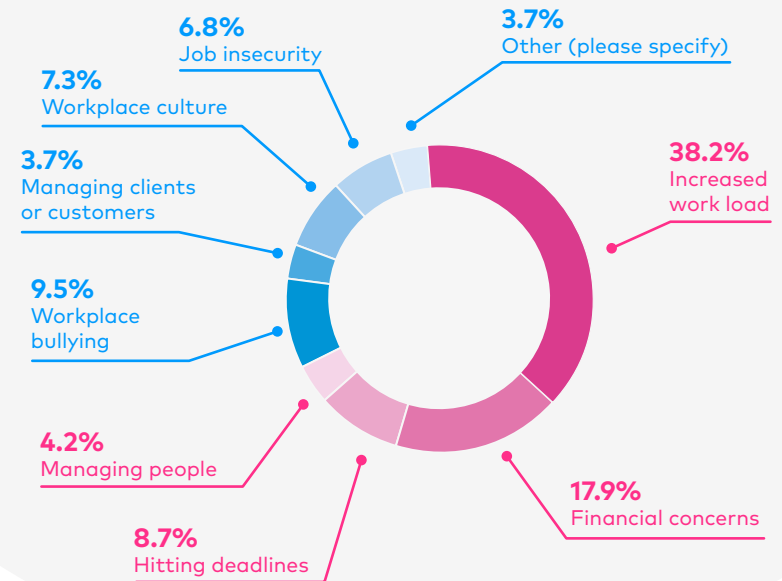
It is common knowledge that high stress can take its toll on mental health and indeed over half of those surveyed (55.3%) said their job has become more stressful in the last five years. Given the prevalence of mental health conditions and increase in stress, it is unsurprising that 61.3% of employees said achieving a good work-life balance is more difficult now than five years ago.

And this, according to the Mental Health Foundation, is bad news: "The pressure of an increasingly demanding work culture in the UK is perhaps the biggest and most pressing challenge to the mental health of the general population[7]."

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[7] Mental Health Foundation, 'Work-life balance', 2017

Part 01

Key findings

Stress
is the most common mental health condition reported by employees

70%
of employees have suffered from a condition associated with mental health

61.3%
believe that achieving the right work/life balance has become more difficult over the last 5 years

38.2%
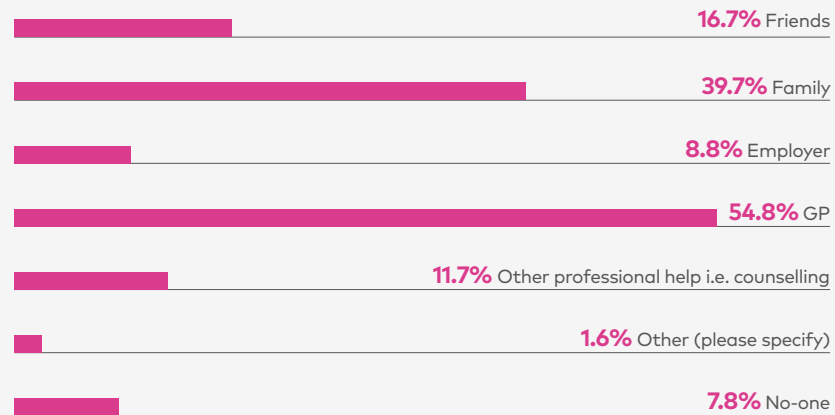say that increased workload is the main cause of stress in the workplace

Part 02

Employees' views on dealing with mental health issues

Despite a large proportion of employees suffering from mental health conditions, it is rarely talked about in the workplace. Mental health seems to remain shrouded in secrecy and shame, despite the best efforts of mental health charities and campaigners to achieve the opposite. It seems clear that in order to remove the layers of guilt and embarrassment many employees feel, employers need to open up the dialogue and encourage open communication about mental health. Because while most employees currently wouldn't talk to their bosses about their wellbeing, over half said they would appreciate help and support from their employer.

If you were to suffer from a mental health condition, who do you think you would confide in or ask for help?

16.7% Friends

39.7% Family

8.8% Employer

54.8% GP

11.7% Other professional help i.e. counselling

1.6% Other (please specify)

7.8% No-one

Who do employees confide in?

Only 8.8% of employees would confide in their employers if they were suffering from a mental health condition. Most would rather contact their GP (54.8%), followed by family (39.7%), friends (16.7%) and other professional help such as counselling (11.7%). When asked who they would be most likely to turn to in the workplace, over 1 in 3 (35.2%) still insisted 'no-one at work'. However 34.1% would speak with their line manager, followed by a colleague (18.8%) and then HR (11.9%), which shows that where training is concerned, direct managers ought to be prioritised.

Sadly **7.8% of employees wouldn't confide in anyone** – inside or outside of the workplace – and instead **deal with the problem alone.**

Providing the right type of support

18-24 year olds were the most likely group to speak with their employer (13.9%) and also to tell no-one (11.9%), suggesting quite a broad spectrum of attitudes towards mental health within that age group. Likewise, males were slightly more likely to confide in their employers (10.5% vs 7.1%); however, as the low numbers demonstrate, it's not a popular option for either gender. Females were much more likely to confide in a colleague (22%) compared to males (15.7%), and they were also more likely not to tell anyone (8.9%) than males (6.7%).

Encouragingly, when employees were asked what they would do if a colleague was showing signs of a problem almost 7 in 10 (68.9%) said they would speak to them directly to offer support. Males were more likely to ignore their colleagues (5.4%) compared with females (3.4%).

During our interviews with employees it emerged that the main reasons for not talking to their employer were job security and embarrassment.

« A feeling of shame, being embarrassed; it still has a stigma attached to it versus physical issues like a broken leg or a bad back. »

If you were experiencing a mental health issue, who would you most likely turn to in the workplace?

11.9% HR

34.1% Line manager

18.8% Colleague

35.2% No-one
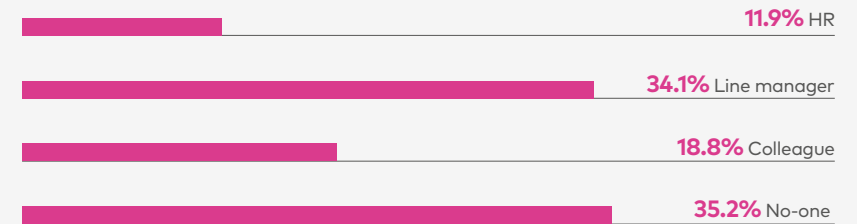
« People don't want to give away weaknesses to colleagues, especially in a high performing team. »

« The employer would single them out, and say 'I don't need people like you in my organisation' and find a way to get you out. »

« You might be seen as inferior, and not up to the job. »

« People don't want others knowing their personal business; they want to keep professional and private lives separate. »

For this to change, employers must work on creating an open and supportive culture that encourages people to talk about their mental health, rather than hide their concerns away. It's understandable that employers are not the first port of call when it comes to getting help for mental health, but employers do need to understand the role they play. It's important that employers take on a supportive role, given that many employees' mental health issues, such as stress, are caused or intensified by work.

But just how do they start? Well, when it comes to what sort of help employees themselves would expect or like from their employer, an offer of help and support was the overwhelming preference (51.8%) followed by simply listening (20.8%). Other strategies such as offering time off (16.7%) and reviewing workload (8.7%) were also stated by some employees.

If you were experiencing or have experienced a mental health issue, what would you expect or like your employer to do?
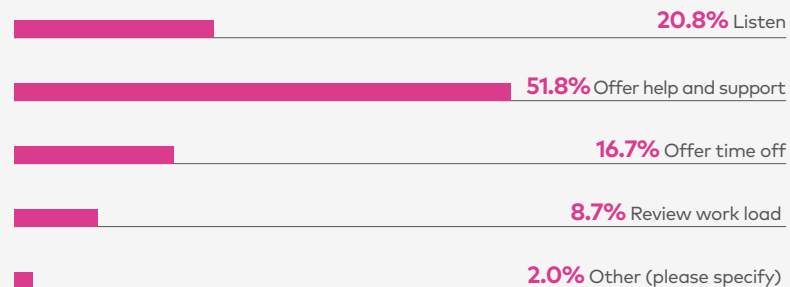
20.8% Listen

51.8% Offer help and support

16.7% Offer time off

8.7% Review work load

2.0% Other (please specify)

Employers must work on creating an open and supportive culture that encourages people to talk about their mental health.

One way employers could help is by offering an Employee Assistance Programme, most of which may include a 24/7 healthcare advice line. This is an effective way to offer help to those reluctant to talk in person, as they'll be able to speak with a professional via the phone at any time of day or night and get impartial support and guidance in confidence when they need it. These kind of medical helplines are available with both Benenden Health's business healthcare and cash plan products.

« Guide me to the right treatments, help me find the support I need. »

« I would want them to understand the challenges I am facing and support me with any treatment I needed. »

« Work out what I needed on an ongoing basis, not just as a one-off fix. »

Part 02

Key findings

Most people (54.8%) would contact their GP if they experienced a mental health problem

Only 8.8% of employees would confide in their employers if they were suffering from a mental health condition

7.8% of employees wouldn't ask for help from anyone

An offer of help and support is the most favoured form of assistance from employers by employees
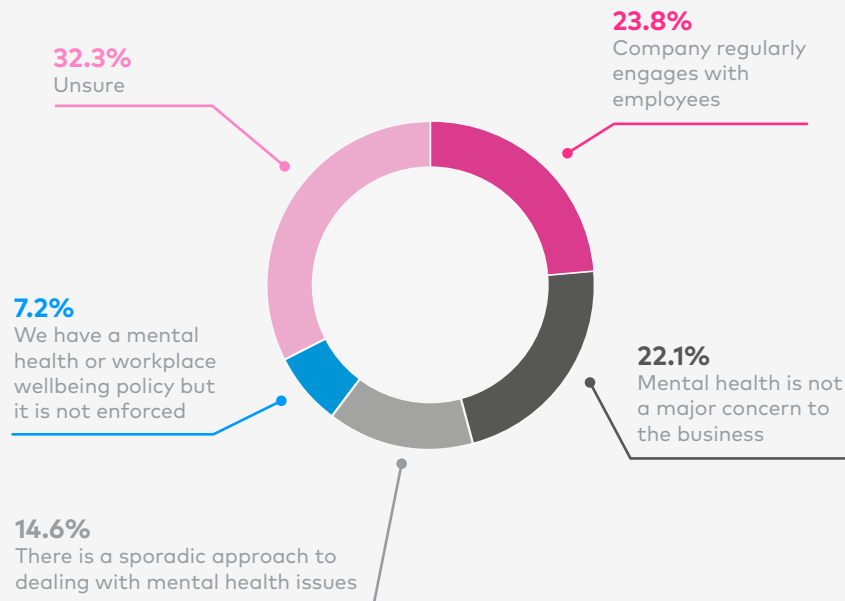
Part 03

Mental health support in the workplace

Currently, there seems to be an atmosphere of confusion around mental health in the workplace. Employees often don't have – or don't know of – any official policies and instead face an unhelpful tick box approach to mental health. Fortunately this research uncovered some clear and actionable steps you could take to start making a difference to the wellbeing of your employees.

Do you think your employer operates a 'tick-box' culture when it comes to mental health (for example, does the company only show concern for mental health to look good and follow suit with other businesses, or does it genuinely care about employees)?

32.3%
Unsure

23.8%
Company regularly engages with employees

7.2%
We have a mental health or workplace wellbeing policy but it is not enforced

22.1%
Mental health is not a major concern to the business

14.6%
There is a sporadic approach to dealing with mental health issues

The presence of a tick box culture

Over half of those surveyed either don't have an official mental health policy (27.9%) at their workplace or don't know if they have one (26.1%). While males and females benefit in equal numbers from such a policy, males are more likely to know about it. Only 22.8% of males aren't sure if their company offers a mental health policy compared with 29.4% of females. It seems the younger the employee, the more likely they are to know they benefit from an official mental health policy. Over half of 18-24 year olds (58.4%) and 25-34 year olds (58.3%) compared with 32% of employees over the age of 55 benefit from an official mental health or workplace wellbeing policy.

Less than a **quarter of employees (23.8%)** said their company regularly engages with them on issues of mental health.

While more than 1 in 5 employees (22.1%) said that mental health is not a major concern to their employers, 14.6% said there is a sporadic approach to dealing with mental health issues. For 7.2% of employees, while their workplace might officially have a mental health policy, it isn't enforced.

The size of the business also influences how mental health is handled within the workplace. Of the employees surveyed, those who work at small businesses are less likely to recall there being a mental health policy in place (28.6%) than medium business (46.3%) and large businesses (54.8%). In addition, almost 1 in 3 employees of small business (29.4%) and medium businesses (28.9%) feel mental health is not a major concern to their employers, compared with just 14.5% of employees at large businesses.

Overall the lack of clarity on how employers handle mental health indicates the emergence of a tick box culture. This means that employees won't actually have access to the support they need, even though many employers feel like they have ticked that box.

« It is just a case of ticking boxes and following protocol, no concern or care; there is no 'let's sit down and have a coffee' »

« Ours is tick-box, definitely, and I think that's not just here but everywhere. »

Does your current employer have an official mental health or workplace wellbeing policy?

27.9% No

46% Yes

26.1% Don't know
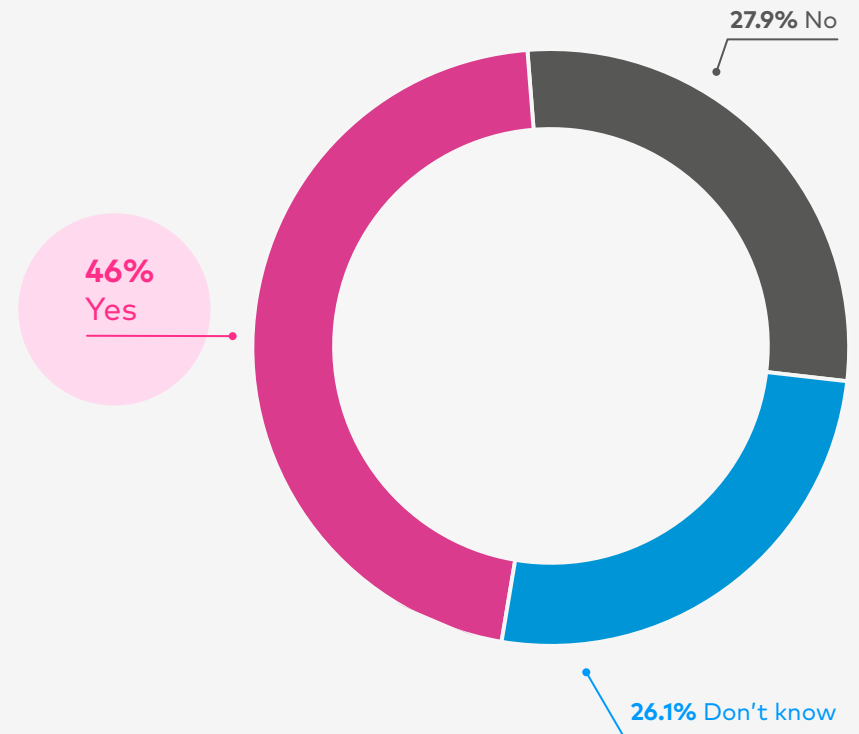
What employees really want

For many employees, how their employer approaches mental health is very important. Nearly half (45.6%) of those surveyed said they would look for alternative employment if their employer didn't provide support for a mental health condition. It's particularly important with younger employees. Over half of 18-24 year olds (50.5%) and 25-34 year olds (57.4%) would leave, compared with just 25.8% of employees over the age of 65. This would indicate that attitudes towards mental health, and consequently expectations of employees, are shifting with the next generation. Businesses looking to continue recruiting should make changes to ensure they have a health and wellbeing strategy in place so as not to deter young people.

Fortunately, there are some clear steps employers could take which employees would find genuinely helpful. Almost seven out of 10 employees (69.1%) would use a confidential mental health helpline provided by their employer if they were experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition.

> « A helpline does send out the right signals that the business cares. »

> « If I needed it I would, especially if it was confidential. »

> « One person I know used it for a bereavement situation; they had counselling as a result; the response was fast, and it helped a lot. »

If you felt your employer didn't provide support in relation to mental health conditions, would you look for alternative employment?

45.6% Yes

54.4% No
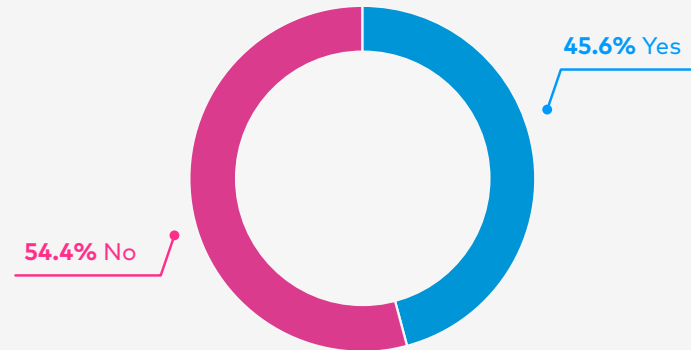
A further eight out of 10 employees (83.2%) think it would be helpful if all businesses provided mental health awareness training to line managers. Many of the employees we interviewed thought that training in mental health issues is important for anyone in charge of a team.

> « It would be good if employers could be trained to spot signs early, and anticipate things which could prevent a situation getting worse. »

> « It should be mandatory. In extreme cases, it can be a matter of life or death. It's a valuable life skill, as well as a business responsibility. »
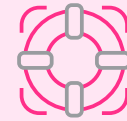
Part 03

Key findings

45.6%
would look for alternative employment if they felt their employer didn't provide support in relation to mental health conditions problem

Less than half of employers
offer any form of mental health support that their employees are aware of

23.8%
of employees are regularly engaged about mental health at work by their employers

1 in 5 employees (22.1%)
said that mental health is not a major concern to their employers

Nearly 7 in 10
would use a confidential mental health helpline

Benenden Health's view

Our research shows we have a long way to go towards improving the wellbeing of the UK workforce. This is a new area of concern for many businesses and understandably many are confused and unsure where to begin. We have developed a simple blueprint for business to adopt, which follows a simple 'before, during and after' approach to mental health in the workplace.

Before

Create a culture of openness: Given that job security and embarrassment are holding employees back from speaking up about their mental health, creating a culture of openness needs to be the first priority. Our findings show if they are suffering from a mental health condition, less than one in 10 employees would confide in their employer about a mental health condition. In response to this, businesses should make it clear to staff that their mental health is important and nothing to be ashamed of. Managers should communicate that discussing mental health will lead to support and not discrimination. This could be achieved through normalising conversation around mental health in the workplace and actively encouraging discussion.

Prioritise work-life balance: We discovered that over half of employees find both their job more stressful and a work-life balance harder to achieve now compared to five years ago. Employers should make it clear that balance matters and that wellbeing is just as important as productivity. While this will be tailored to the individual, general strategies such as discounted gym memberships and flexible start and finish times are likely to be universally popular.

Create a mental health policy: It's not good enough that almost half (46%) either don't believe their employer has a mental health policy in place or they have one but nobody knows about it. If you don't have a policy, work with a mental health professional to develop one and then, crucially, share and promote it with your employees.

Provide training: A culture shift as important as this needs to be underpinned with robust training so that managers feel confident in matters of mental health. Our research found that, if they were to experience a mental health issue, most employees (34.1%) would likely turn to their line manager rather than a colleague or HR, so it may be wise to target them with training first. Things like mindfulness sessions and exercise can also really help employees' better cope with the stresses life and work can bring.

Offer professional help: Access to a confidential 24/7 mental health helpline can be used to help aid communication and to help prevent general life and work issues building up into something much more serious. Benenden Health's Psychological Wellbeing Helpline is 100% confidential and is staffed by trained professionals who can help with a wide range of mental health issues.

During

Adapt as necessary: Your mental health policy should include straightforward guidelines on workplace adjustments that are available for staff struggling with their mental health. This is particularly important considering some employees would expect or like their employer to offer time off (16.7%) or have their workload reviewed (8.7%) .

Allow time off: Given that most employees (43.5%) who have taken time off work because of a mental health condition have taken more than 10 days, helpful support is being allowed some time away from work. A short period of leave could really benefit an employee experiencing a condition such as situational depression brought on by an event such as a death or divorce.

Be flexible: Another useful solution is to be flexible with regards to timings while an employee is dealing with a mental health condition. This could translate to time off for appointments relating to their mental health, remote working options or having regular breaks throughout the working day.

Provide extra support: While having general guidelines available in your policy is vital, often adaptations will need to be individual. You will need to have a meaningful discussion with your employee and find out what their needs are during this time. This could result in the need for more positive feedback, increased support from their manager or setting up a buddy system.

Offer professional help: While workplace adjustments are certainly beneficial, access to a confidential 24/7 mental health helpline which seven out of 10 employees said they would use if they experienced any mental health symptoms. The anonymity of these help lines is particularly important considering employees apparent fear of talking to their employers about their issues. Our Healthcare for Business also offers a psychological wellbeing service which can provide structured and positive support whilst an employee waits for their NHS appointment.

After

Phased return: As your employee recovers from their mental health condition, you will need to help them ease back into work. This could involve reducing their original hours and gradually building them back up, or perhaps working closely with their line manager for the first month and gradually taking on more responsibility as they both see fit.

Develop an action plan: Part of your employees return to work should also involve developing an action plan which proactively manages their mental health. It could cover things like spotting early symptoms, their required support and helpful steps for both employee and employer.

Continually prioritise mental health: Mental health, like physical health, requires continual tending too. Just like you wouldn't cease an exercise programme once you achieved a healthy BMI, you shouldn't stop focusing on mental health once your employee feels mentally better. You can continue to emphasise the importance of wellbeing by scheduling weekly one-to-one meetings, continuing mental health training and putting on relevant events such as meditation workshops.

Offer professional help: Help foster good mental health hygiene by continuing to offer employees access to resources that can help them manage their mental health. At Benenden Health, we make it as easy as possible for our members to access our [Psychological Wellbeing Helpline.](#) They can call us in confidence and for free from anywhere in the world to provide immediate guidance and reassurance.

Final word

Seven in 10 employees have suffered from a condition associated with mental health, yet just one in 10 are willing to confide in their employer about it. For all the recent national talk about mental health, it seems it often remains a taboo topic in the workplace.

For most people, their GP would be their first port of call if they experienced a mental health problem. While that should remain the case, employers can certainly do more to support their staff within the workplace. Fortunately, as outlined, our research revealed some practical first steps employers can take towards a happier, healthier workforce.

Who is Benenden Health?

Benenden Health is a mutual, not-for-profit healthcare provider run for the benefit of over 800,000 members. We have over 110 years' experience of supporting employees and our aim is to help any business that wants to support the wellbeing of their employees.
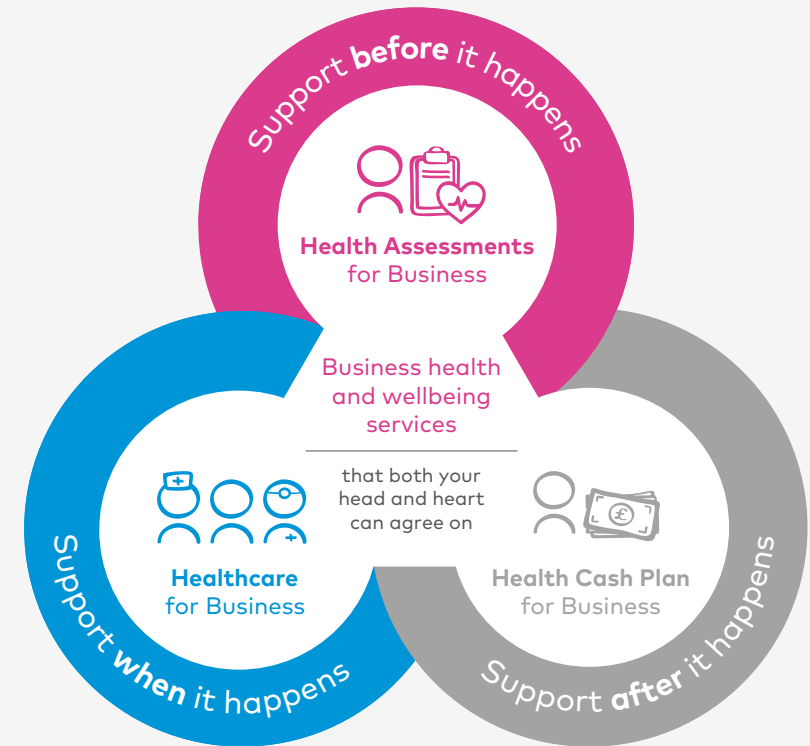
Our range of services can support employees before, during and after employee health issues occur.

We believe healthcare for employees is part of a culture of wellbeing, not just a tick in the box, which is why all businesses we work with are provided with a dedicated account manager to provide ongoing support to make sure you and your employees are getting the most from our services.

These are just some of the reasons why our customers voted us Winner of Moneywise **Most Trusted Health Insurance Provider** via Your Employer Award.

moneywise
CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARDS
2017
MOST TRUSTED
HEALTH INSURANCE PROVIDER VIA EMPLOYER
Benenden

As prevention is better than cure, our health assessments help give your employees a clearer picture of their health and how they can improve it.

Support **before** it happens

Health Assessments for Business

Business health and wellbeing services

that both your head and heart can agree on

Healthcare for Business

Health Cash Plan for Business

Support **when** it happens

Support **after** it happens

Our private healthcare offered on a discretionary basis could help provide expert support for employees when it really matters.

Some services are available after six months. Limits and exclusions apply.

Help employees' salaries go further with money back on everyday healthcare costs.

Limits and exclusions apply.

Want to know more?

Speak to our friendly team of dedicated account managers today if you would like to find out more about our health and wellbeing services and understand how we could help to support the psychological wellbeing of your employees.

📱 **0808 252 0628***

✉ **salessupport@ benenden.co.uk**

🖱 **www.benenden.co.uk/mhr**