

# Time To Act: Mental Health in Early Careers

Research and Recommendations Report for Business



City Mental Health Alliance

In partnership with



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# 1 Forewords



**Farimah Darbyshire**  
Head of Programmes,  
CMHA

Almost three-quarters (72%\*) of people in early careers have experienced poor mental health in the past year, according to our research. One in six (17%) have had suicidal thoughts. One in 50 (2%) attempted suicide. This is devastating.

We have gathered these insights at an extraordinary moment in history. The pandemic has affected us all. But they have created specific challenges for young people, which are layered on top of an already high reported incidence of poor mental health. This mental health crisis revealed by this report did not just emerge in the last year. It builds on pre-pandemic findings that point to a persistent and growing challenge. It is for all of society to respond.

Business, a key pillar of society, has a responsibility and an opportunity to play a significant role in protecting, supporting and creating positive mental health for young professionals. It is the right thing to do and, given the impact on productivity revealed by this report, it is business-critical. The good news is the research points to a path forward. It tells us what this generation want from employers so that they can be healthy, thrive and fulfil their career potential. And it's encouraging to see many businesses already focusing on this. Using what we've learnt from this data, and our work with businesses and experts, the CMHA is sharing recommendations for how to create mentally healthy workplaces for those in early careers. We hope these will support businesses to build on the progress we are already seeing.

Looking ahead, these young people are the managers and leaders of the future. If they experience a supportive culture from the start, they will not only thrive today, but good practice will become embedded in the organisation. We are grateful to Bupa for its vision and collaboration in launching this report. The case is clear. We must act.



**Alex Perry**  
CEO, Bupa UK Insurance

It's hard to overstate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic over the last 18 months. Almost everyone, everywhere has had to adapt and evolve in the face of the crisis, whilst working against a backdrop of major economic uncertainty. This uncertainty, combined with each's person's personal experience of living through a global pandemic, has taken its toll on the mental health of the workforce, especially those at the early stages of their career.

This report shows that the long-term mental health repercussions of the pandemic are still to be determined. Whilst the pandemic has changed the way we work and live forever, it has also prompted the opportunity for a reset. For many organisations, the importance of keeping hold of their talent and preventing

attrition has never been greater, which in turn means supporting their people with their resilience, and mental health and wellbeing. At Bupa, we have long championed the importance of mental health both in and out of the workplace. This is one of the reasons why we have partnered with the City Mental Health Alliance on this important report.

We know that early diagnosis and treatment of mental health conditions leads to better outcomes. We strongly believe that businesses have key a role to play in supporting their people – and in turn are rewarded by increased talent attraction, loyalty and productivity. What's more, we hope that by supporting the next cohort of leaders, we are encouraging cultural change around mental health at work and setting up future generations for success. Guided by this report and recommendations, we hope that businesses are inspired to leverage the positive impact of the pandemic as an opportunity for both recovery, and a renewed focus on mental health. Businesses that take this once-in-a-generation opportunity for change, by investing in the mental health of their people, will undoubtedly reap long-term rewards in the future.

## 2

# Research methodology

All figures in this report, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size for the survey was 1,014 adults aged 20 – 26 years old.

Fieldwork was undertaken between 30th July - 23rd August 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted by age, region and ethnicity. We surveyed people working in traditional office environments, often referred to as 'desk jobs', though many respondents would have worked remotely throughout the pandemic. This included respondents from a range of different industries, with a particular focus on professional services, legal, financial, banking and technology, but also including media, marketing and healthcare amongst others. All respondents had worked in an office-based environment for no longer than 4 years. The sample also included a spread of responses across organisation size.

The quantitative YouGov research was supplemented by qualitative research and in person insights, which was gathered via focus groups that were facilitated by a workplace mental health expert. The 15 focus group attendees, who are all in the first four years of their career, worked in jobs that are traditionally office based, but which were mainly remote during the pandemic. They work in a wide range of industries including financial services, legal, public sector and charity.



## 3

# Executive Summary

This research – commissioned by the City Mental Health Alliance (CMHA) in partnership with Bupa – reveals the state of the mental health amongst young professionals in the first four years of their career. It focuses on the impact that experiences at work can have on their mental health, as well as external factors such as the global pandemic and societal issues. It also points to what action young people would like businesses to take to support their mental health.

## Key Findings

- **There is a high incidence of poor mental health.** 72% of respondents say they have experienced poor mental health in the last 12 months, with 45% reporting experiencing consistent low mood, 24% panic attacks and 11% an eating disorder. 17% have had suicidal thoughts and one in 50 has attempted suicide.
- **Poor mental health is having an impact on business.** 20% took sick leave due to poor mental health in the last year, and a further 8% used annual leave as cover for when they felt mentally unwell. 61% said poor mental health has impacted their ability to do their job “well” and concentrate at work.

- **Work is a significant contributing factor.** 45% say that the pressure to work consistently long hours has negatively impacted their mental health, and 60% said that they have experienced burnout because of work at some point in their career.
- **COVID-19 and lockdowns put a strain on many.** 69% said they experienced loneliness. 62% said additional stress on relationships with their family or partner negatively impacted mental health, while 38% said the same about personal finance concerns.
- **There is a clear expectation of and desire for employers to help support mental health.** Nine in 10 young professionals say that employers have a responsibility to support the positive mental health and wellbeing of their people. 47% said that one of the most “important things” they would look for in a future employer is whether it would prioritise mental health.
- **Mental health stigma at work is high.** Only 27% say that they feel comfortable seeking support through work if they were struggling, while 43% said that trying to conceal poor mental health from their employer had a negative impact on mental health.

- **Many employers are already playing a role in supporting positive mental health.** 49% said their employer had supported their mental health over the past twelve months during the pandemic through, for example, wellbeing check ins, mental health training and private mental health insurance. 74% also said the sense of purpose and achievement from work has a positive impact on mental health.
- **Respondents point to action businesses could take to support their positive mental health.** Over half of respondents (55%) said that employers could encourage “rest and recovery” breaks between busy times at work. Nearly half (47%) would also like reassurance that accessing mental health support through work would not impact their career.
- **Line managers play a critical role in wellbeing support.** 79% said that having a supportive and approachable line manager would have a positive impact on their mental health.
- **Young people feel a responsibility to support others.** 84% of respondents think it is important to develop mental health awareness skills at work so that they can support a colleague in need.



## Conclusions and Recommendations

Three things are clear. Firstly, people in their early careers are facing a mental health crisis, with a complex mix of factors contributing to this. Secondly, businesses have a significant influence on their employees' mental health. They can be a positive force, or they can exacerbate the problem by allowing mental health stigma and unhealthy working practices to go unchecked. Thirdly, young professionals are looking for employers that support their mental health. Our goal in sharing this report is to help businesses meet the expectations of young professionals, and be a positive force in mental health and wellbeing, so that both people and business can thrive. The CMHA is calling on all businesses to focus on three recommended areas of action. These recommendations are informed by our research, businesses and workplace mental health experts. They are designed to be high level so that they can be applied to most organisations. Section 5 of this report provides more detail.

### 1 Creating a culture of wellbeing and psychological safety

This is about challenging and eradicating mental health stigma. It is about creating a culture in which it's clear that, and genuinely feels like, employee wellbeing is a business priority – from the boardroom, permeating down to every level. This is a culture in which people feel safe to talk about mental health and ask for support when they need it, as well as feel confident that it will not damage their career. Early careers line managers have an important role to play here. This focus on wellbeing will need to be aligned with Diversity and Inclusion teams to ensure that the wellbeing needs of diverse groups are understood and addressed appropriately.

### 2 Ensure the work environment and job design is supportive of mental health

Work can provide many benefits which we know support wellbeing, such as social connection, financial security, sense of purpose and opportunities to learn. However, there are work experiences that have a negative impact, including ineffective project and/or job design, prolonged and excessive workload, poor relationships with managers, lack of control and autonomy, plus the physical office environment. These are all factors that must be taken into account when considering the mental health and wellbeing of individuals, teams and the wider organisation.

### 3 Provide and signpost to accessible resources, tools and support

Employers can play a key role by offering their people support and initiatives that promote wellness. This should include early intervention and recovery support. When workplaces offer this support, it not only makes it easier for their people to access help as soon as they need it, it also normalises it. When it comes to people in early careers, it is important that the services are accessible, are representative, and meet the needs of diverse groups. Leaders and line managers have an important role to play in advocating support services and encouraging people to use them if they need to.



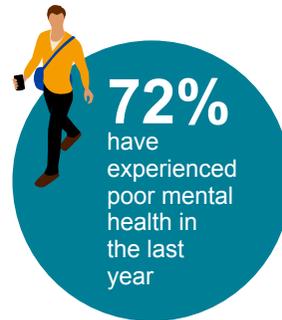
# 4 The Research



## The state of mental health of young professionals

**There is a mental health crisis for this generation and it may be affecting their ability to fulfil their potential at work.**

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of respondents said they had experienced poor mental health in the last 12 months. This builds on previous data<sup>1</sup> and research conducted before the pandemic, which suggests an enduring problem.

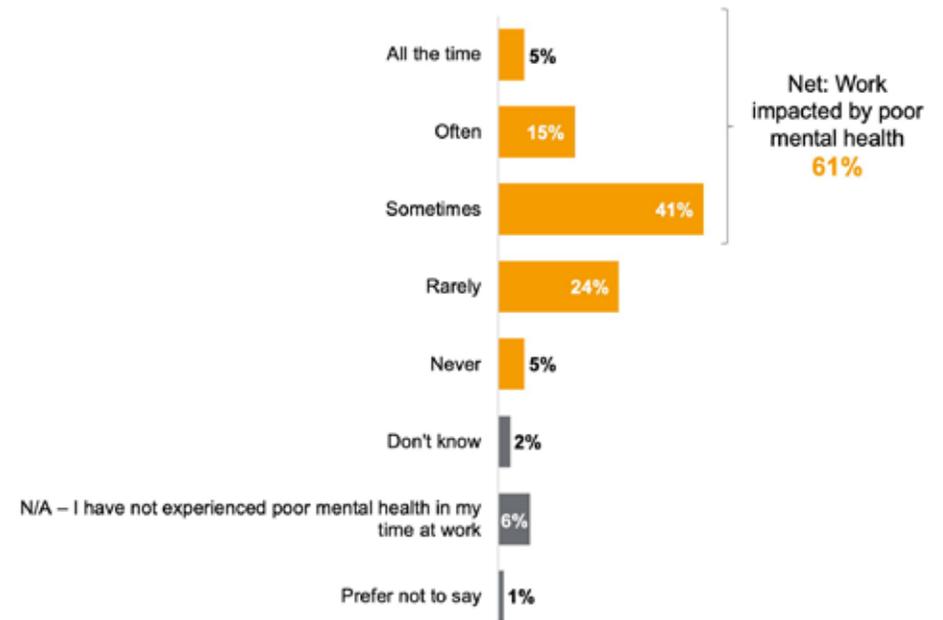


This is having a significant impact on their working lives. Nearly two thirds (61%) of young professionals said that poor mental health impacts their ability to do their job well - one in five (20%) said this “all the time or often” and further 41% said “sometimes”. Nearly half reported they have taken leave (28%) or needed to take leave (17%) in the past year due to poor mental health.

Some of the most common experiences of poor mental health issues reported were: consistent low mood (45%); severe stress (34%); and panic attacks (24%). Very worryingly, 17% of respondents reported having had suicidal thoughts in the past year, while one in 50 (2%) said they had attempted suicide. As one attendee in a focus group reflected, “A large graduate intake is around 50 people. It’s terrifying to think that one of them may have attempted suicide.”

Nearly a third (32%) of these young professionals have had an official diagnosis of a mental health condition, such as an eating disorder or depression, at some point in their life.

### Impact of poor mental health on the ability to do your job



How often, if at all, does your own poor mental health (e.g. being anxious or stressed) impact your ability to do your job well and concentrate at work?

1. *What are early career job seekers thinking?* (citymha.org.uk), *Making it work* (citymha.org.uk), *Poor mental health costs UK employers up to £45 billion a year* | Deloitte UK

## Contributing factors to poor mental health

Our research shows that causality of poor mental health in young professionals is a layered and complex picture. Respondents reported a mix of pressures at work, societal factors and pandemic effects having a negative impact.

### Work and line management

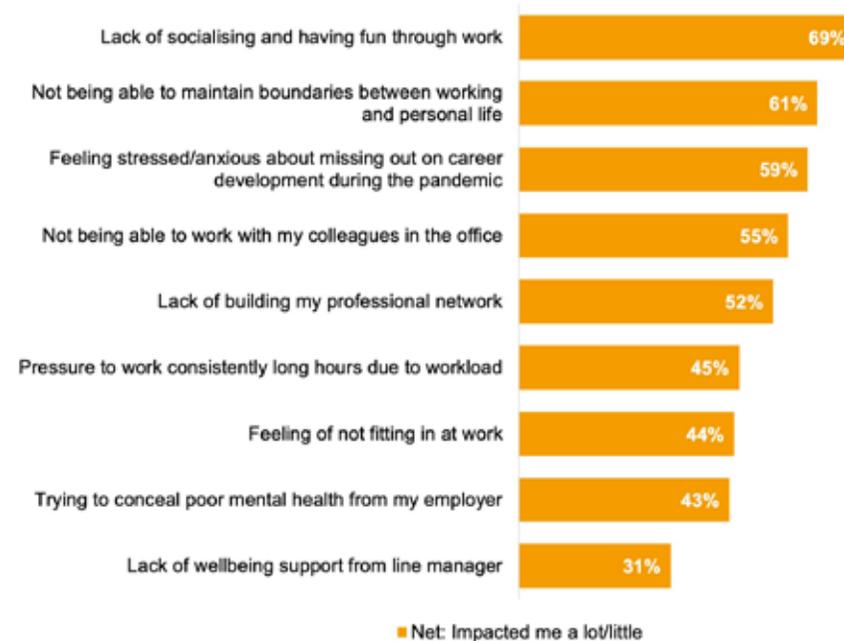
Work is a significant and often positive contributor to mental wellbeing; a large majority (74%) of respondents said that the sense of purpose and the community they get through their job benefits their mental health.

However, excessive work strain and a lack of support have the opposite effect and are very commonly experienced. Nearly half (45%) said that pressure to work consistently long hours has had a negative impact on their mental health. Further, a large majority (60%) said they had experienced 'burnout' - a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion - because of excessive and prolonged work stress. 61% said that not being able to maintain boundaries between their work and personal life is taking a toll.

Both the quantitative and qualitative research revealed that the relationship and interactions with line managers is a key factor in supporting a young professional's wellbeing. Nearly a third (31%) said that a lack of wellbeing support from their line manager was a contributing factor to their poor mental health, while almost one in five (18%) said their line manager prioritised delivery of work at the expense of mental health always or often. Eight out of ten (79%) said that having a supportive and approachable line manager would have a positive impact on their mental health.

*"For a lot of the last year, I wake up, log on, finish late, log off, sleep and repeat. I feel like the expectation of my employer and industry is that I frequently should prioritise meeting deadlines over my sleep, which is really important for my wellbeing. Some will say that our salary justifies working like this. But if that's the point of view, the business can't also claim that the mental health of your people is important. It doesn't match up."* – Focus group member.

### Which experiences at work have had a negative impact on mental health?



To what extent, if at all, have any of the following experiences related to work negatively impacted your mental health and wellbeing in the past 12 months (i.e. since August 2020)?

### Unhealthy perfectionism and imposter syndrome

Mental health experts recognise that there is a difference between a healthy approach to striving for excellence, and unhealthy perfectionism, where someone lives in fear of making a mistake. The research reveals how common unhealthy perfectionism is and the impact this is having on young professionals' mental health and their behaviour at work.

44% said that they worry all the time or often about not meeting self-set expectations at work and 53% say they react to small mistakes with a lot of self-criticism. As well as causing stress, unhealthy perfectionism impacts on behaviour at work – 30% say they regularly put off starting work/projects because they are worried they won't do it well. One third of respondents (33%) said that they had worked for longer hours than they need to get something absolutely perfect. Related to unhealthy perfectionism, 40% of respondents experience imposter syndrome – a feeling that they are not good enough – all the time or often, with a further 25% say they experience it sometimes.

***“People with unhealthy perfectionism often have... very high standards but the standards are not realistic, or only attainable with significant negative consequences.”***

– Professor Roz Shafran, University College London

***“When you're constantly hearing from your employer that “We only hire the best, you are the best.”, it makes me doubt myself. Do I belong here? I'm less likely to reach out and ask for help because I feel like I'm exposing myself as not “the best”.”***

– Focus group member

### Covid-19

The pandemic has had clear an impact on working and personal life. More than half (55%) of respondents reported that not being able to work with colleagues in the office affected their mental health. 59% said they were impacted by feelings of missing out on career development, and 52% because of lack of building professional networks, because of the pandemic. This was a key theme that emerged from focus groups, in which young professionals spoke of the difficulty – as a new recruit – of integrating into teams and getting to know colleagues during lockdown. There was a specific concern from those who started work between January 2020 and late Spring 2021 – the 'Covid cohort' – that they are being left behind. This group are anxious that, compared to their peers who started work either just ahead or just after them, they have missed out on face-to-face networking, skills development and career opportunities.

Outside of work, not being able to socialise with friends during lockdowns was cited as a significant contributor to poor mental health, affecting four in five respondents. Further, a large majority (69%) reported their mental health suffered from the loneliness caused by the lockdowns, and our focus groups revealed feelings of loneliness come with feelings of embarrassment or shame. 38% admit that they have heightened concerns about their personal finance, and 62% said that the pandemic put stress on relationships with family or



partners.

***“I think that, as a young person, there is a stigma in admitting that you are lonely. It feels like a reflection on you as a person. To be honest, I think that most people I know would be much more comfortable talking about having anxiety, than being lonely.”***

– Focus group member



*“Covid and associated lockdowns left me feeling very isolated and very low. Unfortunately, it spiralled into me being diagnosed with general anxiety disorder and depression. I’m still living with this anxiety, even as the lockdowns have lifted.”*

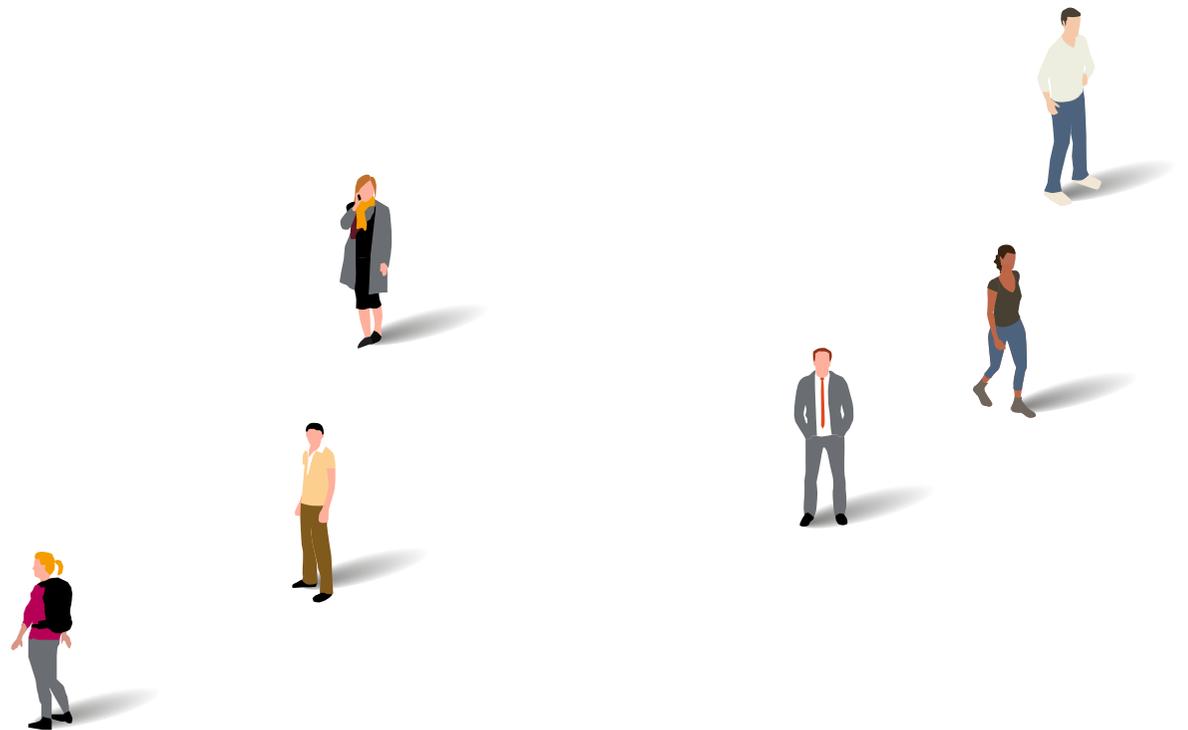
– Focus group member

While the pandemic’s impact on mental health is clear, the research does not point to a simple narrative that it is the main cause of the high reported incidence of poor mental health today. In fact, only 38% said their mental health is worse than it was pre-pandemic; 29% say it is better and 29% say it is the same.

### Societal

A wide range of societal factors have had a negative impact on this group’s mental health in the past year. Contributing factors that have impacted mental health, a lot or a little, include: climate change (59%); concerns about the economy (59%); and long term financial future (53%).

Of Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic respondents, triggering conversations about racism (50%), or experiences of it (48%), had negatively impacted their mental health. Of our female respondents, 45% cited experiences of sexism being a contributor and 15% of all respondents cited experience of homophobia as having negatively impacted their mental health in the last twelve months.



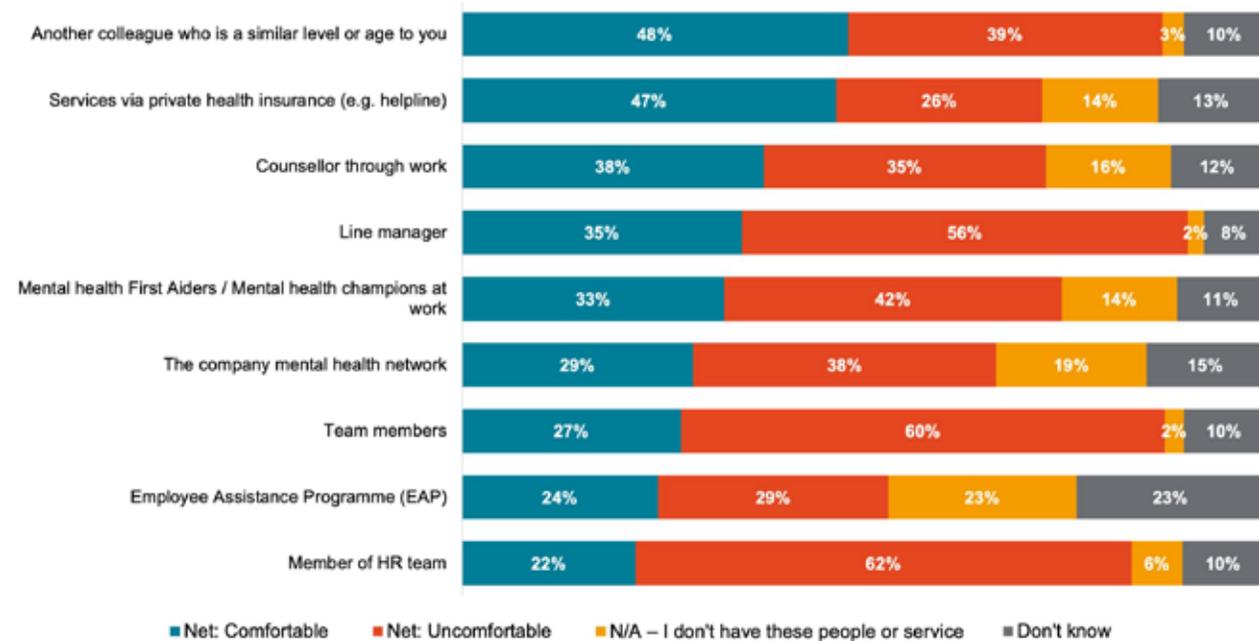
## Mental health stigma is holding people back

Our research showed that only a minority of young professionals currently feel comfortable accessing support at work for poor mental health. Barriers include stigma and fear of repercussions on their career.

Only one in four respondents (27%) said that they would be comfortable using mental health services offered at work if they were struggling with their mental health (e.g. with anxiety or depression). When pushed to consider which interventions or support they would prefer, 22% said they would be comfortable speaking to a member of the HR team, while 33% said that they would be comfortable to talk to their line manager. Avenues of support that are less “formal”, or more separated from the day-to-day, were received better; 48% would be very or quite comfortable talking to a workmate at a similar career stage and 47% would be very or quite comfortable accessing help through private medical insurance.

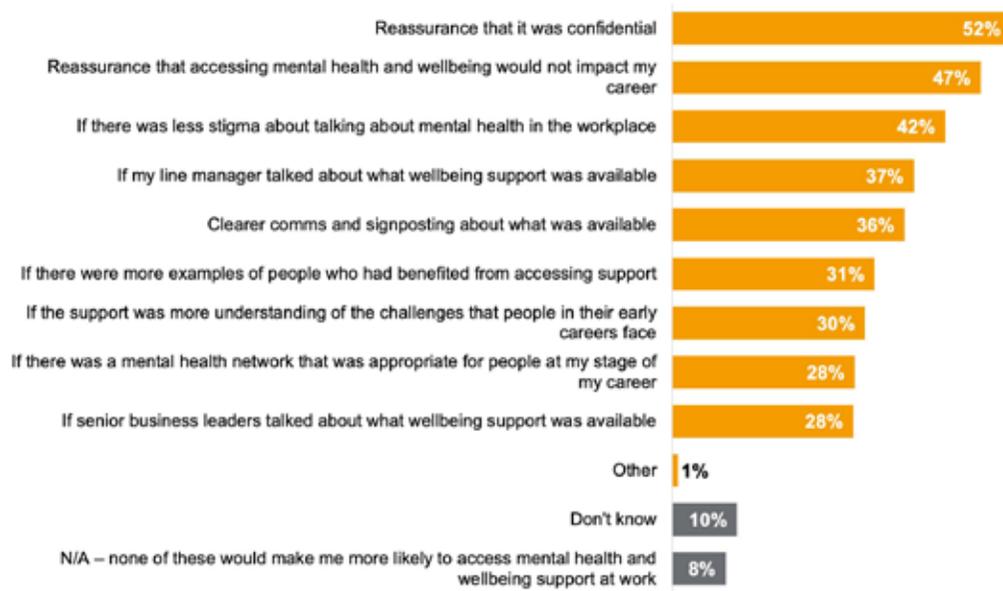
As well as being a barrier to seeking support, stigma is also making mental health worse. 43% said that trying to conceal poor mental health from their employer was having a negative impact on their mental health, thereby compounding the problem.

### Comfort in accessing mental health support through or at work

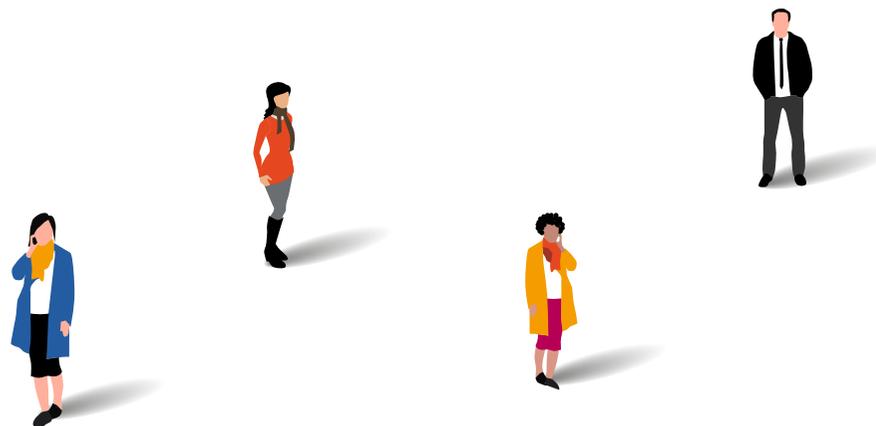


If you were concerned about your mental health (e.g. for anxiety/depression/low mood), how comfortable, or uncomfortable, would you feel speaking to the following support services at work? Even if you have not struggled with your mental health before, please think about how you would feel.

## Employer actions that would encourage access mental health support at work



Which, if any, of the following would make you more likely to access mental health and wellbeing support at work? Please select all that apply. Even if you do not currently need to access mental health and wellbeing support at work, please think about if you did.



## Employers and mental health – what young professionals want

Our research shows that young professionals have a clear expectation that employers – and, in particular, line managers – can play a role in supporting their mental health. And this is an important factor when considering where they want to work.

Nine in ten of our survey population think employers have a responsibility to protect, support and nurture the positive mental health of their people. And, even though stigma is high, 68% think it should be okay for them or other employees to talk openly about mental health at work. This suggests that they are open to having conversations and accessing wellbeing support, if they could get past the stigma barrier.

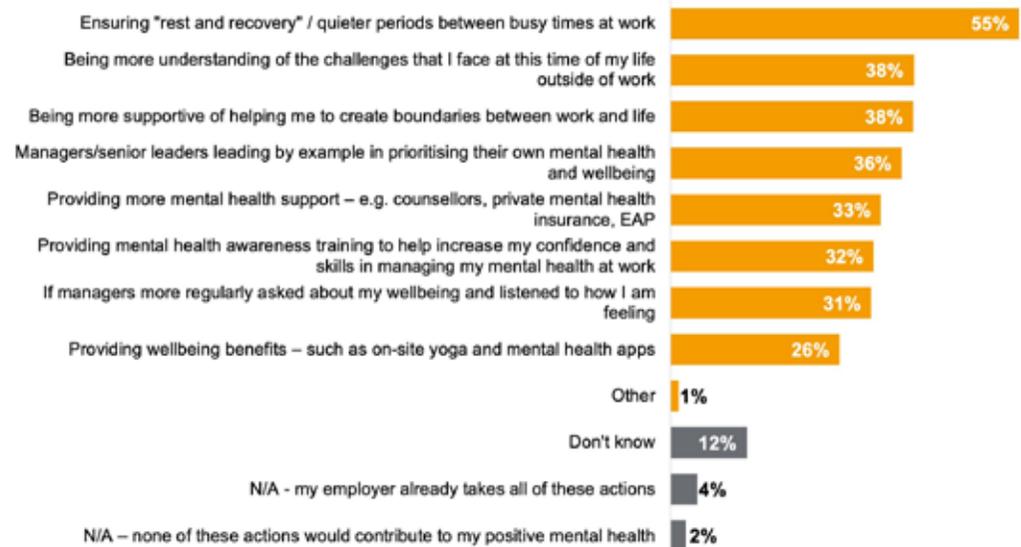
Respondents also see workplace mental health as being their responsibility, with 84% saying it is important to develop mental health awareness skills at work so that they can support a colleague in need.

### Line managers and senior leaders

The influence on young professionals' mental health of the attitude and behaviour of line managers should not be underestimated. Eight in ten respondents (79%) said that having a supportive and approachable line manager has had a positive impact on their mental health. And over one third (37%) said they would be more likely to access mental health and wellbeing support at work if their line manager talked about it. Over a quarter (28%) said the same about senior business leaders.

Leading by example at all levels is important. 36% of respondents said that it would be helpful if managers and senior leaders demonstrated the prioritisation of their own mental health and wellbeing. The importance of 'walking the walk' not just 'talking the talk', was echoed in focus groups.

### What actions would young professionals like employers to take to support their mental health



Which, if any, of the following actions could your employer take to support your positive mental health and wellbeing? Please select all that apply.

*"The organisation I work for talks a lot about mental health. Optically it's there, but culturally it is not quite yet there. Senior leaders have been open about taking time off for stress, which is good to see. However, I think that whether a person at the start of their career will feel comfortable asking for time off for mental health reasons will depend on the line manager and whether they feel that line manager gets it."*

– Focus group member

## Change

When asked the actions their employer could take to support positive mental health, 55% said that having “rest and recovery” periods between busy times at work would support positive mental health and 38% want support in creating boundaries between work and personal life. A third (33%) would like employers to provide more mental health support, such as counsellors, EAP and private mental health insurance. Young professionals also want to develop their own skills, with nearly a third (32%) saying they would like to their employer to provide training to help increase their confidence and skills in managing their mental health. One in four (26%) think that access to wellbeing benefits – such as on-site yoga and mental health apps - would support their mental health.

## New ways of working

A majority of respondents (79%) feel positive about a move towards a hybrid way of working (e.g. people working in a mix between home and the office), but we must bear in mind that remote working presents challenges for young professionals. For instance, developing professional networks, and establishing a boundary between home and work, have already been cited as challenges that the majority of respondents said negatively impacted their mental health in the past year.

## Influencing career choices

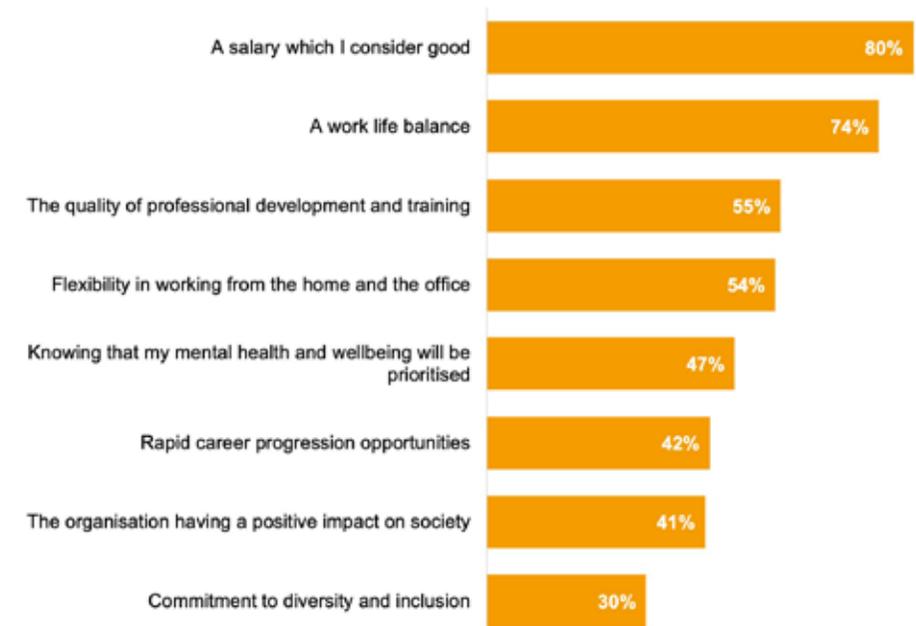
Young people are looking for an employer that will prioritise their mental health. Two-thirds (66%) of respondents said that if an employer supported their mental health, it would make them want to stay at the organisation, and four in ten (42%) said it would make them want to advocate for that organisation as an employer.

Conversely, if an employer did not support positive mental health, the majority of respondents said it would make them work less effectively (59%), feel disengaged (54%) and want to leave the organisation (55%).

*“I am leaving my current role because my workplace didn’t provide the support or understanding I needed over lockdown. I didn’t have clear support, feel appreciated or good management. I am now working for an organisation which made it clear, from interview stage, that they take care of their people.”*

– Focus group member

## What would you look for in a new job?



Which, if any, of the following are the most important to you if you were looking for a new job? Please select all that apply.

When looking for a new job, three-quarters (74%) said that work-life balance was an important consideration, and nearly half (47%) said knowing that mental wellbeing would be prioritised was important.

*“There is a real opportunity. If an employer openly focused on mental health and wellbeing of their people, I am sure there would be competition to join that company. I would definitely be applying.”*

– Focus group member

## Case study

“ I started on the Bank’s graduate programme during lockdown, in a virtual environment. From the minute I first received my job offer, I experienced feelings of insecurity and doubted whether I was good enough for the role. Working from home exacerbated this. As I couldn’t physically see my colleagues, in order to prove myself, I started to say “yes” to every opportunity. I put this pressure I on myself. My workload wasn’t sustainable - I was anxious and only sleeping about 4 – 5 hours a night. I was on my way to burning out, and knew I needed to speak to someone.

The Bank regularly signposts to different types of mental health support and encourages people to seek help when they need it, so I spoke to a counsellor through work, which helped me reflect on my way of working, and the reasons behind it. Through the counsellor, and conversations with other colleagues, I have become better at drawing a line between work and personal life and prioritising my mental health. I am grateful for the support.

– Ali Aswad, Graduate, Bank of England, aged 23

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# 5 Recommendations

This research adds to the evidence that businesses need to build workplaces which protect, support and create positive mental health for their workforce, and that people in their early careers have an urgent need for this to be priority. The CMHA has developed the following recommendations, focused on three areas, to help guide businesses to design effective mental health plans and strategies for the workplace. Firstly, creating a culture of wellbeing and psychological safety. Secondly, ensuring the work environment and job design support and create positive mental health. Thirdly, offering and signposting to appropriate resource.

To help businesses understand how these recommendations can work in practice, we have included a non-exhaustive list of suggested actions and examples of good practice which will particularly help people in early careers. These recommendations have been informed by research, conversations with young professionals, businesses and workplace mental health experts. With these recommendations, we hope to support more businesses to create working environments where people in early careers are more likely to be healthy, be themselves and fulfil their potential.

To find out more about how to introduce a whole organisation approach for developing wellbeing strategies, based on existing good practice in business, please see the CMHA UK's [Thriving At Work Framework](#).



## Recommendation 1

### Create a culture of wellbeing and psychological safety

Creating a culture of wellbeing and psychological safety is about challenging and eradicating mental health stigma. It is about creating a culture in which it is clear that, and genuinely feels like, employee wellbeing is a business priority – from the boardroom and permeating down to every level. This is a culture in which people feel safe to talk about mental health and ask for support when they need it, as well as feel confident that it will not damage or impact their career. This focus on wellbeing should be aligned with Diversity and Inclusion teams to ensure that the wellbeing needs in different or diverse groups (e.g. people who are neurodiverse, from a different ethnicity, etc.) are understood and addressed in the appropriate way, and stigma and discrimination challenged.



#### Suggested ideas and examples for achieving this recommendation

##### Create and communicate a mental health plan/strategy

There should be a clear mental health plan or strategy which can be measured to create a clear path forward on mental health, rather than an ad hoc range of initiatives.

##### Mental health must be a priority for business leaders

Leaders need to ensure that employee mental health and wellbeing is a strategic priority, which is planned for and measured, and an every day focus for their organisation. This includes understanding issues related to workplace mental health, measuring progress and being held accountable for the delivery and resourcing of any mental health strategies / plans.

##### Leaders should role model healthy behaviour

Culture and behaviour is influenced by leadership. Business leaders and managers should role model healthy behaviour, as well as play an active role in advocating for prioritising wellbeing and signposting to support that is available.

##### Normalise conversations about mental health

Managers should frequently initiate talking about wellbeing and mental health and, as far as they feel comfortable, talk about their own mental health and wellbeing. They can open questions such as “How are you managing with hybrid working / settling into the job, etc.?” and take the time to listen.

##### Ensure early careers recruitment supports mental health

Start challenging mental health stigma, talking about mental health support and creating mentally healthy processes at recruitment stage. For advice on how to do this, see the [CMHA Guide to Mentally Healthy Recruitment and Induction](#).

##### Train employees

Offer mental health awareness and skills to everyone. Upskilling the whole organisation is key to driving real culture change, and also sets the expectation that this is a business priority.

**Share stories**

Normalise conversations about mental health and help seeking behaviour by encouraging sharing of people's stories about their experiences of poor mental health and/or recovery. Include perspectives that relate to people at all levels, but especially early stages of career, including both graduates and apprentices.

**Work with D&I teams and align with their strategy**

Consult with inclusion teams and/or networks to ensure mental health plans and related activities are inclusive towards diverse groups, such as people from different ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds, and neurodiverse employees.

**Have a consistent approach for all employees at the start of their career**

The mental health support and training for school leavers, apprentices and graduates should be consistent.

**Normalise workplace adjustments**

Proactively offer and show examples of possible workplace adjustments, for mental health reasons as well as others, to show that the organisation has done it before and is ready to offer support.

**Example from business****PwC's Early Years Wellbeing Curriculum**

PwC recognises that helping their people to stay well, and supporting them when they are unwell, is not only the right thing for the business to do but will bring commercial benefits through sustained high performance. Ensuring the wellbeing of more junior and younger colleagues is of central importance, especially as they make up a significant proportion of PwC's workforce.

To help create culture change, PwC introduced the Early Years Wellbeing Curriculum in 2020. This is a four-year curriculum for all new joiners. The curriculum allows staff to focus firstly on their own wellbeing through sessions based on personal resilience, with most activities accessed through their online learning platform. Their 'Wellbeing in the Workplace' training, created in partnership with The Samaritans, is one example of the online learning provided. As employees move towards management and leadership roles, the curriculum focuses on helping people to consider how they can set the right tone for those around them and reflect on how they can actively contribute to the wellbeing of others.

For those employees who may be struggling, they have access to workplace mental health support such as the Employee Assistance Programme and a network of mental health advocates and Mental Health First Aiders ready to listen and signpost to support.



## Example from business

**Bank of England**

The Bank of England is focused on supporting the positive mental health of its people. As part of this drive, the Bank's Future Talent Team and Wellbeing Team have worked together on a range of initiatives that are specifically designed to support people in their early careers.

Storytelling is a key part of challenging stigma. They launched a new [This is Me](#) video which, importantly, included people who are at the start of their career, as well as more senior colleagues, sharing about their mental health. This aimed to show the universality of mental health challenges and to highlight that it does not need to be a barrier to professional success. It also had a series of blogs from our Future Talent entrants, who shared their experiences with mental health and how they managed it at this early stage of their career.

The Bank develops mental health skills and awareness as part of the induction process, by running mental health and wellbeing sessions for all Early Careers cohorts. Line managers are also helped to support their direct reports and can attend sessions where they learn how to signpost to support and develop skills in talking about mental health. They also worked on upskilling our Future Talent Team who are responsible for the recruitment and development of the cohorts.

The Future Talent Team will regularly ask for suggestions from new entrants about what they would like to see, to ensure the Bank understands what is working and what can be adapted.

## Example from business

**Linklaters offers health and wellbeing session for students**

Linklaters runs a health and wellbeing session for students who are interested in starting a career in commercial law. The objective is to help to challenge mental health stigma, provide helpful advice and support to help students to stay motivated and healthy, and also let people know about the initiatives and available benefits that are in place at Linklaters to support our employees.

The session is hosted by a diversity and wellbeing lead and current trainee solicitor from the firm. The latter can also provide a current and honest perspective of what it's really like in the first year of being a trainee solicitor. All attendees are encouraged to ask questions about anything related to mental health and wellbeing.

Linklaters ran the first mental health and wellbeing session in 2020. The feedback from attendees on this focus on wellbeing was very positive, particularly as it was delivered during the height of the pandemic when many of the students are going through a very challenging time.



## Recommendation 2

### Ensure the work environment and job design are supportive of mental health

Businesses have a responsibility to create healthy working conditions for all people, a good work/life balance and encourage positive relationships between employees. In order to do this, businesses should ensure that they review all processes through the lens of mental health. How can the elements of working life as an employee of your business be designed to help protect and promote mental health? This includes organisational policies, processes (e.g. recruitment, redundancy, promotion, performance review), ways of working, project and job design, management of professional relationships and the physical environment.

There will, of course, be stressful and busy periods, and indeed many people seek out challenge, and thrive when presented with a stretch opportunity. But excessive or sustained long working hours, or consistent high levels of stress, cannot be the norm. A mentally healthy work environment recognises that a person's, and therefore a business' resilience, is not a fixed trait or an unlimited resource.

#### Example from business

#### Bupa's wellbeing programme

Personal Energy is Bupa's wellbeing programme for its people. It's about helping their people to take good care of and prioritise the important things in life that are key to their personal wellbeing. Bupa knows that energised, resilient teams who feel psychologically safe are able to navigate problems, remain open and flexible and adapt well to change. Personal Energy helps individuals and teams take control of small but significant things in their life which can help them to stay mentally healthy, build their resilience and maximise their effectiveness. It covers three elements: selfawareness, self-care and taking positive actions. The programme empowers people to identify what will help keep them in a good place and gives them tools to stick to their personal action plan. This might be about prioritise and improve sleep or ways to relax. When done as a team, it fosters powerful conversations about what matters to colleagues and gives them permission to be open about how they're feeling with no judgement attached.

Personal Energy is important for people at any stage of their career, but especially so for people who are at the start of their career. As they find their feet in the workplace, this programme supports people to develop healthy behaviours which will keep them to keep balance in their lives. Bupa delivers Personal Energy to its own people and, with the support of the Bupa Foundation, to thousands of educators and charity workers.



**Make people processes mentally healthy**

Protecting, supporting and creating positive mental health should be considered when designing any processes related to people, including recruitment, induction and performance management.

**Manage psychological risk**

Projects or jobs should be risk assessed to check they do not lead to sustained work-related stress and/or psychological risks. Procedures should be in place for assessing risk and there should be clear and appropriate channels for the self-reporting of risks.

**Training for all leaders and managers around mental health**

Offer early careers line managers mental health training so they understand the challenges facing this cohort, develop the skills to spot warning signs and the confidence to have conversations about mental health and signpost to support.

**Include wellbeing as part of performance management**

For all managers, their impact on the wellbeing of their team should be integrated into their professional development, included in competency frameworks and measured through performance feedback.

**Consider mental health in new ways of working**

As many organisations design new ways of working, including hybrid and flexible working hours, mental health and inclusion should be at the heart of that design. For people in early careers, this will allow them to have autonomy and flexibility, whilst also ensuring they have enough contact with peers and their team. It will be important to consult with young professionals to find out what they want.

**Example from business****Personal Managers encourage open conversations at Headland**

At Headland, every employee is matched with a Personal Manager from day one. A Personal Manager helps to guide the individual in their career development as well as acting as a first touch point should there be any issues relating to work or wellbeing.

Importantly, Personal Managers aren't line managers to that individual and remain one step removed from an employee's day to day work. They regularly check in with the individual's direct teams, building a holistic picture of development needs. Personal Managers meet with their 'managee' on a monthly basis, providing a regular opportunity for the individual to talk about any difficulties they might be facing. Trainee recruits meet more regularly with their Personal Managers, as they get to grips with the workplace at the start of their career.

Personal Managers find it a hugely rewarding role, and it is an integral part of Headland's culture. It develops caring and trusting relationships within the workforce, encourages open conversations, and ensures the business is able to put the right support in place for every individual to allow them to progress and thrive.

Headland is working in partnership with CMHA to roll out mental health training for all Personal Managers.



### Example from business

#### Hogan Lovells focuses on Trainee mental health

Hogan Lovells has a mental health strategy, which includes specific support and processes that are in place to protect the mental health of its Trainee solicitors. During the beginning stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, the firm, introduced Monday morning clinics where trainees could drop in to talk to the Trainee Development Team about anything that was on their minds – from how to manage their workload, to wellbeing, to questions about the job. These have continued. There is also a buddy programme, where first seat trainees are buddied up with a 2nd, 3rd or 4th seat trainee, as well as a member of business services, to help them get to know the business better.

Hogan Lovells also recognises that trainees, in a high pressured, remote or hybrid working environment, may be more likely to work consistently long hours. To try and prevent this from happening, supervisors have access to their trainee's utilisation figures – in other words how many hours they are working. If this ever goes too high, the supervisor and Trainee Development will check in with that trainee just to see how they are and proactively help them to manage workload. That supervisor is also responsible for keeping an eye on their annual leave and will encourage them to take regular breaks that they have during the year, especially after busy periods. All supervisors have had mental health training as part of the wider supervisor training, to increase their confidence in having conversations about wellbeing, and are regularly offered refresher courses so that they can maintain their skills.



## Recommendation 3

### Provide and signpost to accessible resources, tools and support

Everyone has mental health and everyone can take steps to take care of it. Employers can play a key role by offering and encouraging their people to make use of initiatives that promote wellness. This should include early intervention and recovery support. When workplaces offer and promote support, it not only makes it easier for people to access help as soon as they need it, but it also normalises access to it. When it comes to people in early careers, it is important that the services are accessible, are representative and meet the needs of diverse groups.

#### Suggested ideas and examples for achieving this recommendation

##### Provide diverse and accessible support

Offer a range of support, including Mental Health First Aiders or Mental Health Champions, Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP), private insurance and/or counselling. Ensure that the support offered is appropriate for the challenges that young people face.

##### Use multiple channels for communication

HR, leaders and line managers all have an important role to play in advocating support services and encouraging people to use them if they need to, and in reassuring them that any access will be completely confidential. Messages should come from these different groups, and there should be regular communication to reinforce messages.



##### Promote peer support

Give young professionals the opportunity to talk to peers through a buddy system or an informal peer support network. Proactively promote internal networks, such as the mental health network, and inclusion groups such as LGBT+, Black and Minority Ethnic groups, etc., where people can speak to colleagues with shared experiences.

##### Signpost to external support

There will always be people who are not comfortable accessing wellbeing support at work, so employers can play a role in signposting to external support, such as Samaritans and Shout (see Resources section for more).

##### Promote self-care and ways to wellbeing

Give people in early careers access to resources and activities that will help them to maintain their mental health and wellbeing, such as meditation apps, on-site or on-screen yoga, gym membership and activity days.

#### Example from business

##### “Discover Deloitte” mobile app supports new joiners

Deloitte developed the “Discover Deloitte” smartphone friendly app to support graduates, apprentices and school leavers as they make the transition into work. New joiners can access the mobile responsive website on their phone as soon as they accept a job offer. It gives them access to information about Deloitte, including details of what will happen on their first day, bite sized learning on the core skills they will need as they make the transition from education to work and clear signposting to available workplace wellbeing and mental health support. It helps new joiners to start to “settle in” and get to know the firm’s culture, and challenge mental health stigma, even before their first day.

## Example from business

**Lloyds offers appropriate support for early careers**

Lloyds Banking Group (LBG) is committed to supporting the mental health of all its people, and has an in-depth mental health strategy that is sponsored by members of the Exec Leadership Team. As part of this strategy, LBG recognises that people in their early careers face particular challenges, so LBG takes specific action and offers appropriate resources to ensure they are supported. This includes:

- An Early Careers Wellbeing Hub, which offers access to dedicated resources to help address some of the unique stressors and situations faced by those starting out in their careers. This includes information on how to tackle issues such as Unhealthy Perfectionism or Imposter Syndrome, which was developed in collaboration with the City Mental Health Alliance, as well as tips for working from home for the first time.
- All colleagues, including those starting on our Graduate Programme, have access to the meditation apps and online resources which help them feel empowered to taking positive steps to improve and maintain their wellbeing both inside and outside the workplace.
- Across the Group we are on the path to training 2500 colleagues to become Mental Health Advocates, including dedicated Graduate Mental Health Advocates, whose roles are to educate inspire and empower colleagues across the Group to change culture. Their roles are to raise awareness and signpost support.
- Induction sessions for new joiners, so they are aware of the resources available and how to access them. And, most importantly, know that it is okay to not be okay.
- Mental health awareness sessions for early careers line managers to help them understand challenges faced and feel confident to start a conversation and signpost to support if needs be.

**Thriving From The Start Network**

The CMHA's Thriving From The Start (TFTS) Network is a free mental health community for people early in their careers. The Network is run by a Committee of young professionals, and the Network's vision is to create a culture of good mental health for future leaders in the workplace. Go [here](#) to find out more or share details of how to register with early careers colleagues.



# 6 Measurement

Measurement of your organisation's mental health and wellbeing approach is critical to help you assess where you are now, the effectiveness of your strategy, the impact of your investment and inform future plans. By being clear on your goals and desired outcomes, you'll be able to identify the metrics you should use to assess effectiveness. Below we have included a list of metrics, which are not exhaustive, that you might want to consider recording and analysing to judge progress against each recommendation.

## Recommendation 1

### Create a culture of wellbeing and psychological safety

- Disclosure rates
- Engagement survey feedback
- Wellbeing survey feedback
- Feedback/performance review data
- Grievances
- Recruitment/candidate review forums

## Recommendation 2

### Ensure the work environment and job design are supportive of mental health

- Retention data for those with diagnosed mental health conditions
- Policy & process audit
- Stress & psychological risk assessments
- Work utilisation/hours worked
- Exits/reasons for leaving

## Recommendation 3

### Provide and signpost to accessible resources, tools and support

- Take up of wellbeing interventions
- Participation in activities & events
- Website/intranet/app usage
- Service provider data (e.g. Medical insurance claims, EAP, use of apps)

Many organisations are also using workplace mental health assessment and benchmarking tools. For example, the [CMHA's Thriving at Work Assessment](#) helps businesses to measure their progress on how they are building a mentally healthy workplace. It also reviews the support offered to different groups, including professionals in early careers. For ideas on how to use the data to measure and inform your mental health strategy, please [see this blog](#) and CMHA members can access this [How To Guide](#).



# 7 Resources

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to [Bupa](#) for being our collaborative partner through this whole project. Thank you also to everyone – the workplace mental health experts, young professionals and businesses – who have contributed your insight to this guide.

## MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES FOR PEOPLE IN EARLY IN THEIR CAREERS

[For help, advice and immediate crisis lines](#)

The City Mental Health Alliance's [Thriving From The Start Network](#)

[For support](#) from Student Minds for a person's own mental health at university, support for a friend or loved one, or for services that might be available to students.

[Hub of Hope](#) – a mental health support database provided by Chase The Stigma.

## FURTHER READING

[Research from the CMHA](#) - What are Early Careers Job Seekers thinking?

[Mental health and employers](#): refreshing the case for investment. A report from Deloitte UK.

[Perfectionism](#): when striving for excellence becomes unhealthy, by Professor Roz Shafran.

The [City Mental Health Alliance Thriving at Work Guide](#). A framework for building mentally healthy workplaces.

[Guide to Mentally Healthy Recruitment in Early Careers](#)

## MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING

[CMHA training](#), including for young professionals and line managers of people.

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