



The Prince's  
Responsible  
Business Network



Mental Health at Work 2019 Summary Report

# TIME TO TAKE OWNERSHIP



In partnership with



and the Wellbeing Leadership Team

# FOREWORD

BY LOUISE ASTON

## MORE WORKPLACES NEED TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION TO BETTER MENTAL HEALTH, NOT PART OF THE PROBLEM

In the past couple of years, we've seen growing momentum around the tangible need for mental health improvements from the Government and mental health stakeholders, including employers. The [Stevenson / Farmer review](#) has stressed the critical importance of helping employees to thrive at work. We cannot allow this momentum to dissipate – the time is now for employers to act.

While strides have been made in some areas of the workplace, the support for mental health is undermined by working conditions being a cause of mental health issues. The number of employees who have experienced poor mental health due to work, or where work was a contributing factor, in the past year has increased significantly. People who come to work don't expect to be physically injured and also should not expect to be psychologically harmed.

A profound cultural shift is paramount, so that work itself doesn't cause poor mental health. Organisational needs are being favoured above the wellbeing of people. We won't achieve parity between physical and mental health until more employers take ownership over their role and create workplaces that enhance positive mental health.

Whilst mental health awareness has universally risen, the findings in our national survey show too many employers are tinkering at the edges rather than making the fundamental changes that are really needed to improve wellbeing, retention and productivity. Those who aspire to be employers of choice must tackle the barriers outlined in this report.

**I call on leadership to identify what they can own and be accountable for.**

In response to this growing need, we've launched Business in the Community (BITC)'s [Responsible Business Tracker](#)<sup>®</sup>, a measurement tool designed to enable organisations to measure their performance as a responsible business. The Tracker is aligned with the United Nation's Global Goals that underpin our [Responsible Business Map](#). The Health and Wellbeing questions are linked to the [Workwell Model](#), BITC's framework to support organisations embed wellbeing into organisational culture.

**Business is at its best when people are at their best. Let's ensure people can take their whole selves to work and thrive.**



**Louise Aston**  
Wellbeing Director,  
Business in the  
Community

# FOREWORD

BY TONY WOOD

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING ARE KEY STRANDS OF RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS. DOING THE RIGHT THING FOR YOUR EMPLOYEES IS ALSO DOING THE RIGHT THING FOR YOUR BUSINESS

As we enter the fourth year of assessing mental health in the workplace with fresh eyes, we are seeing some encouraging improvements. But a lot of work is still ahead.

More employers are talking about mental health issues, supported by the rise of mental health first aid training and employee-based support routes, yet our findings show there is a need for employers to do more. There is no health without mental health. A holistic, integrated approach is essential.

There are often strong health and safety measures to tackle occupational problems like physical injury, but few organisations have similar measures in place for mental health. Managers acknowledge that they need to do more but they are often hampered by other organisational priorities and pressures.

It's been revealing to focus in on some new areas this year. There's an increasing need to understand intersectionality better. Worryingly, a third of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other (LGBT+) employees reported hiding their sexuality at work for fear of discrimination in the last year. Nearly a third of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) employees felt they have experienced negative outcomes in the last year due to their ethnicity. Those with a disability fare even worse.

Financial wellbeing continues to be a huge problem. There is a fine line in the disparity between what the employee wants and what the employer offers in the area of support. Employers either aren't offering financial advice or support isn't accessible or visible enough in the workplace. Only 5% of employees say they receive financial support in the workplace, but whether this is reality or perceived reality due to lack of promotion, is interesting for employers to consider.

In partnership with Business in the Community's Wellbeing Leadership Team, we're helping businesses move from good to great in terms of improving their mental health capability. We're trying to get people engaged on the journey, even if they focus on the basics. And we're going on this journey with a host of organisations to cascade good practice by engaging with their stakeholders and supply chains.

**In order to take action, you've got to talk action. Good is good, but it's time to aspire to be great.**



**Tony Wood**  
Partner and UK  
Managing Director,  
Mercer Marsh  
Benefits

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## WE ARE MOVING FORWARD BUT WE MUST DEEPEN OUR COMMITMENT

As we move into the fourth year of conducting our national mental health at work survey, in collaboration with business and nine national partners, it's great to see progress being made with increased awareness and positive action.

However, progress is not happening with the scale and speed needed. Unacceptably, some employers are still contributing to the psychological harm experienced by their staff through poor business practices and cultures.

### **Employers need to stop harming the mental health of their employees through poor business practices and culture.**

This report highlights the urgent need for employers to take ownership of the impact their working practices have on the mental health of their employees.

In our latest findings, 2 in 5 (39%) employees have experienced poor mental health due to work, or where work was a contributing factor, in the past year. This figure stood at 36% in both 2017 and 2018; this increase shows movement in the wrong direction.

The three main causes of work-related poor mental health are too much pressure, workload impacting on ability to take leave (leavism) and a lack of support. More can and should be done by employers to relieve that pressure. Employee mental health is also affected by negative work relationships, and people not feeling able to trust their managers.

### **Employers must acknowledge and support employees experiencing poor mental health, whatever the cause.**

Our findings show that 30% of the UK workforce have been formally diagnosed with a mental health condition at some point in their lifetime – yet parity of esteem between physical and mental health has yet to be realised. Employers must take this ambition seriously if positive change in the workplace is to be achieved.

Responsible business needs to be the mission of all employers. Not enough employers are taking full ownership over measures within their organisation to support their staff.

Employers must consider further ways of ensuring people feel comfortable talking to someone at work by creating a safe and open environment.

Where employees are experiencing poor mental health symptoms not related to work, feeling lonely and isolated is the most significant factor (32%). This is particularly true for younger employees (48% of 18-29 year olds, compared to 19% of 60+ year olds). Financial difficulties such as debt, and family bereavement or long-term illness of family members were also notable causes (both 24%).

The whole spectrum of mental health has to be acknowledged by employers, including the most severe of experiences. For 13% of those surveyed who had experienced poor mental health symptoms that were not caused by work, one of the root causes was their partner, spouse or

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# 30%

of the UK workforce have been formally diagnosed with a mental health condition at some point in their lifetime.

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# 39%

2 in 5 employees report experiencing poor mental health symptoms related to work in the last year. 23% in the last month.

family member being abusive. For 23% of this group, the abuse sometimes occurred whilst they were at work or travelling to and from the workplace.

Employers need to rapidly provide appropriate support for those affected by poor mental health caused by factors both in and outside the workplace.

As in previous years, there remains a worrying disconnect between what senior leaders believe about the support they provide and the reality of employees' experience. Those at CEO and Board level are more likely than those with no managerial responsibility to think their organisation supports its staff – 51% against 38%. Worryingly, the proportion of employees who believe their organisation does well in supporting those with poor mental health fell to 41% from 45% over the past year from 2018 to 2019.

## **Employers should create workplaces that enhance positive mental health.**

Good employee mental health is fundamental to building a successful, sustainable organisation. We know that good work positively enhances wellbeing and there needs to be much greater emphasis on this. Despite this, more than 6 in 10 (62%) managers have had to put the interests of their organisation above staff wellbeing either sometimes, regularly or every day.

Many companies are fostering good mental health at work through innovative policies and approaches, and are reaping the benefits through improved staff recruitment and retention. However, this is not being seen UK-wide. Only 13% of managers have attended specific training that focused on mental health. By comparison, a third of CEOs or Board personnel have received some form of training about mental health. With mental health issues estimated to cost employers around £34.9 billion each year (according to the [Centre for Mental Health](#)), providing effective support isn't just the right thing to do – it makes complete business sense.

## **One size doesn't fit all. There are different risks and concerns for different groups.**

Our understanding of the impact of intersectionality continues to grow. LGBT+ employees are especially likely to have experienced a mental health problem where work was a cause or factor (79% of LGBT+ people, compared to 62% who don't identify as LGBT+). A third of LGBT+ employees reported having hid their identity at work for fear of discrimination in the last year.

As many as 30% of BAME employees felt they have experienced negative workplace behaviour or outcomes in the last year due to their ethnicity.

Finances are another area to consider, although financial security varies by age and gender. 21% of employees (25% in 2018) say that they struggle to make ends meet financially, a number highest among 18-29 year olds (26%) and women (23%), compared to 19% of men. More than a third (34%) say that they spend more money when they are feeling down. This again affects the youngest employees the most, with 44% of 18-29 year olds agreeing that they do this compared to just 28% of those in their 50s.

## **All UK employers need to commit to improving the wellbeing of their people.**

Whilst progressive employers are making a positive impact, the scale of the challenge means we really need to step up our response. It is simply not acceptable for employers to be the cause of mental health problems among staff – they must take ownership and be part of the solution.

We urge every employer to follow our [recommendations](#) to help put good work into practice. It's time for employers to be far more ambitious and aspirational. Many organisations can make a faster change than they think.

## **The time for action is now.**

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# 52%

of those who experience mental health problems related to work say this is due to pressure such as too many priorities or targets.

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# 62%

of managers have had to put the interests of their organisation above staff wellbeing either sometimes, regularly or every day.

# SUMMARY OVERVIEW

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## EMPLOYERS NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR DIRECT IMPACT ON EMPLOYEES

**2 in 5**

employees (39%) have experienced poor mental health where work was a contributing factor in the last year

2018

**36%**

**62%**

of managers faced situations where they put the interests of their organisation above the wellbeing of colleagues

2018

**64%**

**24%**

cited bullying and harassment from their manager as a cause of work-related poor mental health

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## EMPLOYERS SHOULD CREATE GOOD WORK THAT ENHANCES MENTAL HEALTH

**70%**

of managers say there are barriers to them providing mental health support

2018

**68%**

**41%**

of employees experiencing a mental health problem reported that there had been no resulting changes or actions taken in the workplace

2018

**49%**

**51%**

feel comfortable talking generally in the workplace about mental health issues

2018

**54%**

**28%**

of line managers say how well they do in managing staff wellbeing is not part of how they themselves are assessed

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## WORKING CONDITIONS MUST BE EVALUATED

**52%**

of those with an experience of poor mental health due to work cited that it was due to pressure

**36%**

mentioned workload as causing poor mental health symptoms

**11%**

Only 11% of managers in the UK have received training on understanding workplace stressors

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## EMPLOYERS MUST ACKNOWLEDGE AND SUPPORT EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCING POOR MENTAL HEALTH, WHATEVER THE CAUSE

50% of employees have cited poor mental health due to causes outside of work:

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**48%**

of those aged 18-29 experience loneliness

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**30%**

experience marital or relationship problems

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**24%**

cite financial difficulties (such as debt)

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## POSITIVE IMPROVEMENTS ARE BEING MADE BUT THERE IS NO ROOM FOR COMPLACENCY

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**41%**

of employees experiencing poor mental health reported that there had been no resulting changes or actions taken in the workplace

2018

**49%**

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**21%**

of employees say they struggle to make ends meet financially

2018

**25%**

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**9%**

of those who disclosed a mental health problem were dismissed, demoted or disciplined

2018

**11%**

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**44%**

would feel comfortable talking to their line manager about their own mental health

2018

**44%**

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## KEY CONCERNS

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**79%**

of LGBT+ people are likely to have experienced poor mental health where work was a cause or a contributing factor

**32%**

hid or disguised that at work for fear of discrimination in the last year

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**24%**

of LGBT+ employees with disabilities reported being encouraged to hide their sexual orientation by work colleagues

compared to

**6%**

of those without a disability

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**23%**

of those who have suffered abuse said it sometimes occurred whilst they were at work or travelling to and from the workplace

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# CALLS TO ACTION

**BUSINESS LEADERS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO STEP UP AND MAKE DIRECT CHANGES TO THE WAY THEY THINK ABOUT AND TACKLE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES**

We urge employers to implement three calls to action. These are priority actions we believe will have the biggest impact on organisational capability to support better mental health:

**1**

**CREATE GOOD WORK  
THAT ENHANCES  
MENTAL HEALTH,  
FOR EVERYONE**

**2**

**ACKNOWLEDGE AND  
SUPPORT POOR  
MENTAL HEALTH,  
WHATEVER THE CAUSE**

**3**

**PUBLICLY REPORT  
YOUR WELLBEING  
PERFORMANCE**





# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEADERS

**We have used the results from the survey along with available best practice to produce a series of guiding principles and key actions for senior leaders on how to radically improve the support provided in the workplace.**

These recommendations – which are supported by our nine national partners – will enable organisations of all shapes and sizes to advance the support they offer, wherever they may currently be on their journey. These principles, which complement the [Thriving at Work](#) review of mental health, are aimed at all employers. While they are aspirational, they are also achievable.

## OWNING RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP

Recognise employee mental health as a critical component to being a responsible business.

### Actions:

- Consciously role model behaviours that promote good mental health
- Enable an inclusive culture by embedding wellbeing into management accountability and operational policies and tools
- Publicly report on your wellbeing performance in external communications such as annual reports

## UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF WORK

Position the enhancement of wellbeing through good work as a priority corporate objective.

### Actions:

- Audit the mental health risks as well as the physical ones and develop a plan for minimising them
- Increase management's understanding of the positive and negative impact work can have on employees and hold them accountable for this
- Regularly monitor and report on working conditions and always include employee feedback

## EQUIPPING LINE MANAGERS

Make employee mental health 'business as usual' for all managers.

### Actions:

- Embed the promotion of good mental health as a core competency for managers
- Recognise and reward empathy and compassion
- Ensure comprehensive training reaches all managers, and includes the impact of work on mental health and productivity

## PROVIDING TAILORED SUPPORT

Take an inclusive and employee-led approach to providing support.

### Actions:

- Introduce training for workplace adjustments and modifications, so that support can be tailored
- Build active listening and communication skills and make signposting easy
- Provide and promote access to a diverse range of inclusive mental health services and facilities such as Employee Assistance Programmes and Occupational Health.

## SPOTLIGHT: RESPECT AND INCLUSION

Promote and implement zero-tolerance policies and guidelines:

- Develop awareness of non-inclusive behaviours and define those that are unacceptable
- Support and encourage staff to be responsible bystanders when they witness bullying and harassment
- Join up inclusion and wellbeing activity to enable a whole person approach, and track your progress in both these areas


## SPOTLIGHT: FINANCIAL WELLBEING

Embed financial wellbeing into your organisation's wellbeing strategy:

- Review whether there are any work-related causes that could be impacting employees' financial wellbeing, such as pay, contract type or shift patterns
- Share your commitment to increasing financial wellbeing and breaking the stigma through internal communications and campaigns
- Develop and promote financial education, information and guidance that helps employees get the right support at the right time

# OWNING RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP

## LEADERS NEED TO TAKE OWNERSHIP OF THE IMPACT THEIR ORGANISATION HAS ON MENTAL HEALTH AND SUPPORT THEIR STAFF APPROPRIATELY



We know employees can experience poor mental health at times or live with an ongoing mental health condition. However, with the right support they can succeed and thrive at work. Therefore we, as employers, have a huge responsibility to take action. The Business in the Community Wellbeing Leadership Team has a vision to create an environment where individuals and organisations can be their best. Whilst there has been significant progress made in recent years, the findings in this year's report highlight that there is still more to do.

Our aim is to use our business skills, reach and convening power to build a movement committed to positioning health and wellbeing as strategic boardroom issues, with an ambition to significantly improve these outcomes. During this year we have focused on building insight on the topics we believe have the most impact on employees' mental health, including Financial Wellbeing, Line Management and Organisational Design. We are using these deep dives as an opportunity to learn from each other to move from 'good to great' with regards to how we approach mental health at work within our own organisations, so that we can share our experiences and learning with others to drive change across UK PLC. Tackling this issue will make a big difference to the productivity and prosperity of the country, but most importantly to people's lives and wellbeing.

David Oldfield, Group Director & CEO, Commercial Banking, Lloyds Banking Group  
and Chair of Business in the Community's Wellbeing Leadership Team



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Survey partner



## In partnership with



## National partners



Read the full report 'Mental Health at Work 2019 Report – Time to Take Ownership' at:

<https://wellbeing.bitc.org.uk/MHAW2019>



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### **Chairman: Jeremy Darroch**

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