



Is it an employer's job to look after the health of their staff?

A white paper from Towergate Health & Protection
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There used to be a mantra that you “don’t bring your problems into work”, meaning all personal issues should somehow be left at the door the minute you walk into work. Thankfully times have moved on a long way and employers now recognise the impact which personal issues can have on their team.

Now, it is far more likely that personal issues will be discussed in a coffee break with colleagues or in a frank one-to-one with managers, but just how far should employers go when it comes to looking after the health and wellbeing of their staff?

When it comes to stress and mental ill health at work, the figures are staggering. With a sixth of workers experiencing a mental health problem at any one time, and stress, anxiety and depression the reasons for almost half the working days lost in Britain¹, it is clear why so many employers are now offering access to more support.

Poor mental health costs employers around £45 billion per year in lost working days, reduced productivity and other related costs, according to research¹, making it important for the business as well as the staff, to offer help when needed.

Supporting wellbeing in the workplace

But what about other areas of health and wellbeing? With an increasingly competitive jobs market, employers need to make themselves stand out from the crowd when it comes to attracting and retaining the best talent.

One of the ways to do this is to position the business as a caring employer by offering a wide range of health and wellbeing benefits. Evidence shows that more and more companies are now adopting this approach. According to GRiD, around 32% of organisations with more than 250 employees use health and wellness programmes to control absence and improve attendance².

The days of offering a private medical insurance scheme and a pension and hoping that will work are long gone, with the new generation of workers looking for, and expecting a very different kind of benefit package.

Modern life brings new health and wellbeing challenges - from living a more sedentary lifestyle, to being always connected, combined with financial stress and the difficulties of caring for relatives - meaning today's workforce comes to work with a whole host of wellbeing issues every day.

The responsive employer will recognise this and understand the impact that failing to support people's wellbeing can have on the business; on productivity, sales and ultimately on the business' profit level.

The impact of sickness and stress in the workplace

Sickness absence has a huge impact on the workplace with around 141.4 million working days per year, lost due to sickness or injury³, with the annual cost to businesses estimated to be £554 per employee⁴. But there are other issues which employers need to think about, in addition to people taking time off work.



Presenteeism is also an issue - people who are coming into the office might not always be feeling their best, emotionally or physically, but will show up regardless rather than be off sick, perhaps trying to escape from a stressful situation at home.

However, the productivity level of people in this situation will be incredibly low. And it's not just down to physical health issues. Stress over money worries is now a huge issue for many in the workplace.

Research shows that one in four employees has lost sleep over money worries in the last year with one in ten unable to focus at work and 6% taking time off work to deal with monetary concerns⁵.

Lower productivity rates and people showing up for work when they can't concentrate properly has as big an impact on the workplace as sickness absence in many cases. In fact, lost productivity and absence due to financial stress costs UK businesses around £120 billion per year⁵.

So, supporting the mental and physical health and wellbeing of all staff can have a hugely positive impact not just on the people, but also from a business point of view, reducing costs and pressures.

So just what can employers do to help their staff?

When it comes to supporting the health and wellbeing of staff, there are three distinct areas where employers can offer a variety of support and programmes, which can be broadly split into health, wellbeing and protection.

Healthcare support for the workplace

Having the right healthcare package in place gives your team more treatment and support options and avoids delays in returning to work, while helping to reduce sickness absence at the same time. It is also an attractive benefit to improve recruitment and retention of the best talent.

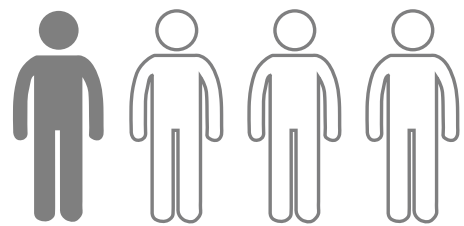
Private medical insurance - can help to reduce waiting times, helping employees to avoid long waiting lists and get back to work quicker.

Dental insurance - employees can gain access to a network of private dentists, receiving treatment without the fear of big dental bills, and reducing time off for appointments as well, as treatment can often take place near the workplace.

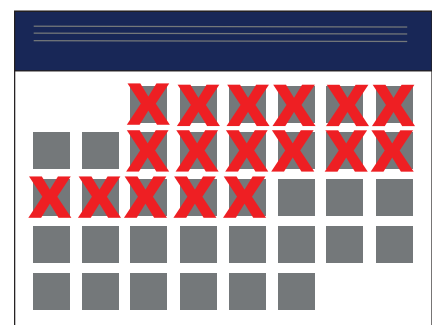
Health cash plan - can be used to pay for everyday treatments such as eye tests, dental treatment, physiotherapy and chiropractor treatment.



Sickness absence costs businesses on average £554 per employee per year⁴



1 in 4 employees lose sleep over financial worries⁵



6% of employees take time off work to deal with monetary concerns⁵



£120 billion per year was lost due to lost productivity and absence⁵

Wellbeing programmes in the workplace

Preventative health measures provided through a good wellbeing programme can help encourage employees to live healthier lives and boost staff morale, as well as reducing sickness absence levels.

Employee assistance programmes (EAPs) - when employees experience personal problems, whether at home or at work, an EAP provides them with a helpline giving access to counsellors. EAPs can also provide support for issues including health, relationship, family, financial, alcohol, drug, legal, emotional and stress.

Health screenings - an easy way for your employees to discover any potential health problems and trends to understand what they can do to actively improve their own health.

Occupational health - pre-employment screening questionnaires to ensure new employees are fit for work and support for the business in managing sickness absence risks.

Mental health support - offering onsite mental health training and resilience courses, access to educational programmes, digital services and apps, as well as EAPs, can support employees.

Financial wellbeing - employers can help by offering access to financial education programmes, signposting people to services like the Money Advice Service, or encouraging use of EAPs for debt counselling.

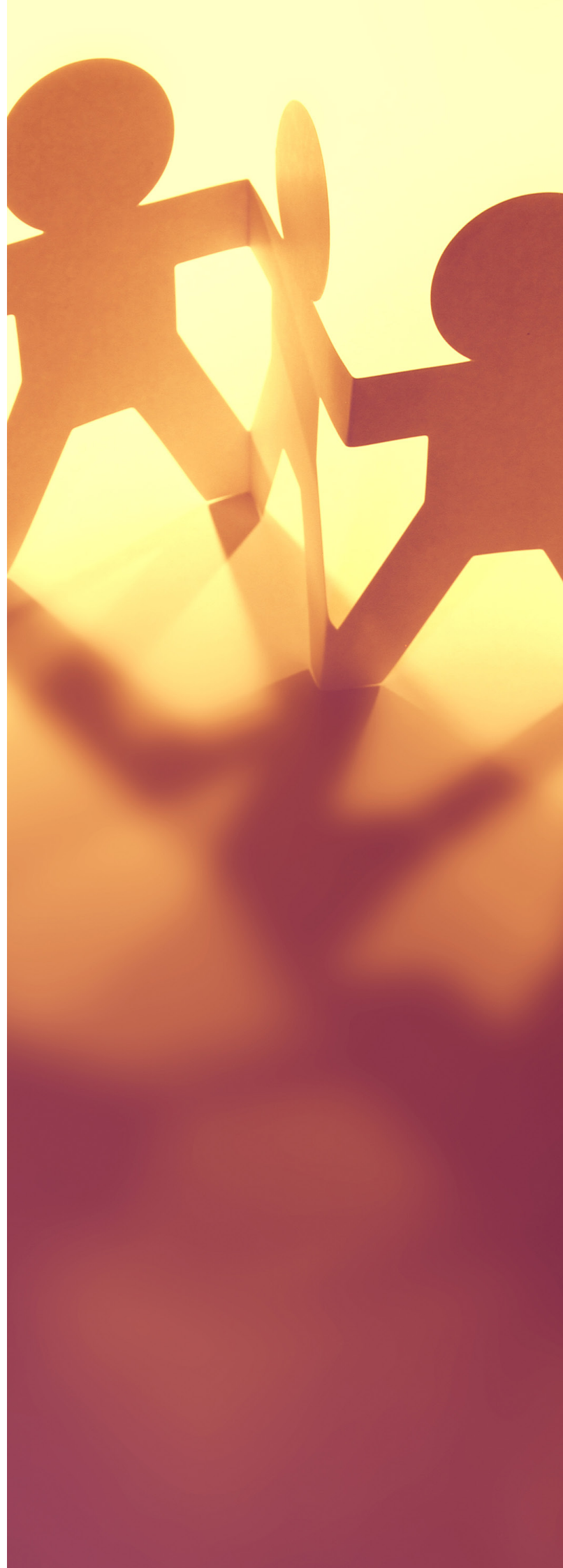
Protection support should the worst happen

Other types of employee benefits which could help to provide financial assistance to employees should they become too sick to work or need time off to recover from a long-term illness can also help.

Critical illness cover - provides a lump sum if an employee is diagnosed with a critical illness.

Income protection - provides an income if an employee is unable to work due to illness or injury.

Life insurance - provides a lump sum to the family if the staff member were to pass away while employed.



Case study: Why all employers should be looking after their staff

In case it's still not clear why employers should be looking after the health and wellbeing of their people, here is a case study example of just what a difference the right benefits package and approach really can make to a business:

A large distribution company employing 2,000 people was struggling with a high number of staff sickness absences and the increasing cost this was placing on the business. They operated with a high-stress environment and the number of employees off with stress or other mental health issues was above the national average.

There was no consistent approach to managing absent people so often those who went off sick were not returning to work, causing recruitment and retention costs and issues. The business had put in place an aim to reduce sickness absence for mental health reasons by 20% and to reduce the number of employees not returning to work from long-term absence by 50%.

A review of their benefits was carried out and the benefits package was extended to cover all employees. A health cash plan and an employee assistance programme were added in to provide more support for those off with stress. An engagement and information plan was set up to educate the workers on what was available for them within their new package, and all sickness absences were actively monitored to assess use of the new benefits.

These are the results:



26% reduction in absence due to mental health

11% reduction in unplanned absence



15% increased completion rates on returns-to-work

88% of long-term absent staff returned to work because of early intervention



The EAP received **420** counselling calls for employees, providing much needed support

As you can see from this real-life example, providing the right health and wellbeing support to employees can make a huge difference to their lives, their health but also to the company in terms of productivity, cost reduction, retention and engagement levels.

So, is it an employers' job to look after employees' health and wellbeing?

Yes, for any company that values its people and the way the business is run, it is the most important job of all.



If you would like to find out more, talk to our expert advisers on **0800 389 7723** or visit **towergatehealthandprotection.co.uk**

Sources

1. Deloitte UK – Mental health and employers – Refreshing the case for investment January 2020
2. <https://employeebenefits.co.uk/issues/august-2018/32-health-wellness-reduce-absence/>
3. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/labourproductivity/articles/sicknessabsenceinthelabourmarket/2018>
4. <https://www.tensor.co.uk/news/annual-costs-of-sickness-absence-for-uk-businesses-reach-554-per-employee-cipd-report-finds/>
5. <https://workplaceinsight.net/financial-stress-can-impair-employee-performance-and-attendance/>

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