



Men's Health Strategy for England: call for evidence

Submission to the Department for Health & Social Care



About CIPD

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years.

It has 160,000 members across all sectors and sizes of organisation and provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Public policy at the CIPD draws on our extensive research and thought leadership, practical advice and guidance, along with the experience and expertise of our diverse membership, to inform and shape debate, government policy and legislation for the benefit of employees and employers. It also seeks to promote and improve best practice in people management and development and to represent the interests of our members.

Background

The CIPD serves on the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) Disability Confident Professional Advisers' Group, and works with the DWP on important guidance for line managers: [Employing disabled people: Disability Confident and CIPD managers' guide](#). We have also worked with health professionals and experts to publish a wide suite of practical guidance to advise people professionals and employers on how to support people's health at work, including:

- [Managing and supporting employees with long-term health conditions](#)
- [Managing a return to work after long-term sickness absence](#)
- Joint [mental health guide](#) with Mind for people managers
- [Responding to suicide risk in the workplace](#)
- [Guidance for managing drug and alcohol misuse at work](#)

General remarks

The CIPD welcomes this call for evidence and urges the Government to consider the role of employers in supporting men's health.

The important role of employers in supporting health

Employers have an important role in many areas and can help to alleviate some pressure on health services, for example by health promotion, health screening and early detection of some conditions. They can also contribute to the prevention of some health issues by adopting risk-based approaches to preventing some of the most common conditions causing sickness absence from work, such as work-related stress, poor mental health and musculoskeletal conditions. They can also encourage good lifestyle choices, early intervention and access to occupational health and other health support services.

How effectively organisations manage sickness absence, particularly long-term absence, and return-to-work following illness can also have a significant influence



on the rehabilitation and recovery of people as well as their continued economic participation.

Further, the workplace can play an important role in creating the supportive and ‘psychologically safe’ environment where employees can talk about their health and seek help, including access to specialist advice and treatment. This could be especially helpful for men’s health issues, as [some evidence](#) - as well as the consultation document - shows men can be more reluctant to speak up about their health, particularly their mental health, and seek medical attention.

The CIPD welcomes recent and ongoing government workplace-focused initiatives to improve the health of the working-age population, such as the independent ‘Keep Britain Working Review’. However, we need a step change in a number of public policy areas to incentivise more employers to provide effective support for employees and prevent ill health where possible.

The state of men’s self-reported health

CIPD’s annual [Good Work Index](#) an annual benchmark of good work or job quality in the UK. Each year, we survey more than 5,000 workers across different sectors and occupations about key aspects of their work and employment, including health and wellbeing, to drive improvement in working lives. The [2025 report](#) has the following findings in relation to men’s health:

Mental and physical health

- Women are more likely to suggest their mental health is poor (19% versus 16% for men)
- Physical health among men and women shows no significant difference
- Female employees are more likely to say their work affects their physical health negatively (28% versus 23% for men). Differences are insignificant for the effect of work on mental health according to gender.

Health-related conditions

In the last 12 months, men are significantly more likely to have experienced alcohol or drug dependence and heart problems - both heightened areas of risk that are flagged in the consultation document. They are also significantly more likely to report hearing problems, an injury due to an accident at work

Figure A: In the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following health-related conditions, by gender (%)

| | All employees | Male | Female |
|----------------------------|---------------|------|--------|
| Anxiety | 43% | 36% | 49% |
| Panic attack(s) | 9% | 7% | 11% |
| Depression | 24% | 24% | 24% |
| Sleep problems | 43% | 42% | 45% |
| Alcohol or drug dependence | 2% | 3% | 2% |



| | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|
| Backache or other bone, joint or muscle problems | 51% | 49% | 53% |
| Breathing problems | 7% | 7% | 7% |
| Heart problems | 4% | 6% | 3% |
| Hearing problems | 9% | 10% | 8% |
| Road traffic accidents while commuting to or from work | 2% | 2% | 2% |
| Injury due to an accident while at work | 2% | 3% | 2% |
| Repetitive strain injury (RSI) | 7% | 6% | 8% |
| Skin problems | 19% | 19% | 19% |
| COVID-19 | 10% | 9% | 11% |
| Long COVID | 2% | 2% | 3% |
| Other | 5% | 4% | 6% |
| Net: Any non-physical condition | 68% | 63% | 72% |
| Net: Any physical condition | 74% | 74% | 74% |

- Base: all (3,019); Male (n=1,513); female (n=1,506).

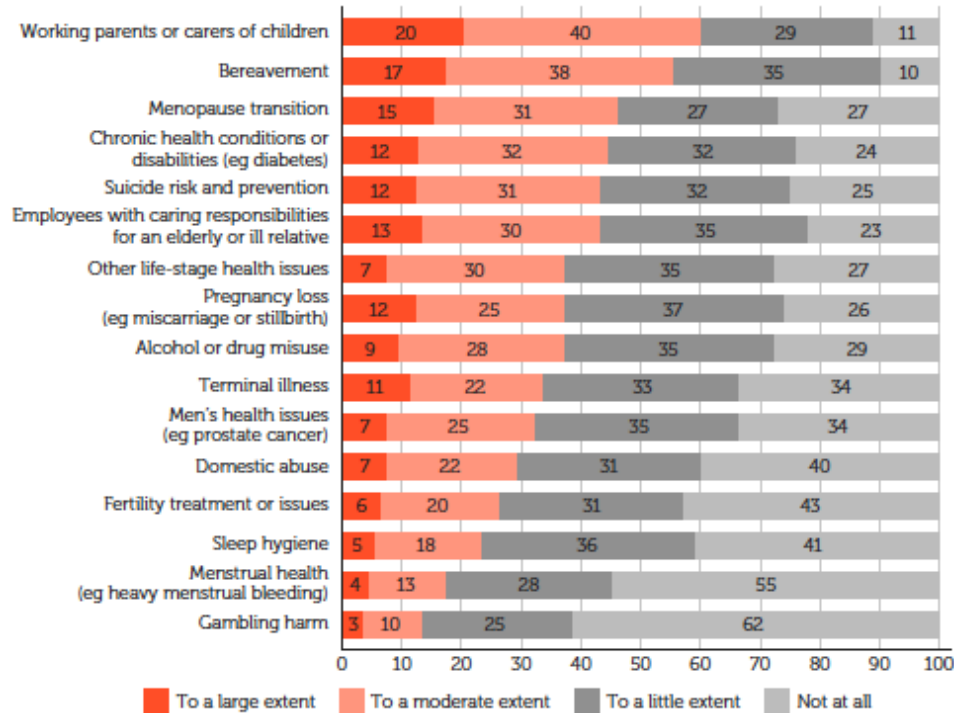
Employers’ provision for men’s health and related topics

The most recent CIPD/Simplyhealth [Health and wellbeing at work survey](#) explores how UK organisations support people’s health at work. The analysis is based on responses from more than 900 HR professionals working for organisations covering 6.5 million employees. Overall, 62% work in the private sector, 24% in the public sector, and 14% in voluntary, community, and not-for-profit organisations.

The findings show that, in line with previous years, support for mental health is the most common focus of employers’ health and wellbeing activity, with more than half (54%) of organisations reporting their activity is focused on this area ‘to a large extent’.

The survey also explores the extent of health and wellbeing provision for a wide range specific issues and groups of employees across the life course, such as women’s health, bereavement, chronic health conditions and disabilities. Overall, the results are very mixed, but as a specific topic, men’s health receives a poor level of attention, with just three in ten (29%) of organisations’ employee health and wellbeing activity including provision (for example, policies, guidance awareness-raising or line manager training) in this area. See figure 10 below.

Figure 10: Does your organisation's health and wellbeing activity include provision (eg policies, guidance, awareness-raising or line manager training) for any of the following? (%)



Base: 649 (organisations that take steps to improve employee health and wellbeing).

Suicide risk and prevention

The consultation document quite rightly points out the heightened risk of death by suicide for men. Our findings show there is workplace provision, but still not nearly enough, in relation to suicide risk and prevention, with 43% of organisations covering this crucial area to a moderate or large extent.

The workplace is an important setting for helping to recognise and prevent suicide risk, which is why we worked with a wide range of health professionals and other expert organisations and charities such as Samaritans, Mind, the Charlie Waller Trust and Acas to produce guidance for organisations, [Responding to suicide risk in the workplace](#).

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

If someone is struggling, knowing they can approach a colleague or a manager and be listened to with empathy and without judgement could be the first step in them accessing the help they need. Organisations also need to ensure it provides

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appropriate support for any individual who listens to someone who is having suicidal thoughts.

Key areas covered by our guidance include:

- Managing the risks related to workplace stress and preventing unfair treatment, such as bullying and harassment, will help to create a mentally healthy workplace, which in turn, can help to address some of the potential risks associated with suicide.
- If someone knows their concerns will be listened to with empathy and understanding, this can help that person to take the first step in accessing support services and securing the help they need.
- Warning signs might be different for everyone, but a manager having a good relationship with their team and the ability to recognise change in behaviour can prompt a conversation about whether someone is okay.
- Employers should engender a compassionate culture that harnesses openness and supports staff to talk about their thoughts and feelings, which is key to tackling the taboo around mental health and suicide.
- People managers need to be competent and confident to have sensitive and supportive conversations with people, and signpost to expert sources of help.
- Disciplinary processes can be hugely stressful, and concern for the health and welfare of anyone involved in a disciplinary, dismissal, or redundancy procedure should be a priority at every stage.

Key points for employers

Build a systematic framework to support health

CIPD research over recent years shows increased employer support for people's health. There is also growing recognition among some employers about the need to build awareness and provide support pathways for specific employee groups (such as working carers, women's health eg menopause) and health conditions. However, many still tend to take a reactive approach to health, rather than a pre-emptive one that addresses the main health risks and supports people with ongoing health conditions/disabilities and helps to prevent poor health where possible.

Organisations need to develop a holistic and systematic framework to prevent ill health and support all employees through sickness absence and return-to-work. An effective employer health and wellbeing framework should be based on the health risks of its workforce, including approaches to help prevent or mitigate illness. This includes analysing its people demographics to highlight the potential health and wellbeing challenges individuals can potentially experience throughout the employee lifecycle as they age. If the right framework with effective support for everyone is in place, this will provide the foundations necessary to support every individual regardless of their demographic or health condition.

Tackle stigma and build awareness of men's health issues

Nonetheless, it is very important to raise awareness, tackle stigma and provide specific support for particular employee groups and for certain health issues. This should include using opportunities to raise awareness for men's health issues by using relevant national health awareness events in the calendar, such as men's health awareness month in November. March is prostate cancer awareness month and suicide prevention is recognised in September.

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Support for men's health issues needs to be grounded in ongoing organisational activities and part of a systematic framework, but these awareness events are an opportunity to build a more open culture, encourage male employees to join in activities and access support. This can include signposting to trusted sources of expert help, such as the range of charities that provide credible advice and guidance, as well as peer support and communities for men, such as Movember, Prostrate Cancer UK, and men's mental health charities such as Andy's Man Club.

Ensure managers are capable and confident

Line managers typically take responsibility for supporting people's health and wellbeing on a day-to-day basis, including discussing and implementing effective support, flexibility and adjustments. [CIPD research](#) shows the central role that managers play in supporting employee health and wellbeing: 70% of respondents report line managers take primary responsibility for managing short-term absence and 61% for long-term absence. Line managers need to be confident to keep in touch with absent team members in a sensitive and supportive manner and conduct effective return-to-work interviews. They can spot the early warning signs of stress and ensure that workloads are manageable and objectives achievable. They act as a 'gateway' for employees to access expert health services and HR policies that can help individuals to manage the impact of health symptoms on work, as well as implementing reasonable adjustments where needed.

[CIPD evidence](#) shows that, when times are tough, support from line managers is one of the key resources that can help prevent or at least mitigate, the risk of stress and burnout. Other [CIPD research](#) shows clear links between line manager quality and employee health, especially mental health; for example, half (50%) of employees with bottom-quartile managers thought work had a negative (or very negative) impact on their mental health, compared one-seventh (14%) of employees with a top-quartile manager.

Effective and supportive absence management and return-to-work

Employees are more likely to return to work safely and productively following long-term sickness absence if they are well supported during their absence and on their return. This should be implemented within a culture and framework that positively supports people's health and trains line managers to have sensitive and supportive conversations with employees who are ill and off work.

However, too often:

- managers lack the confidence, or the processes are not in place to maintain regular and sensitive contact when the individual is off sick
- return-to-work after absence is seen as a one-event rather than a journey that needs to be planned with the employee beforehand with ongoing support and flexibility provided after the individual returns to work.

Research shows that a compassionate absence management policy, access to work adjustments and a supportive manager can make the difference between a successful, sustainable return and someone struggling and likely relapsing soon after return or even exiting the workplace.



Key points for government

Compared to some countries (eg the Netherlands and Denmark), the UK's workplace health infrastructure is underdeveloped. As the [Discovery phase report](#) published as part of the Government's 'Keep Britain Working' review points out there *'has been a surge in the number of people with work-limiting health conditions between 2015 and 2024.'*

To affect real change, public policy reform needs a joined-up approach across government as well as on the part of the many other agencies, regulators and stakeholders whose work impacts on the workplace health and disability agenda. The support and services available needs to be tailored to meet the needs of different employers, widely promoted, joined up and responsive. We therefore draw your attention to the [CIPD's submission](#) to the government's Keep Britain Working Review, where we make several policy recommendations that are relevant to this review to improve the work-health infrastructure. Employers can play a significant role in improving the health of the male working population in England, and we urge government to include a focus on the role of workplaces in its strategy for men's health.