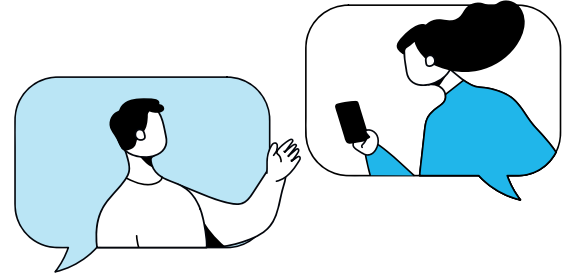


What now?

How employers build resilient organizations and communities

The following is a summary of the United Kingdom LifeWorks Employers Connect Mental Health Summit, held on February 22, 2022.



As communities throughout the United Kingdom begin to imagine life and work in a post-pandemic world, it's becoming clear that old approaches to wellbeing will no longer work.

In her introduction to the annual Employers Connect event, LifeWorks Global Leader and Senior Vice President, Research, and Total Wellbeing, Paula Allen, observed that “what we need to do now to build a healthy and productive workplace is different. It's more important; people are more challenged. We need to bring health, wellbeing, and mental health support into the workplace in an integrated form.”



The need for robust mental health programs is large and getting larger. The LifeWorks Mental Health Index™ shows the decline in mental wellness since 2019 has been massive, with nearly half of Britons saying they need mental health support, and one in five workers noting a decline in their mental health during the pandemic. Paula also notes concerning behavioural changes due to stress and isolation, including substance use – in fact 33% of working Britons say they have increased their alcohol consumption during pandemic, and this group also shows the lowest scores in terms of mental health and isolation.

For employers, these steep declines in mental health mean lower productivity, higher turnover, and deteriorating relationships with managers and colleagues. As many as one-third of workers may be thinking of resigning. The study also shows an unsustainable and unhealthy level of mental stress for all Britons, which is driving increased anxiety, depression, and addiction concerns. The impact is particularly acute among women, parents, post-secondary students, and people with lower incomes.

The research highlights some areas where organisations can invest in better mental health. For example, people who feel a sense of belonging and acceptance at work also have higher than average mental health scores, as do employees who say their organisation supports personal wellbeing and is a great place to work. Beyond the walls of the workplace, however, employers can play a big role in building resilient communities.

The importance of employers

That's something that Tina Woods has been thinking about since the pandemic began. As Co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of [Business for Health](#), she's working with public, private, and third sector organisations to add five years to healthy life expectancy in the U.K..

Addressing the health implications of economic inequality is key to improving life expectancy. “The gap between our richest and poorest citizens in time lived in good health is about 20 years and that gap has increased as a result of the pandemic,” Tina explains.

The organisation looks to businesses to support workforce health, create healthy products and services, and build resilient communities. “We know that good work leads to good health through good benefits, good wages, and quality managers,” Tina says. But key to realising these impacts is a mentally healthy group of managers and employees. “What really makes a difference is the discretionary effort people can put into work to support retention, innovation, productivity, and customer service. All of this is impacted by mental health,” Paula adds.

While top notch managers and executives are key to a healthy workforce, the LifeWorks study shows that they are disproportionately struggling with mental health. In fact, British managers are [40% more likely](#) than non-managers to report increased work stress and 30% more likely to struggle with their mental health. Yet many may not feel they have permission to acknowledge they need help. “This group is feeling the most traumatized in terms of their mental health,” Paula

notes. That said, other research shows that 98% of CEOs are planning to make mental health a priority after the pandemic.

Tina also points to older workers as a priority for U.K. employers, adding, "I think many employers are seeing that as a burning platform because we have fewer and fewer young people, so we need to keep our older workforce healthy." But she adds that too much of public healthcare is focused on caring for sick people versus preventing illness in the first place, pointing out that at least 80% of the determinants of health lie outside the quality of care delivered through the NHS. Employers have a key role to play in filling this gap.

She advocates a data-driven approach to the role of organisations in the health of the population and the metrics we will need to create incentives for ongoing investment and innovation by employers, academics, and public sector.

Harnessing data at Lenovo

Good data about employee health is at the heart of Lenovo's multinational wellbeing strategy. According to Janna Maxey, the company's Global Leader of Wellbeing, "We have data from our [LifeWorks employee assistance programme \(EAP\)](#) which we combine with the data from our health and welfare programmes to help us learn what issues employees are interested in." Beyond employee interest, Lenovo also uses data to uncover hidden trends that can inform benefits design and areas of focus. For example, Janna points out that employees who engage with the EAP for one concern, may have additional issues that need attention. By understanding underlying health factors, Lenovo is designing programs to support everything from managing diabetes to staying hydrated at work. "Using the data we can target messages because we understand what the issues are," Janna says.

As Paula points out, the data are showing different drivers of wellbeing than prior to the pandemic, and will require an ongoing effort by

employers to keep adding datapoints with programme data, along with surveys, focus groups, and benchmarks from other employers.

Among the insights Janna and her team have found is that Millennial and Generation Z employees are looking for support for mental health concerns but are afraid to ask for it. This information helped them design programs to address anxiety and stress and to better prepare for the return to workplaces.

"We worked with LifeWorks to build a programme to help our managers have difficult conversations, Janna says. "It's about how to help people who are dealing with grief and loss while they are trying to perform at work. We help managers recognise the signs of someone in distress and, one of the most powerful tools in the programme is the manager consultations.

Belonging, connection, and meaning

A key outcome of good conversations between managers and employees is a sense of belonging within the organisation. As Paula points out, "control, connection, and meaning are essential. And there's no way you can possibly feel a sense of belonging if you don't feel supported, valued, respected, and safe.

In addition to supporting managers, many employers are also offering choice while improving access to mental health care by offering digital wellbeing tools, such as internet based cognitive behavioural therapy, on-demand access to counselling, and self-serve content such as articles, videos, and podcasts.

Tina points out the impact of employers' investments in mental health will reverberate into their communities. Indeed, a focus on key physical and mental health risks, could reduce the burden of disease on the NHS and other care systems by as much as 20%. "We need to see prevention as a much more important priority, and this is where the business community has a huge role to play," she says.

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