

Response from the Working Well Coalition to 'Health is everyone's business' DWP consultation

About the Working Well Coalition

The Working Well Coalition is a group of employers, health experts, charities, trade bodies and MPs who want to work collectively to increase the number of employers investing in musculoskeletal and mental health prevention and early intervention to support their employees at work struggling with a health condition.

We want to turn ambition into action. Overall we want to narrow the gap between the large number of employers that say health and wellbeing is a priority and the employers that are actually taking proactive steps to intervene early and support their employees.

Response to the consultation

Coalition members will be submitting their own organisational response to the consultation. However, we have collectively identified six key principles which we call for the Government to adopt when developing its response to the consultation:

1. **Early intervention and prevention.** Government should be incentivising and supporting employers to intervene early when someone is in work, rather than focussing reactively on sickness absence. This is beneficial to someone who is unwell, as well as to the Government. The value of prevention is recognised in the Government's recently published Health Prevention consultation but should also be reflected in tax policy and Government's work and health policy objectives.
2. **Parity of esteem.** Mental health and musculoskeletal conditions should be put on an equal footing in government policy and not treated in siloes. There also needs to be recognition of support for fluctuating conditions. This should be reflected and clarified in Access to Work, Disability Confident, the Equalities Act and health prevention policy and advice for employers. Government should support employers to put in place adjustments by streamlining, simplifying and increasing funding for the Access to Work scheme.
3. **Flexible sick pay.** SSP should be reformed to support flexible returns to work. Government should ensure that calculating pay for phased returns is simple and easily understandable for employees and employers.
4. **A thriving market for high quality, holistic, workplace support.** This means Government needs to focus on increasing the capacity and quality of the occupational health market, as well as acting as a convenor to better link up the NHS, occupational health and employers.
5. **Equality of access to support for all employees.** Government should remove financial barriers which could prevent low paid workers, low margin large employers and SMEs from taking up support. For example, Government research shows that

blue collar workers are more likely to be off sick, with no enhanced SSP and no access to support¹.

As a first step, the Government should stop taxing services made available to all employees when they are in work as a benefit-in-kind. The Department for Work and Pensions' own research shows that one of the main reasons employers gave for not providing occupational health services was cost (35%).²

Government should be measuring workers' take-up of occupational health services and their outcomes to assess effectiveness, rather than a focus just on supply of occupational health services by businesses.

6. **Business-friendly information and advice.** Businesses, health experts and Government should work together to draw together existing advice and best practice including:
- Measuring return on investment from workplace health support, including preventative approaches
 - What options are available to businesses to support their workers, tailored for different types of businesses
 - How businesses can measure success and what 'good' looks like

Working Well Coalition, October 2019

John Lewis Partnership
Siemens UK
LSI Architects
CIPD
Bacp
Versus Arthritis
REBA
Vocational Rehabilitation Association
Better Space
Social Finance
Society of Occupational Medicine

¹ 'Health in the workplace: patterns of sickness absence, employer support and employment retention'; Department for Work and Pensions/Department for Health and Social Care - July 2019

² 'Sickness absence and health in the workplace: Understanding employer behaviour and practice'; Department for Work and Pensions/Department for Health and Social Care - June 2019