

Supporting men's health in the workplace

Ten actions that
employers can
take today



Introduction

Does your business support the health of men in the workplace?

It's an important question to ask because a gender health gap currently exists across the UK.

Men in this country die younger than women – typically three-and-a-half-years younger – and are more likely to be overweight and more likely to commit suicide¹.

During the pandemic it was reported that in England and Wales, twice as many men were likely to die from Covid-19 in comparison to women².

This guide aims to help businesses change those statistics by understanding men's health better and suggesting actions employers can take to support the men in their workforce.

Taking a proactive approach to meeting the needs of male employees could help improve performance, talent attraction and retention, and reduce rates of absence due to sickness. It could even save lives.

This guide will provide practical guidance, with factors to consider and steps to take when evaluating your employee benefits package.

You can also speak to one of our expert consultants for a free review to find out whether your business is supporting men effectively.

In this guide we use the terms 'male' and 'men' throughout this document, but this information may also be relevant to some transgender, non-binary and intersex people who do not identify as men.



Why it's so important for businesses to focus on men's health

Some of the statistics around men's health are stark, and they can be exacerbated by a historical reluctance for men to seek help.

Research from the UK charity Men's Health Forum highlights that one in five men die before they reach the age of 65 in the UK³.

Up to 75% of all premature deaths due to heart disease are male – and 67% of men are overweight. As many as four out of five suicides are male.

These figures are frightening but also changeable.

“Looking at these statistics, we can see just how important it is for businesses to focus on men's health issues⁴.

Whilst many illnesses can be treated or cured if detected early, research shows that primary care consultations are 32% lower for men than women.”

Mark Fosh, Director of SME at Howden Employee Benefits & Wellbeing

In this guide we will highlight and offer practical steps that employers can take to help.

¹ <https://www.bupa.co.uk/business/~media/files/mms/bins-05128.pdf>
² <https://www.unum.co.uk/article/mens-health-in-the-workplace>
³ <https://www.menshealthforum.org.uk/scale-challenge>
⁴ <https://www.onrec.com/news/news-archive/five-ways-for-employers-to-improve-men%E2%80%99s-health-and-wellbeing-from-howden-employee>



MALE CANCERS

The harsh truth is that men are more likely to get cancer than women and more likely to die from it.

They are also less likely to seek help for cancer symptoms, even though detecting cancer early can dramatically increase the chances of successful treatment.

This means it is vital that employers create greater awareness around cancers that people are either embarrassed to talk about or don't know enough about.

For men, these include prostate cancer and testicular cancer.

Alarmingly men also have a 67% higher chance of dying from cancers which affect both men and women.

Prostate cancer

This is the most diagnosed cancer for men in the UK, where more than 400,000 men are living with the disease. However, 1 in 8 men in the UK and Europe are affected by the disease and only two-thirds of these cases are detected early⁵.

Testicular cancer

This is the most prevalent cancer amongst younger men. When caught early it is highly treatable and highly curable, with a survival rate in the UK of 95%.

But many men don't know how to check themselves – up to 44% according to one survey – and despite high profile work by a range of charities, it remains a taboo subject for some⁶.

How to support your employees

Understanding that cancer is different for every person and treating cancer as a recognised disability covered by the Equality Act 2010 will help to create a workplace where people feel supported.

Some other tips:

- Encourage people to attend cancer screenings, including in work hours if feasible. Some employers are now offering health screenings as part of their overall benefits packages.
- Take part in or organise events on awareness days to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of cancer and how to check for them.
- Consider programmes and events to tackle the major causes of cancer, including smoking and obesity. Men are more likely to smoke than women and more likely to be overweight from the age of 25 onwards.

⁵ <https://www.broadstone.co.uk/mens-health-week-2022-what-it-means-for-employers/>
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CONDITION OVERVIEW:

MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH



It's an age-old story that some men find it difficult to talk about their emotions and feelings, but that doesn't mean they are immune to struggling with their mental health.

Employers have an opportunity to nudge the behaviour of male employees by providing an environment in which mental health can be discussed openly at work and where help is easy to find.

One significant way employers can make a difference is simply by being more aware of mental health issues and the warning signs that often go unnoticed.

When people are suffering mental health issues their behaviour often changes.

Things to look out for include:

- Tiredness due to lack of sleep
- Anxiousness brought on by being more worried than usual
- Being irritable or even aggressive
- Being reclusive or shying away from social situations
- Taking more risks than usual

If you recognise any of these signs in a member of your team, it's a good idea to reach out and offer help and support.

Male suicide

Four out of five suicides in the UK are men.

It is already the biggest cause of death for men under 35 and there has been a sharp increase in the rate amongst men aged 35-64, according to the Men's Health Forum⁷.

The question is, does your employee benefits programme do enough to help?

A study by staff scheduling platform Planday recently revealed that more than a third of men don't feel like they can be open about their mental health issues at work – and two in five don't think their workplace has a positive impact on their mental health. So, action is needed.

“ We can all take action to live healthier, happier and longer lives. It is important to raise awareness of these issues and help businesses better support their male employees and remove any stigmas associated with mental illness.”

Mark Fosh,
Director of Howden Employee Benefits & Wellbeing

⁷ <https://www.menshealthforum.org.uk/scale-challenge>

Engagement and employee benefits

Open discussions in the workplace and making it easier for men to access health advice is crucial because studies have shown they may be more reluctant than women to seek help.

A study by the National Pharmacy Association (NPA) found that 90% of men didn't want to trouble their GP unless they thought there was a serious problem and were less likely than women to consult a doctor or pharmacist⁸.

BUPA's research reached similar conclusions and it says men are less likely to⁹:

- Adopt healthy behaviours
- Visit a GP when they aren't feeling well
- Talk about the symptoms of their illness to a doctor when they do see one

The workplace provides a perfect opportunity to engage with men around health issues and signpost where to find help.

Which employee benefits can help?

- Private Medical Insurance
- Income Protection
- Health screenings
- Wellbeing apps
- Critical Illness Cover
- Employer funded health screenings
- Virtual GP
- Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP)

“Consistently communicating to your staff about the issues that may be affecting them, shows a commitment to their wellbeing. Knowing that your employer is proactively looking to support, increases employees overall understanding and engagement with their benefits.”

Leo Savage, Global Wellbeing and Analytics Consultant at Howden Employee Benefits & Wellbeing

How to get your messaging right

Men sometimes have a perception that health is a 'women's issue'. So, the language used in health messaging is important if you want to reach everyone.

Older generations, especially, have grown up with a school ground mentality of 'big boys don't cry' and have lived in an environment shaped by the media's linking of health and beauty into one female-dominated sector.

Tips to make health messaging inclusive:

- Think carefully about the language you use to ensure it is inclusive when sending company-wide messaging
- Personalise messaging where possible, sending private messages where appropriate
- Make information available online and allow employees to access it anonymously
- Consider offering virtual support services which can also be accessed privately
- Help employees to understand how to access help when they are working from home
- Consider the use of more accessible language in messaging. In some circumstances an element of humour can take the embarrassment out of a topic. This has been used successfully by campaigns to tackle testicular cancer, for instance
- Talk to employees and ask them what they want to know, exploring differences between the genders – and develop campaigns with that information in mind



⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2012/nov/04/men-failing-seek-nhs-help>
⁹ <https://www.bupa.co.uk/business/-/media/files/mms/bins-05128.pdf>

Ten actions that employers can take right now

How can businesses support the men in their workplace and help reduce the stigma around talking about men's health & wellbeing?

How can I support my employees?

1. Share relevant information about their employee benefits and the services available. Consider the employee benefits you offer and ensure they are widely communicated so people know how to access them when needed.
2. Encourage male employees to attend medical appointments, both virtually and in-person, by offering flexibility for these to take place within work hours.
3. If your employees are sitting behind a desk most of the time, it's not great for their physical or mental health. Health and wellbeing initiatives are a great way to get everyone moving. Why not consider a sports club after work or subsidised gym memberships as a way to encourage everyone to look after their physical health.
4. Listen to your employees. The best way to have a highly engaged and relevant wellbeing programme, is to hear the needs of the employees before creating the strategy. By holding a survey to see what the needs of your staff are, you can then bring in the suitable support measures.
5. The stigma around speaking out about mental health issues persists, so it's important to bring issues out into the open. Mental health support is often available through health insurance cover. This typically includes an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which can offer employees access to specialist counselling. Don't forget there are lots of free resources available. Signpost employees to charities such as Samaritans, Mind and Mates in Mind for those working in the construction, transport, logistics and manufacturing industries.
6. Keep talking about men's health as it will promote action and can be a valuable way to support employees. National awareness campaigns, like #Menshealthweek and #Movember, are a great way for employers to cover these important topics. They are also a way for employees to show that men's health issues matter and create a feeling of community and support in the workplace.
7. Health screenings for men can help in the early detection of several medical conditions and diseases including prostate cancer, diabetes and heart disease. If you have Group Private Medical Insurance you may find that your policy covers various types of health assessments and/or screening services, or provides some discount for health checks with outside sources. Speak to us to find out more.
8. Train and educate line managers on supporting men's health & wellbeing to enable them to spot signs of poor mental and physical wellbeing. Ensure your managers are aware of resources or appropriate teams they can signpost their employees to.
9. Ensure employees know who to speak to at work if they have health concerns for instance an Occupational Health Nurse or Mental Health Ambassador or First Aider.
10. Encourage them to take breaks, switch off emails after work and provide help with their workloads. This can help to reduce stress.

What to do next

Now that you have read this guide and gained a better understanding of some of the health conditions and challenges men can face, it is time to review the support available within your workplace.

If you are looking to put benefits in place to support men in your workplace, speak to one of our experienced consultants for a free review. We'll tailor your employee benefits to your workplace, helping you to ensure your people have everything they need to face life's challenges and perform to the best of their abilities.

If you already have benefits in place, one of our experts will be able to check what support is already available to your male employees. We can assess whether your current benefits are fit for purpose, supporting your employees to be as healthy and productive as possible.

Taking action to support men's health will let your employees know they are valued and supported throughout their working lives, helping you to reduce sickness absence, boost performance and attract the best talent to your organisation.

To speak to one of our experts, please contact us at employeebenefits@howdengroup.com or call 020 3327 5700.

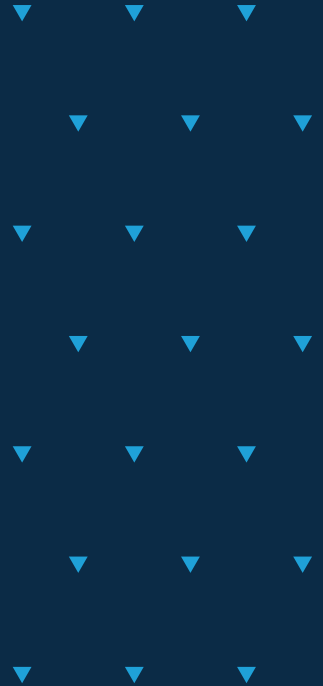
About us

Howden Employee Benefits & Wellbeing is part of the Howden Broking Group. Our expert team works with clients of all sizes to provide dedicated employee benefits & wellbeing consultancy.

We have won many industry awards for our work and are widely recognised for our innovative and creative people-first approach to benefit design. We understand that, especially in the wake of the pandemic, today's diverse workforce is looking for tailored employee benefits that meet ever-changing lifestyle and wellbeing needs. So, we design, implement, and manage your benefits to keep them relevant and fit for purpose - now and for the future.

Our global reach is crucial, too. Working across more than 40 territories means we can call on regional and international experts who understand the unique needs of your local culture and have access to the very best global pricing.

Our experts can help build a cost effective solution that is individual to your organisation, sector, and workforce.



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