



Public Health England annual conference: Inclusive growth

Prevention is a big word. It covers so many things, from junk food advertising to screening programmes. For businesses, prevention can feel like something complicated which sits more naturally with others: schools, parents, each of us as individual citizens.

But prevention is everyone's problem. Mind estimates that 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem each year. 1 in 4 employees have reported a physical health problem. That's a lot of pain. From a purely commercial point of view, that's a lot of hours spent at the doctor's, a lot of time spent ill at home.

When employers begin to think about their employees as the individuals behind these statistics, they can realise that the 35 hours of the working week can be perfect opportunities for intervention.

A business can decide to invest in wellbeing for lots of different reasons. For some, it's because they understand that looking after the people who make up their business is the right thing to do: they see that successful businesses can only thrive if they are based within a healthy, happy community.

For other businesses, the motivation can be more selfish. It's what I call enlightened self-interest. They know that protecting the workforce's wellbeing leads to happier, more productive employees who are less likely to leave. It's cynical, but never underestimate the power of bringing down recruitment costs.

This might not seem as compelling as the moral argument that business and community depend on each other. But we shouldn't be too quick to dismiss self-interest. I've always thought it as a way to get a foot in the door: it may not be the motivation that we'd like, but the most important thing is that the results are the same.

No matter what their reason for doing it, all businesses are faced with the question of where to start. That's often where Business in the Community comes in. With 35 years of experience in responsible business, we've led an evolution from cheque-writing to strategy-writing.

Business in the Community supports businesses to understand the concept of wellbeing and the ways to make a difference for employees. Most of all, we help businesses to understand that responsibility deserves to be integrated at a strategic level, rather than added as an afterthought.

We also help businesses to make good on these big promises. We deliver practical advice, training and support to make theory reality.

One of the ways that we do that is to partner with other experts. Over the last two years, we have published eight toolkits with Public Health England which cover difficult subjects like domestic abuse, suicide, sleep and drugs.

Most recently, we have worked with Public Health England and Mercer to find out the state of the nation's mental health through our Mental Health at Work survey.

This is the third time that we have run this project. Year on year, we are developing a stronger understanding of what employee mental health is like and – most importantly – what businesses can do to help.





We have also been expanding its scope. For the first time, this year's survey has included a specific focus on LGBT+ employees and the support they need, as well as the impact of financial problems on mental health.

The full report is being published later this month, but I wanted to share some of the most compelling results.

Firstly, only 60% of respondents felt that managers were concerned about their wellbeing. That's a staggering 40% that feel they don't have that support. If we think back to those one in four people who will struggle with their mental health over a year, that's a huge amount of the workforce who may need help. That's not even taking into account the 25% with physical health issues.

But this isn't down to apathy. Strikingly, 85% of managers know that the wellbeing of their team is their responsibility, but 68% feel that there are barriers to offering help, with the most common reason being that they need more training. Luckily, this seems to be something which managers are following up on: our survey shows that 30% of managers are now getting training, compared to 22% in 2016.

The newer areas of our survey show there's room for improvement there, too.

Two out of three respondents said that their mental health and wellbeing are affected by job security and the economy. In times of uncertainty like these, there's a lot for an employer to reflect on.

Similarly concerning was the news that only 60% of LGBT+ respondents feel able to be open about their sexuality at work – a fact which isn't surprising when you learn that almost 3 in 10 business leaders have been encouraged to hide the fact that they're LGBT+. Given that LGBT+ employees are more likely to have experienced a mental health issue this feels like an issue that employers should be dedicating time and resource to.

Our Mental Health at Work survey sets out the scale of the problem and shows that the tide is slowly turning: people are speaking out more, managers are getting the information they need and the workplace is accepting more and more that mental health is something to protect.

That's important progress inside an organisation. But do companies need to look beyond their own walls to really make a lasting difference?

One of the things that makes me proud of the survey is the partnerships that made it possible. PHE and Mercer played a huge part, but so did all of these organisations [slide]. By working together, we made this project more than another survey: it's a tool which has been informed by – and which will now help to inform – the leading voices on mental health in the UK.

BITC's strength lies in convening. It brings together business, community and policymakers to tackle the issues facing our society and find solutions that work for everyone. That's what inclusive growth means to me: progress without leaving any group behind.

It's great if the toolkits that we developed with PHE allow companies to make changes within their own organisation. But businesses don't exist in a vacuum. They're part of an ecosystem, living and dying alongside the communities around them. To tackle a problem like mental health – to really invest in prevention – they need to work with others.

Our members are proving this again and again.





Just look at what Anglian Water has done on wellbeing. They knew that they wanted to focus on wellbeing, but that their own organisation was just a drop in the ocean. Instead, they reached out to the companies in their supply chain, asking them to address wellbeing using their collective strength. I imagine a network of change popping up all over the east of England, affecting the men and women who work in those companies as well as their children, their friends and families.

The idea that a business is just one link in a chain is the foundation of our new Place strategy. It's based on the idea that change is best achieved through compound impact: programmes and stakeholders joining forces to make sure that their aims are aligned. It means businesses working with national and local stakeholders, government and community groups to really understand the communities they affect.

To think of the public, private and civil sectors as separate is to oversimplify. Together they affect the lives of citizens across the UK, they're overlapping: inextricable.

As Mayors and combined authorities plan their strategies for change, they need to think of business as a partner, a stakeholder to co-design with. Surveys and toolkits like the ones we have developed with PHE show that businesses are increasingly aware of the need to support their employees, but I know they're also waking up to the world outside head office.

Business is a resource that's waiting to be tapped.

I think this is becoming increasingly accepted. The Industrial Strategy and the Civil Society Strategy have set out the government's expectations of business and they're pretty significant. The latter even has a long list of qualities that make a business a responsible one. For me, the answer is a lot simpler.

Successful businesses can only thrive if they are based within a healthy, happy community.

