



mentalhealth MATTERS



Guidance for branches

UNISON believes there is both a human and financial benefit of investing in the mental health of staff. Staff working in mental health settings supporting those at their most vulnerable, have told us they sometimes find they are unable to put their own mental health first. It is important that employers recognise that the mental health of staff matters, and take proactive steps to work in partnership to improve resources and care.

This short guide is designed to help branches initiate discussions with employers about prioritising the mental health of staff. It is based on the “Thriving at work” Stevenson/Farmer review of mental health in the workplace. The review outlines each core standard that all employers should implement as a minimum, regardless of size or sector. Each core standard has been identified in the column on the left, with suggestions for branches listed to the right. The suggestions explore a number of methods that reflect joint working approaches and creative ways to encourage discussions.

Branches may wish to consider the points made in this guide, and then create an action plan to take to joint negotiating committees for further exploration.

Mental health core standards	Suggestions for branches
<p><i>Produce, implement and communicate a mental health at work plan</i></p>	<p>Explore whether there is existing health and wellbeing guidance in your workplace Does it include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Employee Assistance Programme • Counselling services
	<p>Assess the overall quality of the programme and identify if it delivers rapid access to mental health services Does it allow for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signposting to charities and/or affiliated organisations • Mental health champions or designated support officers
	<p>Is there a mental health at work policy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify whether it was created in partnership, as it will be important to ensure it reflects any concerns accurately • Explore how regularly it is reviewed and when it was created
	<p>Is there an existing health and wellbeing forum?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the main focus areas? • Is there a clear, informed strategy?
<p><i>Develop mental health awareness among employees</i></p>	<p>Mental health training for managers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversations to stress importance of having an open environment where staff feel able to disclose a mental health problem • Guidance on what managers should do when a mental health problem is disclosed • Work to be done jointly with HR and staff side <p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider producing materials that can be presented to employers and circulated at your workplace • Materials could include a calendar with key dates, such as World Mental Health day, and any planned health and wellbeing days
<p><i>Encourage open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling</i></p>	<p>Consider the best methods to engage management and staff, and encourage open conversations around mental health Ideas could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cards around the office inviting people to pause and have a break for conversations around mental health • Are staff or management able to share their experiences anonymously? – E.g. in staff bulletins • Promoting information around mindfulness and the positive impact it can have on staff at work

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage in conversations around stigma and help remove the negative impact it can have for those with mental health problems
<i>Provide your employees with good working conditions</i>	<p>Explore what flexible working processes are in place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was this information agreed in partnership, and is it easily accessed? Explore whether there are short term flexible working plans in place Is the working environment considered? E.g. separate area for lunch and rest breaks <p>Are these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fairly applied Relevant and up to date
<i>Promote effective people management</i>	<p>Identify what policies already exist</p> <p>These could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies on absence management Attendance – mental health should become a core part of this policy, to ensure this approach becomes embedded in workplace culture Are work life balance and wellbeing questions included in weekly/monthly check in?
<i>Routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing</i>	<p>Is there an existing health and wellbeing survey?</p> <p>Does it capture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Views of staff on key mental health and wellbeing issues? Any extra information not currently captured in the NHS staff survey Suggest conducting the survey in partnership <p>Review results and put measures in place to ensure feedback is actioned and any changes implemented.</p>

Enhanced standards

In addition to the mental health core standards, the review also discusses enhanced standards that Employers can strive to achieve. These discuss areas including increased transparency, and tailored in house mental health support. Branches are encouraged to explore

More information on UNISON's mental health campaign along with resources, can be found at unison.org.uk/mentalhealth

The links below may be useful starting points for Employers, when considering the mental health standards, and how best to adopt them.

Thriving at work report <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/thriving-at-work-a-review-of-mental-health-and-employers>)

Mental Health at Work Gateway www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk

Time to Change Employers pledge <https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/get-involved/get-your-workplace-involved/employer-pledge>

Head first. Online resource by NHS Employers, designed for the ambulance service
<http://www.nhsemployers.org/headfirst>

Training for staff and line managers, by the charity Mind
<https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/training-consultancy/>

Mind's Workplace Wellbeing Index <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/workplace-wellbeing-index/>

Mental health foundation's employer checklist for creating mentally healthy workplaces
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/how-support-mental-health-work>

For branches

UNISON mental health bargaining guide
<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2018/05/25005.pdf>

UNISON's mental health campaign page with reports, resource pack, campaign materials and more
unison.org.uk/mentalhealth

Please email any queries to health@unison.co.uk