

Workplace wellbeing efforts 'barely' scratching the surface of looming wellbeing crisis

11 months ago



Almost three-quarters of companies now offer employee wellbeing programmes. Despite this, 83% of professionals state they've experienced mental ill health at work in the past 12 months – with more than a quarter encountering it 'regularly'.

[Robert Walters'](#) survey of 3,000 professionals in the UK & Ireland recently revealed that despite employers' best efforts to enhance wellbeing offerings like employee wellbeing programmes e.g. mental health support (71%), Cycle-to-work schemes (65%), Healthcare vouchers (48%) and free or discounted gym membership (43%) – they still may not be effectively addressing the current crisis.

A recent [survey](#) by Ipsos indicated that mental health has recently overtaken cancer and obesity, to become the most common health problem Britons worry about.

Habiba Khatoon, Director of Robert Walters Midlands: "While it's encouraging to see that many employers have been ramping up their wellbeing benefits – our research shows that the interventions currently on offer are falling short in meaningfully supporting professional's wellbeing."

Are wellbeing benefits a box-ticking exercise?

Less than a fifth of professionals claim to have accessed the mental health support provided by their employer in the past 8 months.

When asked why they hadn't, 58% stated that these types of benefits feel more like a 'box-ticking

exercise' rather than provide any meaningful support – with a further 29% stating the services they've been offered need to be improved.

Habiba comments: "Employee wellbeing programs usually involve things like mental health / mindful apps, physical health checks and supplements – whilst these interventions can be useful, they put a plaster on the real cause of mental ill health – which can be something as simple as increased stress or professionals feeling overworked."

More nails in the coffin

Not only have most professionals experienced poor mental health at work, but the rate of economic inactivity in the UK currently sits above last years' estimates at [21.9%](#). Partially attributable to large numbers off on long-term sick – of which mental health conditions make up a large percentage.

To add further to worries, the UK already loses around [£138bn](#) every year due to workplace sickness.

Habiba comments: "With past aspersions of the UK adopting a 'sicknote culture' it's important employers can not only empathise with, but adequately support their employee's wellbeing to avoid footing the cost of increased employee absences."

Demand for wellbeing interventions

29% of all UK professionals consider employee wellbeing programmes the most important wellbeing & lifestyle benefit when they're considering a job offer. Increasing to two-fifths (43%) of HR professionals and 31% of those working within General Management.

Interestingly – a third of C-Suite professionals state the same, selecting wellbeing programmes over travel & retail discounts, healthcare vouchers and free/discounted gym memberships.

Habiba adds: "All professionals are coming forward to demand that their employers do more to support their wellbeing at work – this isn't an issue that's limited to a specific industry or job-level. But the jury is out on whether the steps employers are then taking to heed their demands are having the desired effect."

Employer efforts must be recentred

A worrying 67% of UK professionals don't think their employer is doing enough to meaningfully promote employee wellbeing – whilst almost two-fifths of senior leaders feel their increased spending on wellbeing benefits is going by largely unnoticed.

Habiba concludes: "There is no overnight solution for improving employee mental health. But employers must be dedicated to the creating a culture of open discussion and empathy in their workplace. This means adopting strategies such as mindful work practices e.g. respecting workhours and holidays, encouraging regular breaks and offering regular check-ins for employees.

"Those businesses who dedicate themselves to going the extra mile in supporting their staff's mental health and wellbeing now, will reap the rewards of increased employee loyalty for years to come."