

An Employer's Ultimate Guide:

What you should know before implementing mental health and wellbeing services



How mental health impacts the workplace

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression and fatigue which impacted some employees' ability to do their best work. But these challenges will likely outlast the pandemic, making it important for employers to take action.

Since the start of the pandemic, demand for mental health services has rocketed, with The Lancet¹ recently reporting that up to 10 million people in England will require new or additional mental health support as a result of the pandemic.

Alongside this, the Office for National Statistics² reported that almost one in five people was reporting symptoms of depression in the crisis – doubling from almost one in ten in the previous year.

Deloitte published extensive research³ in May 2021 which showed that:



38% of UK workers had their wellbeing negatively impacted by COVID lockdowns

This mirrors research from CIPD⁴ that showed that stress-related absence from work in particular has increased,



37% of respondents saying that stress-related absence had increased in the last year.

The research also showed the financial cost of mental health on employers, with the average private sector employee representing £1,652 per year of mental health cost. This figure rose to £1,716 per year in the public sector.

¹ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(20\)30288-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(20)30288-7/fulltext)

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/coronavirusanddepressioninadultsgreatbritain/june2020>

³ <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/consulting/articles/working-during-lockdown-impact-of-covid-19-on-productivity-and-wellbeing.html>

⁴ <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/supporting-mental-health-workplace-return#gref>

The mental health charity Mind have found⁵ that more than half of adults (60%) and over two thirds of young people (68%) said their mental health got worse during COVID.

The Royal Society for Public Health in the UK reported that home working is having an impact on people's mental health, with:

67%

saying they felt less connected to their colleagues

56%

saying they found it harder to switch off.

Case study 1

Unaddressed mental health: Elena's perspective on feeling she has no options

For Elena, each day feels like a long and arduous climb. Balancing a fulltime job whilst raising two school-age children, both learning remotely during the pandemic, takes all of her physical and emotional strength.

Each day is a hectic balancing act of work Zoom calls, helping her children with schoolwork, cleaning and meal preparation. Her supervisor just assigned her a new project which seems daunting. She's not sleeping well and struggles to maintain her energy levels.

She's worried about her aging parents and their potential vulnerability to the coronavirus. Not able to see her friends in person as much, she has less emotional support.

All of this adds up to near constant feelings of pressure, loneliness, worry and negative thoughts – a heightened emotional state that she can't escape. She has already used up all of her paid sick time to deal with stress. She wants to ask for help but is afraid her employer or friends will find out that she has mental health needs and that she may be judged.

She has heard from a friend that no therapists near her have any free appointments for at least three months and she will have to wait to see someone.

Yet despite this, only a third of respondents had been offered support with their mental health (34%) from their employer.

These patterns of increased mental health issues have an inevitable impact on sickness rates and the demand for services provided by, or through, employers as increasingly unwell and desperate employees seek urgent help.

Case study 2

Addressed mental health: Eli's perspective on getting the care he needs

Across town, Eli is facing similar feelings of anxiety and pressure. Yet Eli recently signed up for an online mental health programme sponsored by his employer. Through his smartphone, he can access self-guided content – including videos, exercises, clinical knowledge and interactive learning tools – which help him better understand and manage his issues.

Eli doesn't have to wait for an appointment or worry about his work colleagues finding out. He can access support on his own time, anonymously. Each day is a little bit better. He sleeps better, has more energy, feels more resilient and able to be more productive and work through challenges.

These examples highlight the effectiveness of digital therapeutics in helping people cope with a range of mental health needs outside of traditional care settings. They also highlight the increasingly important role employers have in supporting their employees' mental health and wellbeing, supporting them to be more productive while reducing absenteeism and employee turnover.

Read how THG implemented a digital workplace wellbeing solution

⁵https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/5929/the-mental-health-emergency_a4_final.pdf

⁶<https://www.rsph.org.uk/about-us/news/survey-reveals-the-mental-and-physical-health-impacts-of-home-working-during-covid-19.html>

What is the return on investment for mental health benefits?

Providing mental health services to employees, especially services that are based on clinically-validated, outcomes-based approaches, can have a powerful impact on each employee and easily exceed the investment – they can produce significant benefits for the employers.

These benefits can include reducing sickness absence rates, helping employees who become unwell to return to work more quickly and can prove to be a differentiator in attracting and retaining talent against competitors.

The debate that is often had inside organisations is about the cost of face-to-face treatments, which inevitably are limited in their reach by physical capacity of practitioners and working day hours, and digital or online solutions that are available 24/7 and more scalable to help more people.

The return on investment in mental health support can be looked at in both financial terms – costs of sickness, reduced productivity caused by COVID-related illness, compared to the cost of investing in additional support – as well as non-financial measures, which include levels of employee satisfaction and engagement if they feel valued and supported at work.



A recent SilverCloud Health survey showed that 38% of respondents reported missing time at work due to COVID-related stress and on average it is estimated that this amounts to 6.7% of all hours worked or around 30 mins per day per employee.

The results from SilverCloud programme users brings these costs into sharp focus and can show the difference that using an effective digital solution can have on employee wellbeing and sickness rates, recovery rates and overall productivity.

The results show that:

91%

Amongst a large group of NHS users, who treated anxiety and depression with SilverCloud programmes, there were strong clinical improvements and recovery that over a 12-month period were 91% likely to be cost-effective⁷.

3 months

More than half of those with a diagnosis of anxiety and/or depression recovered after three months when using SilverCloud programmes.

85%

of SilverCloud users show improvement in depression and anxiety symptoms.

65%

of users experience clinically significant improvement when they use SilverCloud programmes.

56%

with a clinical diagnosis of depression or anxiety were diagnosis-free at three months when using SilverCloud programmes.

What are some of the barriers to getting help?

A key factor in controlling mental health-related costs in the workplace is putting proactive, early intervention measures in place. Being able to stop the progression of symptoms that could lead to more severe cases, and as a result the need for more costly and disruption interventions, can make a huge difference to the employee and the costs on the organisation.

However, many people experiencing mental health symptoms may not seek treatment for a variety of reasons, which can lead to their mental health issues going undiagnosed and untreated. Often this reluctance to seek help can be tied to feelings of stigma, especially in speaking out about mental health in the workplace.

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⁷ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41746-020-0293-8>

According to a recent survey⁸, employees are three times more likely to discuss their physical health over mental illness at work.

Only 14% of 2,000 workers polled said they felt comfortable discussing their mental health worries at work, compared with 42% of workers who felt able to talk about physical conditions.



Another survey reported that nearly 80 percent of UK adults⁹ would be uncomfortable discussing their mental health with their employer.

People are often worried that if their friends, colleagues and family find out they have a mental health issue, they will be viewed in a negative way, or perhaps even discriminated against. This stigma lead many people to avoid in-person mental health treatment, such as going to speak to their GP, seeing a counsellor or therapist or attending group therapy sessions.

COVID has also seen a huge increase in the demand for mental health support at work and from the NHS, which means that waiting list for talking therapies can be long – over a year in some parts of the UK.

Digital therapeutics: flexible and on-demand

There are limits to how effective the traditional ways of supporting employees will be as we tackle the huge impact of COVID.

Face-to-face health services are under huge pressure and many people are still working away from their normal place of work and juggling a variety of home, work and caring responsibilities at a time of heightened stress and pressure.

It is critical therefore that employers play a role in helping employees overcome these barriers to provide more flexible options that people can access virtually, on their devices, at times that suits them and can fit around their busy lives.

Accessing these services in an anonymous, confidential, secure and self-managed way puts employees more in control of their care and keeps them engaged. In SilverCloud's recent study, 78% of employees said they preferred online mental health services and support over in-person services.



Another 60% said they would be more likely to use their mental health-related benefits if they had the option to access their benefits at any time from their smartphone or other digital devices.

This is where digital therapeutics, based on clinically appropriate care and proven clinical outcomes, offer enormous potential to impact lives – keeping employees productive and engaged and reducing turnover.

Digital therapeutics like SilverCloud Health's platform can address the entire spectrum of mental health and behavioural care challenges, from skill building to help with everyday emotional health issues like problems with sleeping and stress, to help tackle more challenging conditions such as depression and anxiety. Hybrid or alternative approaches to employee counselling through virtual therapy can address the growing mental health needs we are facing, especially in the light of COVID.



Cognitive behavioural therapy delivered digitally, in the form of interactive content, tools and videos, eliminate issues around scheduling and lack of NHS support availability.

Digital therapeutic platforms are designed to be equivalent to face-to-face therapy, giving them tools to better understand their symptoms, recommend activities to help relax, mindfulness exercises and ways to help build resilience skills to manage one's mood and emotional wellbeing.

SilverCloud Health's digital mental health platform is an example of a digital therapeutics platform that can be delivered in both a completely self-guided or supported approach. Additionally, content that encourages and nurtures positive behaviour change and lifestyle management helps people better adhere to prescription medications, whether for acute or chronic health conditions.

⁸<https://www.qcs.co.uk/tackling-mental-health-stigma-in-the-workplace/>

⁹<https://www.babylonhealth.com/c/mental-health-perceptions/>

SilverCloud Health: our perspective

SilverCloud Health's digital mental health platform simplifies implementing an employee mental health and wellbeing programme, enabling employers to more effectively get their employees enrolled in as little as four weeks.

This helps employers eliminate challenges around lack of employee utilisation of benefits.

SilverCloud's customer support team works with employers to integrate SilverCloud's solution into their care pathways and to tailor the intensity of clinical interventions with individual needs.

Choosing a mental health solution that works

Employers need to consider what support they are providing in three key areas:

- **Prevention** – helping employees take action to stay healthy
- **Early intervention** – helping employees to respond quickly and effectively when warning signs develop
- **Ongoing support** – helping employees maintain their mental health every day, including as they return to the workplace

In order to get a digital mental health partner to help with this effort, employers should consider the following criteria:

- The most effective behavioural health approaches meet individuals where they are and allow on-demand access to insights and tools, at times that suit, on their own devices. This allows people to overcome barriers around access to help and support that have impacted traditional care settings and puts them in control.
- Mental health services offered through a digital solution must be backed by robust clinical evidence to ensure that the approaches to care are credible and impactful. Evidence-based interventions are validated through rigorous group studies and shown to be effective in reducing mental health symptoms in a clinically significant way.
- Digital programmes should be personalised and tailored to each individual's need to ensure employees participate and stay engaged. Ideally, the solution should offer channels that are both (a) assisted by a professional supporter who can tailor each individual's care journey based on their needs, and (b) self-guided, without a supporter, typically for people with less acute symptoms who may not need guidance.

- Behavioural health programmes need to be available to help with situations relevant to the workplace, such as stress, financial worries and work/life balance. SilverCloud Health's digital mental health programmes include modules to help people cope with enhanced stresses and worries related to COVID-19, school-aged children and financial challenges.
- Content must support a variety of conditions across the mental health continuum, from resilience, sleep and stress to anxiety and depression.
- The solution should follow a preventative and proactive approach, helping to provide early interventions that prevent symptoms from worsening and helping users get on top of their mental health issues.

In summary, the right digital behavioural health solution can lead to better business outcomes and reduced costs to the employer.

SilverCloud Health can help

The health of your employees is the health of your bottom line. We help employers deliver mental health tools, programmes and support for a wide range of organisations who have employees with different needs.

SilverCloud Health was born out of a collaboration between Trinity College Dublin and Mater University Hospital and is rooted in over 18 years of research that proves it works. It is trusted by 100s of employers, covering tens of millions of employees' lives to help meet their mental health needs.

SilverCloud Health is the world's leading digital mental health company enabling employers to deliver our clinically validated on-demand programmes that improves outcomes, increases access and scales while reducing costs.

Those who have invested in SilverCloud are getting 24/7, on-demand, convenient and confidential support for employees, both to proactively stay well and to recover when things go wrong. The feedback they provide has one over-riding message: the SilverCloud programmes work.

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