



# Supporting staff with long-term conditions.

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Workplace  
Health and Wellbeing **Academy**

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# Introduction.

**Here, we focus on the different ways that you can create a more positive and supportive working environment for employees with long-term conditions.**

**It is estimated that over 15 million people in England are living with a long-term condition.**

As the population ages, there is expected to be an increase, and people's needs in the workplace are therefore likely to grow.

Evidence suggests that being employed helps to reduce social isolation and can provide a sense of identity and purpose, as well as an income. Whereas being unemployed is linked with poorer health.

Combined costs from unemployment and sickness absence are estimated to be around £100 billion each year.

Employers and managers need to find ways to support their employees to remain in the workplace. There is increasing evidence that targeted health support can help keep people in employment, and in turn improve their health and wellbeing.

If positive steps are taken early, this can go a long way in boosting work productivity, reducing levels of work absence and supporting the economy.



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**What are long-term conditions?**

**Making the right work adjustments**

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**Communication is key**



## What are long-term conditions?

Long-term conditions (also known as chronic diseases) are conditions where there is no cure, and may be managed over an extended period of time with medication or other treatments.

### Examples of long-term conditions include:

- depression
- heart disease
- kidney disease
- HIV
- cancer
- muscle, bone and joint problems
- diabetes
- chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

### Of those surveyed in the 2019 Annual Population Survey:



**44%**

of people aged 20 to 39 had a long-term mental health condition



**38%**

of people aged 40 and 59 had diabetes



**13%**

of people aged 60 to 64 had a long-term condition related to their heart, blood pressure or circulation



## Making the right work adjustments

Creating the right work environment and culture can be a great step forward in supporting colleagues with health conditions to stay in work. To help with this Head of Advice and Occupational Health Services at Bupa UK, Kirstin Newman, recommends having the right policies and procedures in place, such as a sickness absence policy. “This sets a framework for ensuring a consistent approach and fair treatment for employees who may, for example, need to take sick leave.”

Employees who have long-term conditions may also be covered by statutory protection that requires their employers to make reasonable workplace adjustments. More information on what’s covered in the Equality Act 2010 can be found on the GOV.UK website.

Even with the best intentions and support structures in place Newman admits that it’s not always easy for managers to provide the level of support required in some cases.



**It is a challenge to balance supporting people with the commercial realities of delivering for customers and hitting your bottom line.**

**We provide support to people to access appropriate treatment and services, understand the options available to them and provide them with clear information throughout, including being open about business impacts.**

Kirstin Newman, Head of Advice and Occupational Health Services, Bupa UK.



# Employee benefit support

Stress and mental ill-health are two of the most common causes of long-term absence in the UK. People are often reluctant to seek the help they need, but there are many things that employers can do to address this.

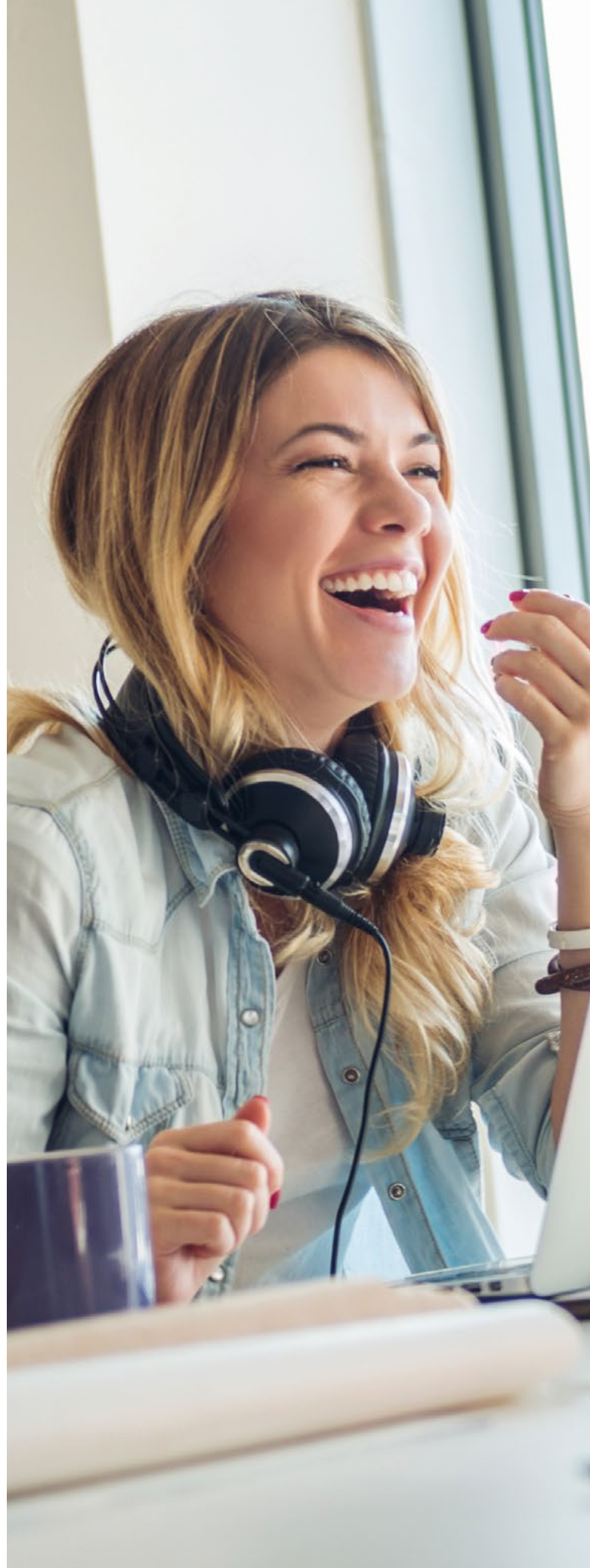
An employee assistance programme (EAP) is a valuable way of supporting people with conditions like stress and mental ill-health. “Our employees for example, have access to Healthy Minds, which helps to manage mental wellbeing in the workplace through a wide range of confidential services,” says Kirstin Newman.

“It aims to offers employees a wide range of around-the-clock confidential services and expert advice and support, so they feel reassured.”

“We also offer a quality in-house occupational health service which supports both employees and managers with quality clinical advice at pace and have trained mental health first aiders across the business,” adds Kirstin.

Another successful employee initiative that Bupa has introduced is a Personal Energy programme. This is a resilience-building training programme that helps employees to manage the everyday pressures of work and life.

Bupa has a Resilience Brilliance podcast, where people share their powerful and personal stories of resilience to help others. We also have a workplace mental health page to support managers in improving the wellbeing of their team. It has information on how to support employees with mental health problems, and advice on how to talk about mental health with members of your team.





## Communication is key

While policies and procedures and employee focused initiatives are important, having supportive line managers is critical to getting the best outcomes for both the employee and business.

“Making the time for supportive but focussed conversations, being open about the challenges and seeking early advice from human resources and occupational health is recommended,” says Newman.

Employers also need to be able to recognise the early signs that an employee may be struggling at work due to ill-health. “If they are withdrawn or their behaviour is uncharacteristic – talk to them and ask open questions and seek advice,” adds Newman.

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**Making the time for supportive but focussed conversations, being open about the challenges and seeking early advice from human resources and occupational health is recommended.**

Kirstin Newman, Head of Advice and Occupational Health Services, Bupa UK.

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