



Workplace Health:

# A Worthwhile Investment





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# Executive Summary

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Sickness absence costs UK businesses an estimated £17 billion a year.<sup>1</sup> A healthy workforce is therefore vital if the UK is to compete successfully in an increasingly competitive global economy.

Evidence shows that employers who invest in appropriate workplace health initiatives to support the health and wellbeing of their employees have the potential to see a significant return on their investment.<sup>2</sup> Government policy could also make a huge difference; encouraging more employers to invest in a broader range of initiatives to support key public health goals could deliver more than £60 billion savings for the public purse.<sup>3</sup>

Independent research commissioned by Bupa among UK employees shows that while some British businesses are taking steps towards actively promoting workplace health, only 15% of workers feel that their company has the health and wellbeing of its people firmly embedded in its culture. And while over half of respondents (56%) expect their employer to invest in the health and wellbeing of all employees, only 16% say that their company is currently doing so.

Further research and changes to government policy will help, but there are important steps that employers can take now to respond to the challenges ahead.

This report reflects the opinions of the UK workforce and shows how important workplace health initiatives are to increasing productivity and improving health and wellbeing. It states that for workplace health initiatives to be effective, they need to be central to an organisation's culture.

## Key Findings

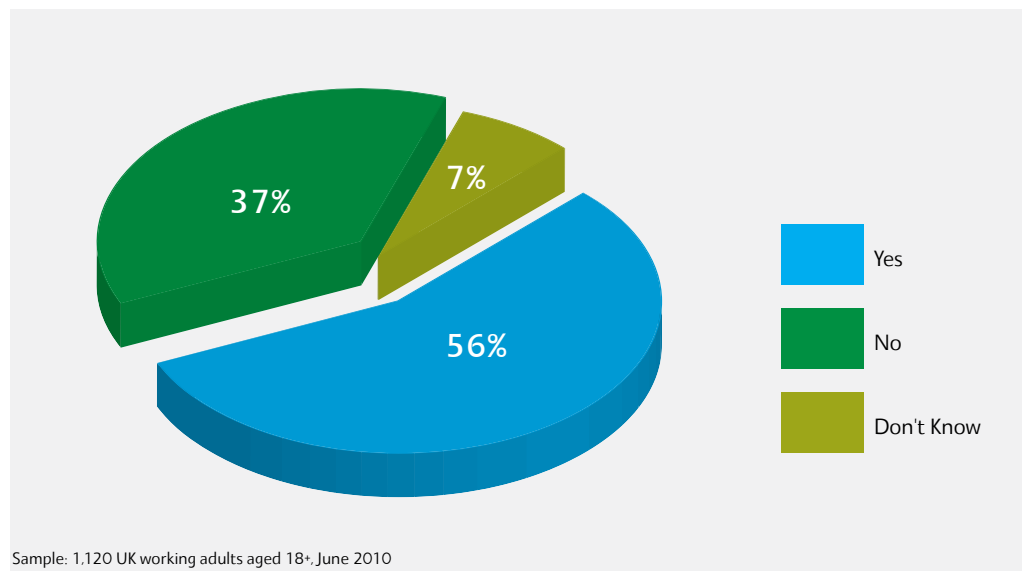
**56% of all workers expect their employers to invest in health and wellbeing**

### Workplace health initiatives

Independent research commissioned by Bupa into the attitudes and opinions of the UK workforce indicates that over half of all workers (56%) expect their employers to invest in their health and wellbeing. Despite this, only 16% of staff say their company has invested money in the health and wellbeing of all employees, with large companies (24%) investing more compared to small to medium enterprises (9%). With most of the UK's 29 million workers spending a considerable proportion of their waking hours at work, workplace health initiatives can make a real difference to healthy living.

Do you expect your employer to invest in your health and wellbeing?

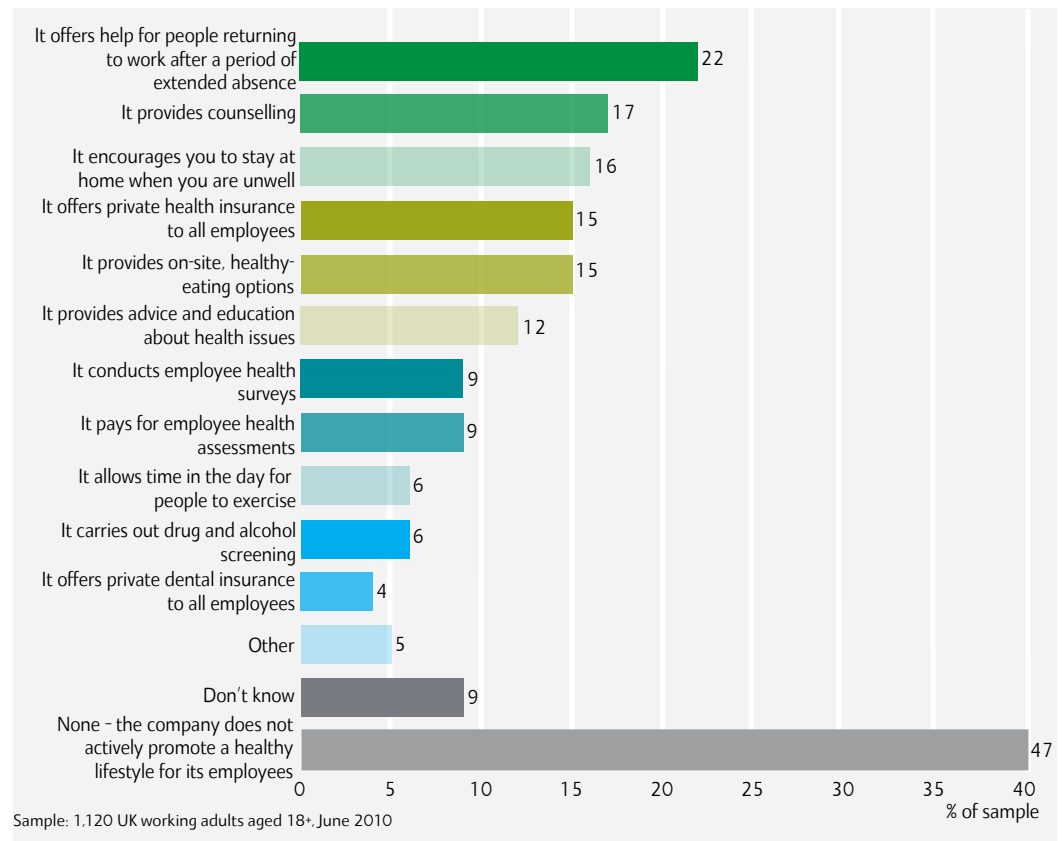
Chart 1



Some organisations are taking steps towards actively promoting a healthy lifestyle for their employees. However, very few offer a range of healthcare initiatives. For example, only 12% of organisations provide advice and education about health issues, 9% carry out employee health surveys, 6% allow time for people to exercise during the day and 15% offer private health insurance to all employees.

## How does your company promote a healthy lifestyle?

Chart 2



**Only 15% of UK workers currently feel that their company has the health and wellbeing of all its employees firmly embedded in its culture**

### Company culture

Some companies are ahead of the game, investing in a comprehensive range of initiatives to support employee health and wellbeing. Others lag behind or see workplace health as a benefit or 'perk'. Although every small step can make a difference to employee health and wellbeing, it is vital that workplace health initiatives are embedded in an organisation's culture to ensure they deliver value to employees and a return on investment for employers.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately just 15% of UK workers currently feel their company has the health and wellbeing of all its employees firmly embedded in its culture and a further two fifths (40%) do not think their company actively promotes a healthy lifestyle.

Ensuring workplace health initiatives are central to a company's culture and aligned with business objectives is likely to lead to a healthier workforce, which in turn is likely to have a direct impact on productivity.<sup>5</sup>

44% of people who turn up for work feeling unwell say they operate at half or less of their normal productivity levels

### Productivity

With improvements in technology, our working lives are no longer confined to any particular workplace. Bupa’s research found that nearly half (49%) of workers who have taken sick leave in the last 12 months have continued to work in some way while they have been off work. Roughly a third have read (32%) and responded (28%) to work emails. One in four (25%) have taken work-related calls. One in five (19%) has gone a step further and worked online while 15% have conducted background research or reading and a worrying 2% of workers have even hosted meetings from their sick bed.

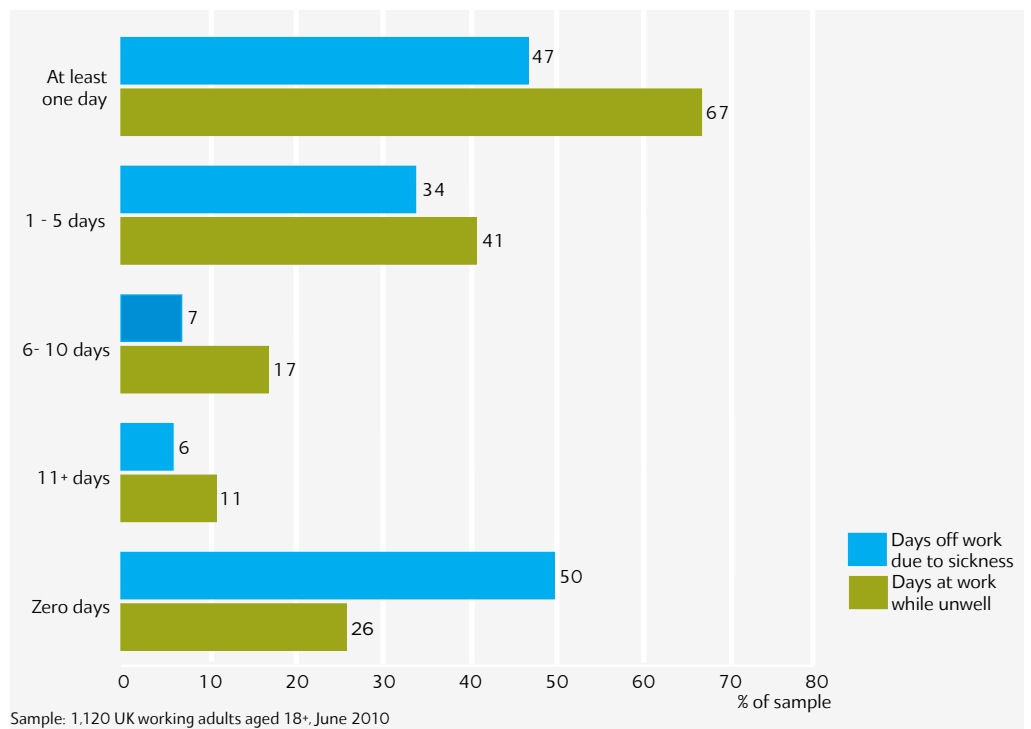
However, the research also reveals that among those who turn up for work when unwell, almost nine out of ten (89%) admit they are less than totally productive, 10% say they are able to carry on at normal levels of productivity and 44% of people who turn up for work feeling unwell say they operate at half or less than their normal productivity levels.

Improving productivity and employee performance is just one of the benefits that employers can expect to see if they invest in workplace health. This is a key motivator for companies of all sizes. Other benefits could include: staff retention; improved employee engagement; cost control; reduced absenteeism.<sup>6</sup>

This research demonstrates that the UK workforce expects their employers to invest in their health and wellbeing. However, at present it is evident that although some steps are being taken to implement workplace health initiatives, more needs to be done to ensure it is part of an organisation’s broader health and wellbeing strategy and aligned with company culture.

Employee sickness days spent in and out of the workplace

Chart 3





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# Recommendations

For employers, the incentive for taking action on workplace health is compelling. A review of academic studies shows that the return on investment for some workplace health initiatives can range from £2 for every £1 spent (1:2) to £34 for every £1 spent (1:34).<sup>7</sup>

Workplace health initiatives are suitable for companies of all sizes, easy to implement and need not cost money. The key to success is embedding them in the culture of an organisation.

## Ensure senior management buy-in

Getting involvement from the top of the organisation is crucial. Employees need to know that senior managers believe in a healthy workplace. One way to do this is to establish a health management board including senior executives to embed workplace health initiatives throughout the company.

## Understand the health profile of the workforce and involve employees

The more an employer understands the health of their employees, the better placed they are to identify the initiatives most suited to their needs. Health risk appraisals and health assessments can help employers identify trends or health hotspots within an organisation. Employee engagement surveys can indicate hotspots where there may be high levels of stress or management problems.

## Ensure clear objectives are in place

Before putting workplace health initiatives in place, employers need to be clear about their objectives, for example, to be seen as a caring employer, reduce absence, improve job satisfaction or recruitment and retention.

Workplace health initiatives can deliver against more than one of these objectives, but employers need to be clear about their priorities so that they can put the most appropriate initiatives in place. A good workplace health programme identifies specific targets, measures progress, engages managers and employees and

has an appropriate management and governance framework.

## Find innovative ways to involve employees

Employers need to involve employees in deciding which workplace health initiatives to put in place and how to implement them. Research shows that employers who do this experience better outcomes, because employees feel more engaged and are more inclined to participate.

Employers can involve employees by setting up working groups, distributing posters and newsletters, involving a trade union, setting up focus groups and carrying out surveys. Research shows that using incentives can be effective in encouraging employees to get involved, for example, competitions, prizes and vouchers.

## Ensure staff participation

There is a clear link between the number of employees who participate in health at work initiatives and its cost-effectiveness. Many initiatives have fixed costs, so it makes sense that the more employees who take part, the lower the cost.

There are various ways employers can encourage employees to take part in workplace health initiatives. Employee engagement is key - the more involved they feel, the more likely they are to participate. Employers should also invest time and energy in promoting the benefits of workplace health initiatives for example, poster campaigns, leaflets and emails.

## Measure results

In order to measure the return on investment, employers should track key metrics such as: levels of sickness absence, including reasons for absence and the direct and indirect costs; productivity and employee satisfaction with work and management; ill-health, including health risk and lifestyle issues such as smoking and alcohol; and wellbeing. This can be done using health and wellbeing surveys and

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absence management tools. Most employers do not currently measure all of these on a regular basis, but without a clear picture of 'before' and 'after', it can be difficult to assess what difference the initiative and investment has delivered.

### **Continually improve**

Employers should ensure they check how well the initiative is working at various stages so that they can continually refine and improve it.

# References

1 Confederation of British Industry (2010), On the path to recovery: Absence and workplace health survey

2 Healthy Work: Evidence into Action (2010), page 46, fig 9

3 Working for a healthier tomorrow (2008), Dame Carol Black's review of the health of the workforce, p53

4 Healthy Work: Evidence into Action (2010), p. 45

5 Healthy Work: Evidence into Action (2010), p. 11

6 Healthy Work: Evidence into Action (2010), p.18

7 Healthy Work: Evidence into Action (2010), page 46, fig 9

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## Contacts

To find out how Bupa can help your company stay healthy, call 0800 600 500 or visit [www.bupa.co.uk/business](http://www.bupa.co.uk/business). Calls may be recorded and may be monitored.



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