

Workplace Health & Wellbeing Report 2023

Current Trends & Insights





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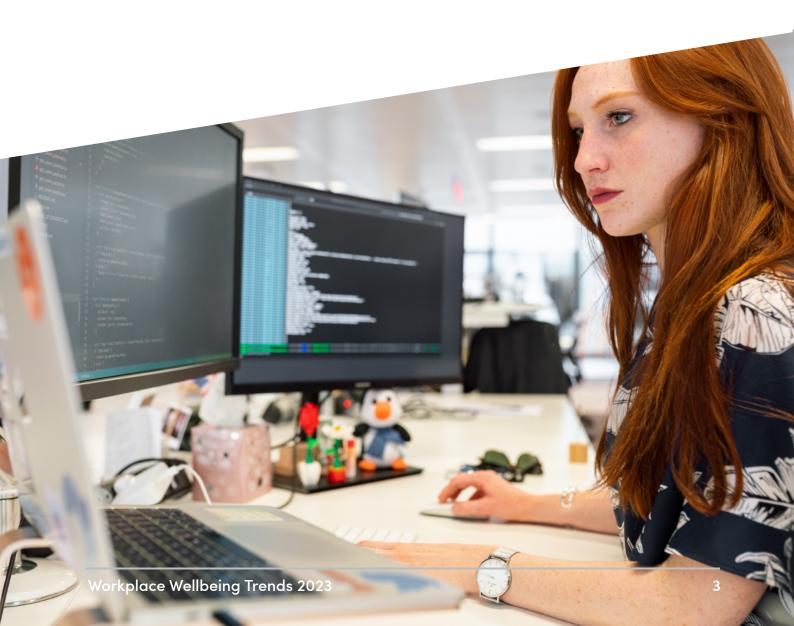


Workplace Health & Wellbeing 2023

Overview

Workplace wellbeing efforts remain continuously important for fostering a healthy and supportive work environment. Caring for employee health should be a fundamental standard, prioritising overall wellbeing and work-life balance over short-term productivity gains. It is crucial for businesses to go beyond superficial measures and address specific health needs, avoiding "wellbeing washing." However, HR departments are exhausted, too, with 44% of HR professionals experiencing stress or mental ill-health due to their work.

This paper summarises the most recent trends in wellbeing HR efforts and addresses new and innovative solutions that may aid and simplify HR's efforts to tend to their employees' needs.





01 Physical Wellbeing

Recent trends in physical and mental wellbeing in the workplace emphasise the significance of comprehensive support and awareness. Disturbing statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics reveal a concerning situation in the US: In January 2022, the number of workers unable to attend work due to illness, injury, or medical issues doubled from the previous year, reaching a staggering 7.8 million. Additionally, health-related reasons caused 4.2 million full-time workers to reduce their hours, nearly tripling from January 2021. Similar alarming statistics have emerged in the UK, where the number of individuals not working due to long-term sickness has reached a record high of 2.5 million, prompting the government to take significant steps in addressing workplace wellbeing. Meanwhile, in the US, over 50 million workers chose to leave their jobs last year, driven by the pursuit of improved work-life balance, flexibility, higher compensation, and a positive organisational culture. The rise in sickness absence can be attributed to the impact of the pandemic, mental health issues and musculoskeletal conditions. These numbers underscore the urgent need to prioritise employee wellbeing by implementing enhanced workplace health programs and support systems. It is crucial to provide readily accessible digital resources, such as mental health and musculoskeletal condition management apps, while also promoting practices like maintaining proper posture, correctly setting up home workstations, taking regular breaks, and seeking medical advice for pain management.



01 Physical Wellbeing

Health programs are not a one-size-fits-all. For instance, workplace education about menopause has gained attention, acknowledging the challenging decisions surrounding Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT). Workplace support and coaching have proven beneficial in assisting women during menopause, addressing cognitive difficulties and self-management. Wellbeing programs and initiatives that focus on women's health are critical for promoting overall employee wellness and creating an inclusive workplace environment.

Furthermore, the societal and economic burden of chronic insomnia is being recognised. With approximately 8% of adults affected, chronic insomnia leads to significant workplace productivity losses, averaging 45–54 days per person. The economic impact is profound, with estimated annual losses to national GDP ranging from 0.64% to 1.31%, amounting to billions of dollars. In light of these trends, it is evident that insomnia remains a costly concern across the world.

These developments underscore the need for proactive support, awareness, and investments in physical wellbeing to enhance employee wellness and organisational success. The responsibility for tackling wellbeing issues requires HR to utilise all available resources. Current Artificial Intelligence (AI) and technological tools empower HR departments and aid in the improvement of physical wellbeing at work are:

AI-Powered Wellness Coaching:

Al chatbots, virtual assistants and workplace wellbeing platforms have been developed to provide personalized wellness coaching. These tools can offer guidance on nutrition, exercise, sleep patterns, and stress management. They can learn from individual data and interactions to provide tailored recommendations for improving physical wellbeing. Company example: Welbot

Augmented Reality (AR) for Ergonomics:

AR technologies can be used to assess and optimize ergonomics in the workplace. Employees can use mobile devices to visualize ergonomic adjustments, receive real-time feedback on posture and movements, and access interactive training materials for proper ergonomics.

Company example: Cerebrum Edge



02 Emotional Wellbeing

Recent trends in emotional wellbeing at work reflect a growing recognition that short-term productivity gains should not come at the expense of employee wellbeing and work-life balance. The detrimental impact of burnout, mental ill health, and work-related stress on the global economy is substantial, resulting in a staggering loss of \$1 trillion (US Dollars) due to depression and anxiety. However, many companies struggle to effectively track sick leave, hindering their ability to provide timely support and prevent the escalation of mental health issues. Recent research indicates that sickness absence recording by employers has reached its lowest level in three years. The rise of hybrid working further complicates the tracking of sick leave, but the use of cloud-based HR technology, such as absence management software, may simplify the process. By accurately tracking sick leave, employers can identify patterns, engage in confidential conversations with employees, offer support, and address issues related to workload management and work-life balance.



02 Emotional Wellbeing

Creating an open culture for discussing mental health is fundamental. Creating a supportive culture that addresses mental health challenges and promotes work-life balance is imperative. The concept of hybrid flexibility has gained traction, particularly in frontline, prioritising equitable flexibility in work schedules and paid leave. Leaders play a crucial role in supporting employees to achieve work-life balance, adapting flexibly to new situations, and remaining open to change. The COVID-19 pandemic has blurred the lines between home and work, altering employees' relationships with their employers. This unprecedented situation has served as a reality check and a catalyst for organisational change, prompting the adoption of new ways of working. The anywhere economy, facilitated by advancements in technology and digital connectivity, is expected to accelerate and positively impact job creation, online services, equity, and wellbeing. The anywhere economy has the potential to boost productivity, spur innovation, and transform commercial relationships. Within this context, flexible working hours emerge as the most desired wellbeing benefit (41%) followed by wellbeing days (23%), access to mental health first aiders (18%), and manager mental health training (14%).

Using technology, such as talking to Al chatbots or anonymously accessing resources on emotional wellbeing through desktop or mobile applications seems easier for employees due to the stigma around mental health in the workplace. Al tools like ChatGPT can help individuals deal with everyday stress management, provides exercises and helps employees to self-diagnose.

The recent developments and most popular technology tools used in workplaces to address emotional wellbeing are currently employee engagement platforms (Lattice), emotion recognition and sentiment analytics (Qualtrics), productivity analytics (Microsoft Viva) and wellbeing analytics (Welbot). All these provide organisations with actionable insights to address emotional wellbeing concerns proactively. Additionally, Al algorithms are being employed to monitor and predict employee mood and emotional states. Through data analysis of various inputs like communication patterns, behaviour, and physiological data from wearable devices, these tools provide timely interventions and suggest activities or resources to improve emotional wellbeing (Akkio).



03 Mental Wellbeing

Recent trends in mental wellbeing within the workplace shed light on the growing recognition of the pandemic's lasting impact on employee welfare and performance, as well as the persistent increase in mental health challenges at work. For the second year in a row, a significant 44% of employees worldwide reported experiencing high levels of stress on the previous day. While the COVID-19 pandemic likely contributed to heightened stress in 2020, it's important to note that employee stress has been steadily rising for over a decade. Globally, approximately 15% of working-age adults have disclosed experiencing a mental disorder, with over 50 million Americans, accounting for around 21% of US adults, currently facing mental health conditions. The workplace can amplify broader societal issues that detrimentally impact mental health, including discrimination and inequality. Workplace harassment, in particular, poses a prominent concern that adversely affects mental wellbeing, with stress, depression, and anxiety becoming leading causes of work-related ill-health. Forward-thinking organizations are encouraging proactive measures such as rest, open discussions, and trauma counseling. To achieve this, employers must prioritize understanding their workforce's needs through surveys, interviews, and fostering open communication channels.



03 Mental Wellbeing

Data from Health Shield's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) indicates that almost half of the calls received are related to mental health, with a higher proportion coming from individuals aged 20–29 compared to those aged 50–59. Other studies have also found young workers (18–24 age group) being more affected by mental health issues. Consequently, it is crucial to urgently address the mental health issues faced by young employees.

Access to mental health support in the workplace is still limited, with a low percentage of employees utilizing available services. In the US, 43% of employees have access to mental health support, while in the UK, this number is even lower at 19%. Unfortunately, a significant portion of employees, particularly in the UK (11%), are not taking advantage of the mental health benefits or Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) provided by their employers. Factors such as the fear of negative job consequences and the persisting stigma around mental health contribute to this reluctance. Additionally, many employees feel that their company's mental health support is inadequate, and issues related to workplace mental health often go unnoticed or are addressed too late, even in environments that promote psychological safety.

To improve this situation, organisations should focus on three key areas: making mental health support easily accessible anytime, anywhere through technology integration and automation, empowering line managers with continuous training and tools, and emphasizing prevention by monitoring mental health sentiment and providing targeted preventative programs. Recent developments also include technology in addressing mental wellbeing at work. The NHS England just recently approved nine online talking-therapy treatments for anxiety or depression, providing faster access to support. Mental-health charity Sane believes that online therapies cannot fully replace the value of one-to-one relationships. Nonetheless, for some individuals these digital therapies can provide a convenient alternative for addressing anxiety or depression.





03 Mental Wellbeing

The latest developments in the forms of AI assistants to address mental wellbeing in the workplace include AI-powered virtual mental health assistants (ChatGPT), Virtual Reality (VR) Therapy (Virtual Reality Therapies), and AI-Driven Stress Management Tools. VR therapy creates immersive environments for mental health interventions. AI algorithms are integrated into these VR experiences to personalize therapy sessions, track progress, and adjust interventions based on individual needs depending on age, disability and more. AI-Driven Stress Management Tools can help employees manage stress and promote relaxation. These tools utilise techniques such as personalised breathing exercises, and guided meditation, adapting to an individual's preferences and providing tailored recommendations for mental wellbeing. (Example: Welbot)

It is known that an organisational wellness culture developed by leaders significantly impacts employee health. Work-life balance and manageable job demands are essential factors for employees' wellbeing. The C-suite and CEO play a crucial role in prioritizing employee health. However, despite increased awareness of mental health in the workplace, the role of managers has often been overlooked. Many employees experience poor mental health, but few are willing to raise these issues with their line managers (only around 14%). It is imperative to select line managers based on their leadership abilities, not just their job performance, and provide them with necessary training to effectively manage mental health and provide wellbeing support. Creating a culture of trust, openness, support, and acceptance is vital for mental health support, and managers should adapt their management style to individual preferences and needs while being mindful of the impact of their communication. Regular check-ins and open channels of communication are essential for employees to feel comfortable sharing their insights and concerns.





04 Social Wellbeing

Social wellbeing in the workplace is crucial for cultivating a sense of community and connection among employees, fostering positive relationships, and ultimately contributing to their overall wellbeing.

In the era of AI and technological transformation, workplace wellbeing requires a balance between automation and human touch. By focusing on empathy, collaboration, adaptability, and employee wellbeing, organisations can unlock the full potential of their workforce and succeed in the rapidly changing technological landscape. Technologies that support team socialising, team sports, and community engagement play a crucial role in promoting social wellbeing within organizations. Simple communication platforms like Slack and Teams provide informal and fun opportunities to connect with team member, for example. These and other technologies provide opportunities for team members to bond, collaborate, and build relationships beyond the confines of work tasks. For instance, team sports platforms facilitate friendly competitions, leagues, and tournaments that encourage teamwork, healthy competition, and physical fitness (Example: Playmetrics).



04 Social Wellbeing

Similarly, event management apps allow teams to organize and participate in social gatherings, team-building activities, and celebrations. These technologies not only enhance team dynamics but also foster a sense of community and belonging within the organisation (Example: Meetup, Eventbrite). Additionally, some purpose-built Team Experience Platforms (TXPs) include apps that specifically cater to team socialising and community engagement. By incorporating these features, TXPs ensure that social wellbeing is prioritized, creating a holistic and fulfilling work environment for employees.

Purpose-built Team Experience Platforms (TXPs) are gaining popularity among organisations as they aim to optimize team performance and enhance employee engagement. Going beyond traditional project management tools, TXPs create an environment where teams can thrive. These platforms leverage technology and principles from behavioural psychology to enable teams to engage and perform at their best. One notable advantage of purpose-built TXPs is their ability to provide continuous shared insights and action plans. By collecting and analysing data on team dynamics, individual strengths, and collaboration patterns, TXPs offer valuable feedback and actionable recommendations. Embracing a purpose-built TXP has the potential to revolutionize team experiences and unlock new levels of performance.

Additionally, most collaboration and communication platforms are now enhanced by Al features (Microsoft Teams). Microsoft is also soon releasing its Microsoft Co-Pilot Al tool that will combine all Microsoft apps in conversations and facilitate communications through Business Chat, a chatbot tool to answer your questions with the data available in your Microsoft apps. Also, there are Al applications to analyse diversity and inclusion metrics (example: Paradigm), and social network analysis (example: Trustsphere).





05 Financial Wellbeing

The importance of financial wellbeing in the workplace cannot be overstated, as it directly impacts employees' overall wellbeing and productivity. Financial worries among young employees are particularly prevalent, with a staggering 44% of them expressing daily concerns about money. In fact, the cost of living crisis is considered as or even more concerning than the COVID-19 pandemic by 90% of young people.

These concerns highlight the need for employers to address financial health as a top concern for their workforce. Financial stress not only affects employees' mental health but also impacts their concentration levels and relationships in the workplace. To support employees' financial wellbeing, employers are increasingly offering non-remuneration benefits, flexible working patterns, and access to financial education resources. Creating open spaces for discussing financial challenges, utilising wellbeing champions and mental health first aiders, and providing tailored guidance are crucial steps in promoting financial wellbeing. By prioritising financial wellbeing, organisations can improve engagement, boost employee confidence about their financial futures, and foster a positive company culture.



05 Financial Wellbeing

The use of employee benefits for leisure purchases, such as gym memberships and holidays, has significantly increased, indicating the relevance of these benefits in alleviating financial worries. Access to rewards and benefits not only helps employees save on everyday expenses but also enhances employee satisfaction and perception of employer care during the cost of living crisis. Employers should listen to employees' preferences, offer diverse benefits that address individual needs, and ensure the ease of use and accessibility of rewards systems.

Currently, various technology tools are being utilized in workplaces to address financial wellbeing. These tools have gained popularity due to their ability to provide personalised and efficient solutions for employees' financial needs. Financial wellness apps have become prevalent as they offer individuals tailored guidance, budgeting assistance, and insights into saving and investment strategies (Mint). Robo-advisors have emerged as trusted platforms for automated investment advice, leveraging Al algorithms to analyse market trends and provide personalized recommendations (Betterment). Expense management tools streamline financial processes, ensuring transparency and compliance (Expensify). Personalised benefits optimization tools help organisations optimize employee benefit packages, considering individual preferences and financial situations (BrightDime).





06 Predictions

By 2030, the workplace and organisational culture will experience significant changes, with a shift in power towards employees and a strong focus on achieving work-life balance in line with evolving wellness trends. Future organisational cultures will prioritise health and wellbeing as vital investments. This transformation will involve providing self-care options to empower individuals in proactively managing their health and wellbeing. Mental health will take precedence, given the rising rates of mental health issues and suicides. Mindful organisations will emphasize granting individuals autonomy and time for reflection, extending wellbeing efforts beyond the workplace to encompass personal lives.

Fitness will continue to be a critical aspect of workplace wellbeing, with gyms and studios coexisting alongside at-home solutions. Nutrition will also be a key focus, as employees increasingly read labels to reduce sugar consumption and adopt sustainable eating habits. Employers will recognise the impact of nutrition on employee wellbeing and productivity, providing access to healthier food options and promoting mindful eating habits. Social and Financial wellbeing solutions will be readily available, as would targeted solutions that address an inclusive and diverse workforce, such as menopause support.



06 Predictions

Innovations in sleep technology, like mattress sensors, will offer valuable data on sleep quality. This data can be integrated with other workplace wellbeing programs, such as exercise initiatives or personalized recommendations, to enhance overall sleep health. Prioritising sleep and providing resources to improve its quality will contribute to the wellbeing and productivity of the workforce.

Employee wellbeing initiatives will increasingly prioritise mental health coverage.

Mindfulness will become essential. Technology and wearables will play a role in promoting mindfulness, offering offline or online classes and wearable devices to prompt employees' engagement in mindfulness practices. Cultivating a culture of mindfulness and providing resources for employees to practice it in their work and personal lives will support their mental wellbeing.

The future of work and employee wellbeing revolves around providing value to employees, recognizing their individual needs, and promoting adaptability and flexibility. Comprehensive support for the body and mind will be provided to promote work-life integration, including intelligent strategies to reduce distractions and create a productive environment.

Companies must adapt to emerging wellness trends while prioritizing employee wellbeing and fostering inclusive and diverse cultures. By incorporating self-care options, supporting fitness goals, promoting healthier nutrition, prioritizing sleep, and cultivating mindfulness, organisations can create environments that nurture the wellbeing of their employees. This, in turn, will contribute to a more engaged, productive, and resilient workforce in the workplace of 2030.





About Welbot

Welbot is an innovative, evidence based corporate workplace wellness platform designed to improve employee health and wellbeing whilst in the office or when working remotely from home.

Our enterprise software features daily physical and mental health exercises including hydration, nutrition and screen breaks, which are all delivered through desktop notifications that pop up at intervals on your computer screen during the working day.

How good is your corporate wellbeing strategy?

Based on the NHS Employers Health and Wellbeing Framework, you can evaluate how well your company's corporate wellbeing strategy and initiatives are performing using our online audit tool at audit.welbot.io

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Contact us:

info@welbot.io www.welbot.io



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