

Core standard one

Produce, implement and communicate a mental health at work plan

“ Mental health is such a huge topic. Broaching it in a club can be really difficult – either there’s an assumption that you have a severe mental illness and therefore can’t work, or that it’s so common everyone in a club environment is stressed and feeling anxious, due to the 24/7 nature of the sport. So, it’s not taken seriously. ”

– Sports Administrator at a professional sports club



People who work in sport and physical activity can sometimes find it hard to talk openly about mental health and get the support they need.

Developing a mental health at work plan is a great way to take a structured approach to supporting your workforce.

If your organisation has signed the [Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation](#), you’ll already be making progress in this area, but if not then it’s a great place to start.¹¹

¹¹ www.sportandrecreation.org.uk/pages/mental-health-charter-homepage

Take the first step: sign the Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation

The Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation sets out how sports and recreation organisations can adopt good mental health practice to make activities inclusive, positive and open to everyone. It was created by the Sport and Recreation Alliance, the Professional Players Federation and Mind.

By signing the Charter, you're committing to help create a culture shift that tackles stigma around mental health. You'll be asked to commit to three actions of your choice. So far over 350 organisations have signed the Charter.

[> Find out more and sign the Charter](#)

Giving people the right tools

Greenwich Leisure Limited have signed the Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation. They've committed to equipping staff with the tools they need to provide a service and a workplace that supports good mental health. This includes embedding mental health awareness training both as part of core training and within relevant training such as Safeguarding, training, providing staff benefit schemes and offering Health Assured – an employee assistance programme that offers counselling support for their 14,000 employees across leisure centres, community centres and libraries.



What to include in your mental health at work plan

Your mental health at work plan should focus on how you'll support the mental health of all your people, including employees, volunteers and athletes. It should detail how you will:

- promote wellbeing for all your people
- tackle the work-related causes of mental health problems and routinely monitor the wellbeing of your people
- support people experiencing poor mental health, whether it's caused by problems inside or outside of work
- equip and support your line managers and coaches
- signpost to relevant sources of information and support – both inside and outside your organisation
- establish clear objectives or targets which are shaped around your organisation's vision
- take into account that mental health may be classified as a disability, with reference to the Equality Act 2010.



Setting squad goals

Ben Jessup, Policy Advisor,
Sport and Recreation Alliance



“You could say that we’re finding ways to keep developing a positive ‘dressing room’ approach to mental health,” says Ben.

“It’s like with any sports team: we’re building an office environment where everybody always feels that their colleagues have got their back.” Setting up an official mental health working group, with an action plan to get initiatives up and running, has helped supercharge this process. “It’s definitely not just a ‘top-down’ strategy,” explains Ben.

“Managers are part of the working group, but there’s junior staff in there, too. It’s important that ideas come from across our organisation.”

To monitor progress there’s a simple, anonymous questionnaire hosted through Survey Monkey. The survey offers staff a sliding scale to report how they’re feeling, and whether they have access to support.

“We’re already seeing initial trends across the year,” says Ben.

“That means we can help staff to manage their workload and encourage them to prioritise their wellbeing. The response has been really good overall.”

Ask your people

Design your plan with input from people across your organisation. This boosts buy-in and gives you a clearer idea of the support people need. It's also an opportunity to bring people in different areas together around a common goal.

You could draw on the knowledge and experience of colleagues already interested in mental health, or Mental Health Champions or trained Mental Health First Aiders if you already have them in place. If your organisation is quite large, set up a small group for initial consultations and another to feedback on the finished plan.

Could you use existing workforce surveys or create a simple online poll to collect wider views? For example:

Q1 How could [our organisation] better promote the wellbeing of all our people? You can provide up to three ideas.

Q2 "I feel comfortable talking about my mental health at work."

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Strongly
disagree

Neutral

Strongly
agree

When you ask people about their mental health, it's vital to keep information confidential. Create strict policies to ensure this and emphasise that surveys are anonymous, so that feedback is honest.

Make sure you consider ongoing communication with your people as part of your mental health at work plan. Keep asking people what works, and tweak your support in response. Consider asking other organisations in your sector for best practice ideas.

Volunteers matter

“ Volunteers are the lifeblood of sport and physical activity in England. Every year 6.3 million people give time and expertise that helps to make sport happen for people in communities across the country in a huge range of roles. They are effectively part of the sports workforce – and most sport and physical activity couldn’t take place without them. ”

– Jenny Betteridge, Strategic Lead Volunteering,
Sport England

Volunteering has a positive impact on wellbeing. But like everyone in your workforce, you need to consider volunteers in your mental health at work plan. And you should ask for their views when developing it.

Volunteers don’t get protection from discrimination under the Equality Act 2010. However, many organisations try to follow the same procedures as paid staff when supporting volunteers with their mental health.

Support for volunteers

England Athletics supports volunteers through induction and training, including an online Mental Health Awareness course and a network of mentors. They promote networking opportunities both face to face and online. It signposts to helplines including a welfare helpline and mental health support.

Who's responsible?

Everyone in your organisation plays their part in creating and sustaining a mentally healthy workplace. But different roles carry different responsibilities.

Human resources (HR)

Human resources should take responsibility for providing advice and support to line managers, coaches and employees. They should also lead on reviewing employee mental health and on monitoring sickness absence. If you're a smaller organisation with no HR team, you may need to split responsibility between different people, with the owner or leader of the organisation ultimately accountable.

Senior leaders

Senior leaders should play a key role in creating change by ensuring reliable processes, checks and action plans are in place which are regularly monitored. Senior leaders can have a powerful impact by speaking out about mental health, sharing their own experiences where they feel able to do so, and leading by example. Your organisation could also formalise its approach and nominate a health and wellbeing lead ([see enhanced standard one, page 64](#) and including a leadership commitment to progress on mental health in internal and external reporting ([see enhanced standard two, page 66](#)).

“ There is a role for activity and engagement at every level of an organisation to make a real difference. As a leader I know I can promote and support the importance of mental wellbeing. Part of that is also the way that senior leaders can role model the behaviour they hope to see from others. At the Alliance we were very keen to ensure that staff at every level had a chance to input into our plan and activity – and that is the way that real change will be delivered.

We've supported the development of the *Thriving at Work* resources for the sport and physical activity sector because we believe they will help senior leaders turn their interest in this area into action. I urge you to use them.”

– Emma Boggis, CEO, Sport and Recreation Alliance

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Line managers and coaches

Line managers and coaches should take responsibility for taking stock of their people's mental health and providing appropriate support. They can do this through regular team meetings, [mental health audits \(see page 61\)](#) and one-to-ones. They should seek feedback on the support they provide and act on it to adjust their approach.

Everyone

Everyone is responsible for taking steps to manage their own mental health. But it's important to acknowledge that this is something we may all need support with at times.

Wider organisational policies

In addition to developing your mental health at work plan, check that mental wellbeing is considered in all related policies.

Mental health needs to be at the heart of all policies that focus specifically on employee wellbeing, such as:

- wellbeing or mental health
- health and safety
- sickness absence
- return to work.

Additionally, consider the impact that policies which focus on employee performance and people management can have on employees' mental wellbeing. This may include policies relating to:

- working time
- recruitment
- performance management
- professional development
- disciplinary action
- change management
- redundancy.

Policies on performance management and disciplinary action should also recognise that an employee's performance or behaviour may be affected if they are experiencing a mental health problem. Appropriate support and adjustments should be explored before proceeding with formal action.

Finally, it is also helpful to make sure you reference mental health in policies that relate to workplace culture. This may include policies relating to:

- equal opportunities
- diversity and inclusion
- bullying and harassment
- employee engagement
- safeguarding and welfare

Employer tool

Develop your own mental health at work plan, or adapt our editable template to make sure your organisation is taking action to meet each of the six core *Thriving at Work* standards.