

Health, work and well-being – Caring for our future

PRESS NOTICE

CPHS - 040
Wednesday 6th September

Work confirmed as beneficial to health and longevity

An independent report published today shows that being out of work is bad for both mind and body - progressively damaging health and decreasing life expectancy.

The comprehensive review of more than 400 pieces of scientific evidence, *Is Work Good for your Health and Well-being?* concludes that being in work is good for your physical and mental health, boosting self esteem and quality of life.

Adverse health effects of being out of work include higher rates of mental health problems than the general population, as well as increased likelihood of suicide, disability and obesity.

The evidence reveals however that this can be reversed – when people return to work from unemployment their health improves by as much as unemployment damages it. The review shows that being in work can help people recover from both physical and mental health problems.

Meeting members of Horizon House, a scheme which offers work-based rehabilitation and job opportunities with local employers, DWP Minister Lord Hunt said:

“The people I have met today are living proof of the undeniable link between work and well-being.

“Work is good for individuals and their families, and by lifting people out of poverty it also benefits communities by increasing prosperity while reducing health and wealth inequalities.

“This review reinforces our commitment to helping more people into work, improving the health of working age people and tackling the root causes of ill-health.”

The Government’s Health Work and Well-being strategy will be led by Dame Carol Black, who took up her post as the first National Director for Health and Work on 29th August 2006.

Dame Carol is one of the country’s top doctors and was previously president of the Royal College of Physicians. She will spearhead initiatives that improve health in the workplace and ensure people with health conditions and disabilities are supported to enter, return and continue in work.

The review highlights a lack of understanding among healthcare professionals of the benefits of work. A series of initiatives are being progressed to help engage, educate and support GPs and other healthcare professionals. These will help them understand the links between work and health, the long-term consequences of signing patients off sick, and the role they can play in helping their patients remain in or return to work.

Dame Carol said: "I am determined to raise awareness among healthcare professionals that being out of work has a real and negative impact on people's mental and physical health.

"Very few doctors and nurses understand that work is health giving. Work is an intrinsic part of improving and maintaining health. It is crucial that GPs bear this in mind when offering advice and support to people with all types of health condition."

A key strand of the HWWB strategy is the commitment to improve access to talking therapies for adults of working age. Visiting the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies pilot site in Doncaster today, Health Minister Rosie Winterton said:

"We have always known that work matters and the review being published today proves this conclusively. People in work have better health than those outside work and the 2004 White Paper Choosing Health made clear that work can improve your mental and physical health, reduce health inequalities and improve life chances for people and their families. Widening access to psychological therapies is a key element of our strategy.

"Employers and the NHS share the burden of ill health, with millions of working days lost to ill health every year. Achieving business goals at the same time as improving health leads to improved staff morale, recruitment and retention.

"The Health Work and Wellbeing strategy demonstrates the significant government commitment to work together and across communities to make it easier for working age people to choose health. The review being published today is another step towards that goal."

The Evidence Review published today shows that:

- Being in the right type of work is good for your health. It improves self esteem, quality of life and well-being.
- Being out of work is bad for both mind and body. Unemployment progressively damages health and results in more sickness, disability, mental illness, obesity, use of medication and medical services and decreased life expectancy.
- When people return to work from unemployment their health improves. Returning to work from unemployment improves health by as much as unemployment damages it.
- If you have a health condition, being in work can help you get better. Remaining in or returning quickly to work is beneficial for people with both physical and mental health problems.
- The positive effects of work do not just benefit the individual. Work also reduces poverty and health inequalities for the family and the community.
- Although aspects of work can pose a risk to health, far more people gain health benefits from work than are negatively affected by it. The benefits of work are also greater than the harmful effects of prolonged sickness absence.
- The positive effects apply to all age groups.

This new evidence supports the Government's commitment to helping more people enter into, remain in and return to work, including the Welfare Reform agenda, which aims to reduce the number of people who need to rely on incapacity benefits by 1 million, and help 1 million older workers and more than 300,000 lone parents into work.

A key element of the Government's approach has been the *Pathways to Work* pilots, which are a major first step in delivering enhanced support for people facing health problems and barriers. The pilots combine a balanced package of rights and responsibilities, which aims to target a number of the health-related, personal and external barriers to returning to work.

Notes to editors

1. Horizon House is a service for adults with severe mental health disabilities and is based on the "Clubhouse model" of work-based rehabilitation. The Clubhouse offers its members the chance to return to paid work through its Transitional Employment Programme. Various third parties offer support and training to help the members gain skills and confidence, and the club works with local employers who offer flexible hours and special conditions to make the transition back to work easier for members.
2. The independent review *Is Work Good for your Health and Well-being?* reviewed more than 400 items of scientific evidence.
3. The authors, Gordon Waddell and Kim Burton, were commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions to conduct this independent review of scientific evidence.
4. The Health Work and Well-being strategy was launched last October and will be led by Dame Carol Black, the new National Director for Health and Work. The strategy is a groundbreaking partnership between Government (Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health and the Health and Safety Executive), employers and healthcare professionals. Its main themes are engaging stakeholders, improving working lives and healthcare for working age people.
5. The executive summary of the report is available at www.health-and-work.gov.uk

Press office media enquiries: please contact Victoria Francis or Darragh McElroy on 020 7238 0756/0850.

Press office: 020 7238 0866
Out of hours: 07659 108 883
Public enquiries: 020 7712 2171
Textphone: 020 7238 0788
Website: www.dwp.gov.uk