

# Action on stigma

Promoting mental health,  
ending discrimination at work



**READER INFORMATION**

<b>Policy</b> HR/Workforce Management Planning Clinical	Estates Performance IM & T Finance Partnership Working
<b>Document Purpose</b>	Best Practice Guidance
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<b>Description</b>	The document announces an initiative, run by CSIP, that provides a set of principles for employers to meet to promote mental wellbeing and end discrimination in the workplace and sets out a listening exercise to develop a step by step process of support, advice and information via regional support teams.
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<b>For Recipient's Use</b>	

# Action on stigma – promoting mental health, ending discrimination at work

## INTRODUCTION

With mental health problems experienced by one in six people<sup>1</sup>, the health and well-being of people of working age is of fundamental importance to our future.

The Government believes that everyone, including employers, has a role to play in improving the mental health of society. This document outlines a new initiative to support organisations in helping to achieve this goal.

Mental health problems, ranging from distress to severe illness, are extremely common. They can be made worse by the way people are perceived or treated by others, whether in the workplace or in their day-to-day contact.

The workplace has a powerful effect on everyone's health – the employer, employee and the customer. How healthy a person feels affects his or her productivity and how they relate to others. How satisfied they are with their job affects their own mental and physical well-being. How customers are treated has a profound effect on their ability to express their views and access services.

There is also considerable cost to individuals, businesses and society with an estimated 80 million workdays being lost each year to stress, depression and anxiety<sup>2</sup>. It has been estimated that not addressing mental health problems in the workplace costs business and the public sector £9 billion each year<sup>3</sup>.

## Playing your part

The Government already has in place a comprehensive strategy to help people protect their mental health and, when they develop a problem, access the treatment and support they need to recover and regain their independence. The strategy also aims to stamp out discrimination and take action on reducing the stigma associated with

mental ill-health. However, if these goals are to be achieved, we need the help of employers.

This is why the Government has developed six principles that will enable organisations to reduce the incidence and impact of mental health problems. The principles outlined below are based upon existing Government policies and good practice initiatives.

To assist organisations working towards these principles, the Department of Health has established a national initiative that will provide guidance, advice and support to employers via eight regional employment support teams. This initiative will be delivered jointly by Shift, the anti-stigma and discrimination programme, and the National Social Inclusion Programme, which are both part of the Care Services Improvement Partnership (CSIP).

Many employers and organisations have made significant progress in this area and they are to be congratulated. In addition, there are a number of guidance documents, influenced and informed by people with mental health problems, that provide support and advice to employers wanting to improve their knowledge and understanding.

This new initiative does not seek to duplicate or diminish this work. Those who have already taken steps to address stigma and discrimination can assess their progress against the principles. Those who have some distance to travel can use them to prioritise action required.

*Jo said: "When I applied for a job as a cleaner at a care home the manager called me and wanted to know more about my disability, which I'd declared. She pressed me so I said 'I'll be absolutely open with you. I've got a schizo-affective disorder and I hear three voices of people I knew'. There was complete silence on the phone. She didn't say a word. So I said "Hello, are you still there?" All she said was "I'll be in touch". Anyway, a few days later, lo and behold, I received a rejection letter. To me her silence spoke volumes and I felt very discriminated against."*

### POTENTIAL BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYERS

Research indicates that less than 40% of employers say they would consider employing someone with a mental health problem<sup>4</sup>. This reflects a work culture where many people fear disclosing or discussing a mental health issue. Such a culture can only have a negative affect on the organisation, its employees and its customers. Employers who have taken part in projects to increase awareness about mental health problems have reported improved staff retention and customer satisfaction and reduced sickness rates.

Employers also have a duty to ensure that their employees are not made ill by their work. In addition they can play a key role in changing the way their employees behave towards those who experience mental health problems. Employers can make a positive impact by committing to workplace practice that will:

- Support and maintain mental well-being in staff and those with whom staff engage.
- Provide mental health awareness training to staff.
- Support employees if they develop a problem.
- Make sure their employees understand mental health issues.
- Not discriminate against an employee or customer because they have a mental health problem.

People with disabilities make a huge contribution to the economy, for example as customers, service

users, students, employees and business people. In fact, they have an annual spending power of £50 billion<sup>5</sup>. Treating them fairly makes sense for good business.

In addition, a new duty under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 comes into force in December 2006 for public organisations, including local councils, government departments, universities and hospitals. They will be required to publish a Disability Equality Scheme, setting out how they intend to eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. They must also involve disabled people in drawing up their schemes.

It is already unlawful for businesses and organisations providing services to treat disabled people less favourably than other people for a reason related to their disability. It is also unlawful for any employer to discriminate against a disabled person when choosing someone for a job or considering people for promotion, dismissal or redundancy.

All customers should be treated with courtesy, respect and sensitivity. People with mental health problems sometimes require additional consideration. It is unacceptable for mental health problems to be a barrier to services which are available and accessible to other people.

*City banker James said his employers allowed him to make a gradual return to work, starting back after a few months recovery with a reduced workload. He added: "My colleagues deserve great credit for having supported my recovery. I was rather dreading their reaction after being off work following a serious episode of bipolar disorder. But once I explained things to them they could see I was still the same old James and that there was nothing to be afraid of. Economically their decision has paid dividends as I have been one of the highest earners since I returned to work."*

### Benefits in brief

The potential benefits for organisations that incorporate the six principles include:

- Reducing recruitment and training costs.
- Complying with legislation (e.g. Disability Discrimination Act and Health and Safety Executive).
- Reduced sickness levels.
- Showing others and your own staff that you are a good employer.
- Demonstrating your corporate social responsibility.
- Enhancing customer service.
- Improving productivity.
- Making your organisation more attractive to people with mental health issues and others.
- Reducing staff turnover.
- Makes your workplace healthier.

People often do not know about the healthy choices they can make, like eating a balanced diet, to protect their mental health. When someone does develop a problem, they often do not recognise the danger signs and seek help early enough. Making staff more aware will benefit them and their employers.

Improving the mental well-being of employees also requires a work culture where everyone is treated with respect and dignity and issues such as bullying and harassment are not tolerated. Promoting such a culture can reduce sickness absence, grievance and discrimination claims, complaints and the incidence of mental health problems.

An additional benefit of increased awareness is that staff can help themselves and be more sensitive to the needs of others. The problems of colleagues or customers can be dealt with most effectively if they are recognised early and if people are given appropriate support. By acting in this way employers and employees will increase positive outcomes in terms of their service and minimise negative outcomes such as sickness absence and complaints.

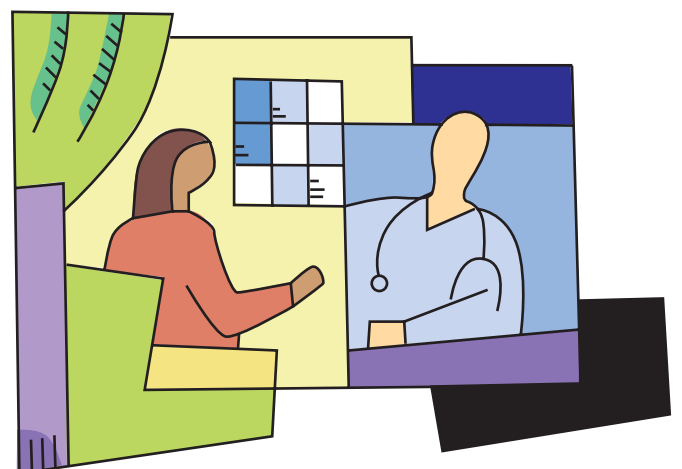
### THE PRINCIPLES

- 1. Employers can demonstrate that employees are helped to look after their mental health by making them aware of the steps they can take to preserve and maintain their own and others mental well-being.**
- 2. Employers promote a culture of respect and dignity for everyone, ensuring that staff are trained to recognise and be sensitive to mental distress or disability in others, whether they are workplace colleagues or customers.**
- 3. Employers encourage awareness of mental health issues, so that employees are aware of the danger signs and understand the importance of seeking help early.**

#### Why these?

The first step to improving mental health and well-being in the workplace is to make staff more aware of the issues.

Employers are well placed to help people help themselves by providing information about mental health and access to services. Promoting good mental health practices, like operating flexible working hours so that employees can balance the demands of home-life with work, will result in a positive working environment.



### Look after your mind

Evidence suggests that there are simple steps people can take to protect and maintain their mental well-being. Employers can help by making their staff more aware of these healthy choices.

Tips for staying happy:

1. Keep physically active.
2. Eat well.
3. Drink in moderation.
4. Value yourself and others.
5. Talk about your feelings.
6. Keep in touch with friends and family.
7. Care for others.
8. Get involved, make a contribution.
9. Learn a new skill.
10. Do something creative.
11. Take a break.
12. Ask for help.

Reference Making it possible: Improving Mental Health and Well-being in England (CSIP 2005)

4. **Employers can demonstrate that no one is refused employment on the grounds of mental illness or disability.**
5. **Employers make reasonable adjustments to the work environment for people with mental health problems so that they can continue working.**

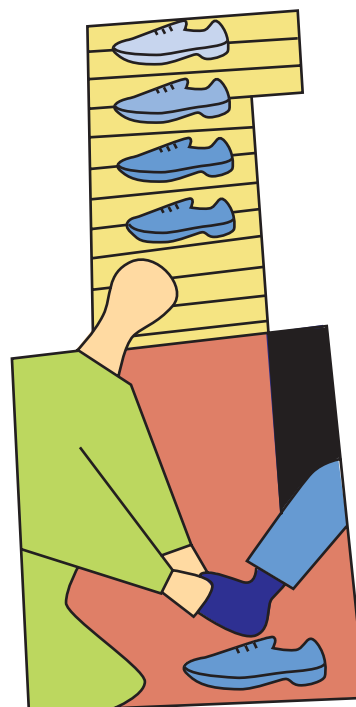
#### Why these?

The vast majority of people who experience mental health problems continue to work successfully. The greatest barrier people face is not being given the chance to prove their effectiveness. Research indicates that once given this chance they take less sick leave than average and demonstrate strong loyalty to their employer<sup>6</sup>. Under discrimination law, it is the duty of the manager to assess whether the candidate is the best person for the job in terms of skill, aptitudes and experience.

There is strong evidence to suggest that re-employment leads to improvement in self-esteem and general physical and mental well-being for people who have experienced a mental health problem.

The Disability Discrimination Act explicitly requires that employers make reasonable adjustments for employees who have a disability. The organisation has invested in the employee and a planned return to work is often more cost effective than retirement.

*Mandy applied to train as a psychiatric nurse, but because she is treated for depression the hospital's occupational health nurse had to write to her consultant psychiatrist for a medical reference. Mandy said: "I was told by the nurse 'I know it's a nuisance, but we have to do this since that business with Beverley Allitt'. I felt as if because I have a mental illness I'm put into the same category as a murderer. Obviously I didn't say anything as I wanted to be passed as fit and thought if I challenged her it would be seen as part of my illness."*



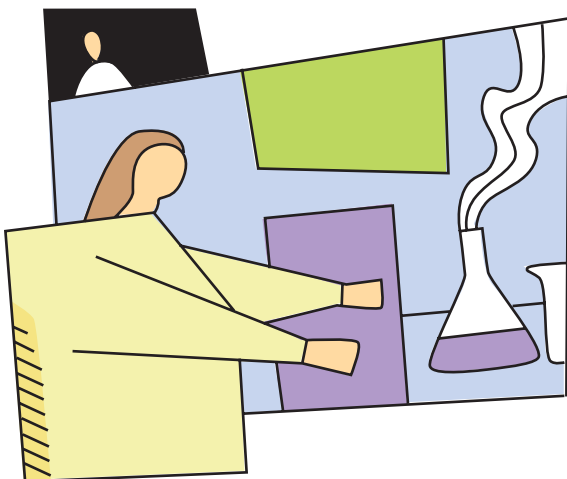
6. **Employers can demonstrate that they take positive steps to ensure that people with mental health problems are not disadvantaged, in relation to the availability of their goods and services.**

### Why this?

People with mental health problems are sometimes discriminated against by providers of goods and services. Surveys of people with mental health problems report a lack of customer care skills and lack of sensitivity that can also be construed as discrimination. Research also shows that routine health screening programmes and health promotion campaigns are not as well accessed by people with mental health problems. As a result, companies lose sales, organisations fail clients, complaints are very difficult to resolve and important aspects of well-being are denied.

If these principles are ignored, people with mental health problems will continue to be excluded.

*Angie has found it difficult to get travel insurance when she has declared her history of mental health problems. She said: "I hate doing it, but I have to take the risk of travelling without insurance. I can't afford the cover – it's prohibitively expensive. It's either that or lie about my medical history and have the worry about having a claim refused if have to make one."*



### ORGANISATIONS THAT ARE ALREADY TAKING ACTION

Many companies and public sector organisations are leading the way in the recruitment and retention of people with mental health problems and providing goods and services that do not discriminate against them.

#### Employer Case Studies

##### BT

BT recognises that the mental well-being of staff is a major issue for employers in a 21st century digital networked economy. Dr Paul Litchfield, BT's Group Chief Medical Officer, said that there were three strands to the telecoms giant's mental well-being strategy, which have delivered an innovative, engaged, and highly productive workforce over the last four years.

Dr Litchfield added: "The first step is promoting mentally healthy working through psychologically sound and socially responsive work organisation that takes account of the need to balance work and home commitments. The next is to identify vulnerable staff and areas of work that are hotspots of distress so that appropriate practical interventions can be put in place. The final element is providing practical support to those off work with mental health problems with a clear focus on getting them back into work when they are able to depending on stress risk factors like how much support they need, work relationships and clarity about their job role.

"We haven't rejected any job applications on grounds of mental illness since our strategy has been in place. Mental health sickness absence are down 30%, stress claims have been reduced dramatically, 75% of long term absentees return to their own job and the medical retirement rate for mental illness is down by 80%."

Contact: paul.litchfield@bt.com

##### Royal Mail

Royal Mail has been improving its stress policy in recognition of the extra pressures that staff face in a fast changing organisation. This includes comprehensive guidance for managers to recognise and support staff who show signs of stress-related illnesses. Su Wang, Head of Health, said: "We've also expanded our Employee Assistance Programme

service from a 5 days a week service to a 24/7 service that will not only provide an enhanced service to our people but will also be extended to include resident family members including retired employees. This service will also offer a counselling service for individuals or couples on a wide range of issues including bereavement, divorce, emotional problems, stress, anxiety or depression."

### **Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust**

Oxleas, a mental health trust in south-east London, has an excellent track record in promoting social inclusion and supporting patients treated at the trust into employment. As part of this approach its council of governors includes a minimum of 12 service users and carers and has representatives from the local chamber of commerce and the jobcentre plus.

The trust runs Horizon House in Bromley, a 'clubhouse' which helps people get back to work and, crucially, provides continuing support when they have returned to work. Simon Hart, the Director of HR and Organisational Development for the trust, added: "The trust seeks to employ more people who have experienced mental ill health. This is a key part of our strategy to reduce stigma and by employing service user consultants in many parts of our services, the trust reaps the benefits of their specialist knowledge."

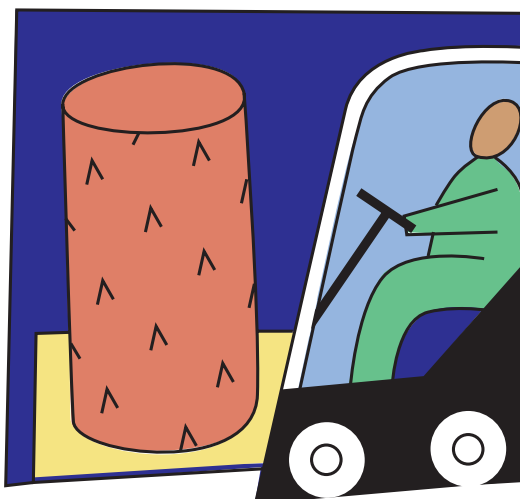
### **BP**

BP recognises that as its work has become more intellectually and socially demanding, managing "psychosocial" hazards has become increasingly more important. In its commitment to meet this challenge, BP has introduced an approach known as "Mindmatters" to achieve this. Angela Whitehead, a Director of Health at BP, said "Mindmatters" was an intranet-based tool-box with a variety of resources and techniques to foster mental well-being and to prevent and help manage stress, including stress risk assessment tools and information on positive psychology and resilience. She added: "We also provide self-help tools to help people regain control of their work life. This could be as simple as switching off the mobile when you go home at night, doing deep-breathing exercises at your desk or coaching in how to approach your team leader in a positive way about discussing your workload." *Contact: angela.whitehead@bp.com*

### **AstraZeneca**

The pharmaceutical company, AstraZeneca, has a holistic approach to promoting employee health that combines organisational and individual interventions. One element is 'personal MOTs' in which staff take time to think how they are 'running' and whether their life, including their work-life balance, needs 'fine tuning'. Another element is an innovative counselling scheme called Counselling and Life Management. This is a hybrid between an in-house and independent counselling service. Chief Medical Officer Eric Teasdale explains: "The advantage is that we can brief the counsellors on corporate issues. At the same time we can get anonymous and aggregated feedback on pressure points for staff which we can then address."

*Contact: eric.teasdale@astrazeneca.com*



### **MORE ABOUT GOVERNMENT ACTION IN THIS AREA**

This initiative will build and support existing Government work in this area.

### **Health, Work and Well-being – Caring for our future**

The strategy Health, Work and Well-being – Caring for our future (HWWB), is a crucial part of delivering on the Government's commitment to improving the health and well-being of the working age population. It is a central element of the wider welfare reform agenda and is also set out in the Government's White Paper Choosing Health: making

healthier choices easier. It also helps to make a reality of the Health and Safety Commission's Strategy for Workplace Health and Safety.

While much good work, both inside and outside Government, is already going on in this area, this strategy is unique in bringing together work focusing on three key areas: preventing people becoming injured or ill, keeping them healthy in work and providing wide ranging, accessible support to enable them to remain in or return to work more quickly.

HWWB has already delivered:

- A ground-breaking partnership between the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department of Health and the Health and Safety Executive.
- Involvement and inclusion of stakeholders both inside and outside of Government and the devolved administrations through the creation of a National Stakeholder Council, a National Stakeholder Network and support of local stakeholder councils.
- The publication of a Charter for Health Work and Well-being setting out the role and contribution of stakeholders and incorporating specific commitments to ensure progress.

The first National Director for Health and Work, Carol Black, has recently been appointed and is working with a cross government team to take forward work with existing government initiatives, employers, individuals, and the healthcare profession to maximise the benefits of the HWWB strategy.

### Listening to you

The Department of Health believes that these principles, if incorporated by organisations will improve the way they deal with the issue of mental health. However, we want to hear the views of public and private sector organisations to ensure they are practical.

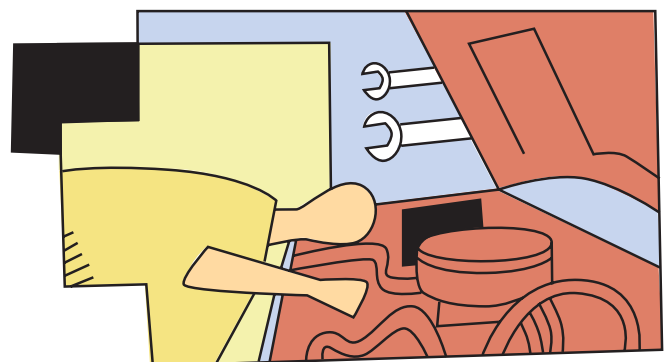
The publication of this document will be followed by a period of discussion with public sector and major private sector providers about the principles and how this initiative can be best delivered in different parts of the country.

To find out more, organisations can attend one of four regional events where employers and accredited employee organisations can hear about the principles, examples of good practice and positive steps to take to achieve success.

Organisations can also visit [www.shift.org.uk](http://www.shift.org.uk) where there is more information about this initiative and an on-line response form they can fill in. Alternatively, they can fill in and post back to us a tear-off form at the back of this document. Employers have until 31 December 2006 to tell us their views. If you want to contact the Shift team, we can be contacted on 0845 223 5447 or at [employment@csip.org.uk](mailto:employment@csip.org.uk).

The Department of Health will talk to people with mental health problems to get their views. An action plan will be published in the Spring of 2007 which will outline how the principles will be implemented.

*David moved from a managerial job with a city council to what he thought would be an easier lifestyle with a 'quiet, backwater' district council. He said: "I was working 80 hours a week. After seven months of over-work I had a breakdown and was signed off sick. They came back and said to me if you're not back at work within a week you're sacked. There was no support in place. It was horrendous. There was no compassion or sympathy. They sacked me a week later."*



## References

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2. Future Foundation 'Mental Health: the last workplace taboo' for Shaw Trust. June 2006
3. Department of Health. National Service Framework for Mental Health. 1999
4. C Manning and PD White, Attitudes of employers to the mentally ill, Psychiatric Bulletin, 19 (1995): 541-543.
5. N Meager. Institute of Employment Studies, by the Employers Forum on Disability 1999.
6. R Perkins et al (2000) The Pathfinder User Employment Programme: Increasing Access to Employment within Mental Health Services for People who have Experienced Mental Health Problems. South West London & St George's Mental Health NHS Trust.

## Useful Websites

[www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)

[www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk)

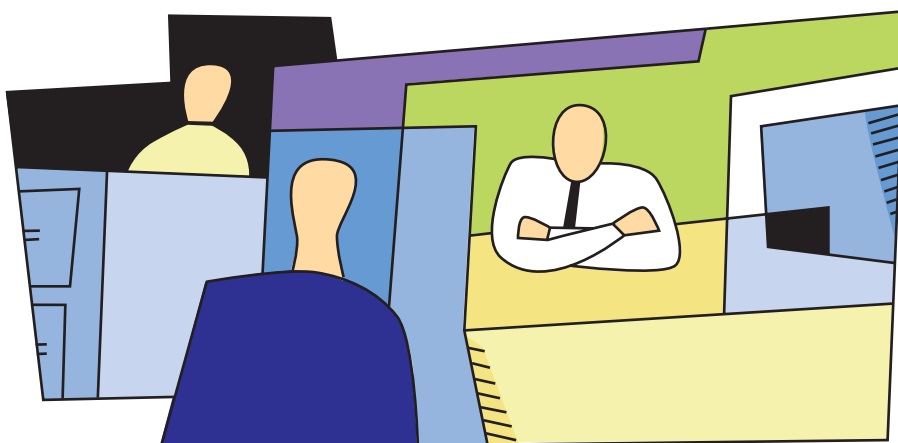
[www.shift.org.uk](http://www.shift.org.uk)

[www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org)

[www.scmh.org.uk](http://www.scmh.org.uk)

[www.mindfulemployer.net](http://www.mindfulemployer.net)

[www.employers-forum.co.uk](http://www.employers-forum.co.uk)



**Feedback Form**

**Have your say**

To help us deliver the support and guidance that employers need, the Government would like to hear your views.

The aim of this initiative is to reduce the stigma of and discrimination directed towards people with mental health problems.

Please complete this form, tear it off and post it back to:

Shift

Room 302

117 Waterloo Road

London

SE1 8UL

Q1. Do you agree with all the principles?

Yes

No

If you do not agree please tell us why

Q2. Which principle do you think would be the most helpful?

1

2

3

4

5

6

Why?

Q3. What practical help would enable you to incorporate these principles?

Q4. What do you think are the main obstacles to achieving these principles?

Q5. What do you think are the key opportunities that this initiative can deliver?

If you have any other comments about this work please add them below

To help us get the most out of this feedback exercise please complete the following questions about yourself by ticking the appropriate box.

Are you ...?

An Employer     Employee     Unemployed     Customer

Which sector do you operate in?

Public     Private     Voluntary

Please enter the name of your organisation (if appropriate) below:

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If you would like to receive more information about 'Action on Stigma' please add your contact details here:

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