

Economy, Skills and Health

Health and Well-Being Briefing Paper (no. 4 of 8)

Introduction

This briefing paper, on tackling the wider determinants of health in relation to economy, skills and health, is one of a series of briefings aimed at local authorities and other local partners in the West Midlands. It was developed using best available national and local evidence and guidance,^{1,2} and local case studies are included which demonstrate good and effective current practice in support of the Public Health role of Local Government. The briefing serves as a legacy of the extensive range of work done to date across the West Midlands led by the Regional Public Health Group. It is cognisant of the needs in the West Midlands and suggests how local areas and Health and Well-Being Boards can work in partnership to tackle local public health issues using innovative and effective approaches in tackling the wider determinants of health and health inequalities. These approaches can help to protect against current and future threats to health and well-being and help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local partnership working to improve the quality and quantity of people's lives.

Key Facts: West Midlands

- Being in work leads to better physical and mental health and we could save the UK up to £100 billion a year by reducing working-age ill health³
- NHS organisations that prioritise staff health and well-being perform better, with improved patient satisfaction, stronger quality scores, better outcomes, higher levels of staff retention and lower rates of sickness absence⁴
- The total income for the West Midlands voluntary and community sector is £3.3 billion⁵
- Poor health is strongly correlated with high levels of unemployment and low levels of skills and learning. Skills and learning programmes are essential in order to tackle multiple disadvantage.⁶
- An inclusive, prosperous and sustainable economy needs an integrated approach involving greater employer engagement; community engagement which targets disadvantaged areas and groups,⁷ bespoke pre-employment training, initiatives such as health trainers which specifically link health, training and employment in disadvantaged areas, and on-going personal support.

Areas for Partnership Action

Health and Well-Being Boards can:

- Tackle the wider determinants of health across the life course. Give every child in every community the best start in life, reduce child poverty and build people's self-esteem confidence and resilience from infancy,⁸ and address the inequalities associated with socioeconomic status.⁹
- Ensure children and adults get the most out of life by supporting them to develop their skills for employment and access to employment
- Work with employers to unleash their potential as champions of public health,¹⁰ promote health and safety at work and increase productivity and performance
- Work collaboratively with business and voluntary sector to promote healthier food choices, mental well-being, physical activity and behaviour change and tackle alcohol and health at work¹¹
- Change attitudes to mental health and employment by working with employers to build confidence and support employment
- Address the root causes of poor health and well-being,¹² reaching out to disadvantaged individuals and families who need the most support,¹³ including Black, Minority and Ethnic communities, refugees, economic migrants, lone parents, incapacity benefit claimants, mental health services' users, older people, young unemployed, offenders and ex-offenders, and families with children in poverty
- Ensure training programmes are employer driven and that "Employment Hubs" are supported in response to key investment projects in health and social care, bringing large numbers of jobs
- Broaden access to jobs by targeting unemployed people to take up entry level jobs and provide progression opportunities through up-skilling once in employment
- Encourage the provision of business support, including diversification, market access, procurement and local purchasing, for small and medium enterprises in the life science industry
- Use investment in health and social care to drive economic growth and use it to create new jobs¹⁴

Employers, the Economy and Health

A large number of jobs in the West Midlands are within health and social care.¹⁵ It is necessary for health and social care organisations to ensure efficiency and have corporate social responsibilities around maximising the investment made in health care and increasing prosperity and reducing disadvantage in the West Midlands. A workforce adjusted view of health is a key component to any strategies to achieve excellent performance and sustained resilience.

All organisations and major employers can improve health through investment in the local community.¹⁶ Workforces should broadly reflect the local population, with proportionate representation of people from deprived areas and vulnerable groups with evidence of robust systems for reporting and monitoring.

There should be a strong active role for the occupational health service where available, to promote health and well-being and reduce inequalities in health, “Back to Work”¹⁷ and “Fit for Work”¹⁸ schemes and other measures to manage absence through sickness are in place. These schemes should extend to all staff, including those employed by contracted companies and organisations.

There should be many comprehensive and embedded ‘Health at Work’¹⁹ schemes which strive to improve the health of the workforce. This includes implementing plans for healthy transport and green travel to promote healthy modes of travel and a reduction in car use.²⁰



Work and Health

Health, well-being and lifespan are influenced by amongst other things, socioeconomic factors throughout life. There is a strong relationship between health improvement, health inequalities and economic development.²¹

Work is central to social status, a powerful predictor of health outcomes and health inequalities. Unemployment is associated with a large number of health risks and inadequate employment is also associated with poor health outcomes. Income inequality affects health. The degree of control that employees exercise over their work influences health.²²

Despite its overall health benefits, work can be hazardous to health. Work influences the health of families and children and health conditions affect work status.²³

Worklessness results in loss of income which impacts on an individual’s health through a resulting lack of daily routine, social contact and self-esteem.²⁴ The West Midlands has a consistently higher rate of unemployment and economic inactivity (people neither in work nor seeking jobs) than the nation as a whole.²⁵

There is a relationship between work and health which can be summarised as follows:²⁶

- Work that provides fulfilment, job satisfaction and allows individuals discretion and control over their work appears to have a positive impact on health²⁷
- Jobs that are lacking in self-direction and control appear to confer far fewer health benefits and the rates of mortality and morbidity among these workers appear to be consistently higher²⁸
- In the West Midlands, an estimated 1.5% of people who have worked in the previous 12 months have experienced work related stress, depression or anxiety²⁹
- It is the responsibility of the employers and employees alike to work together to reduce the impact of the negative effects and promote a safe and healthy working environment³⁰

Promoting health and well-being, retention of staff, provision of occupational health services and interventions, risk assessment of potential accidents and workplace policies (e.g. green travel) can increase productivity and reduce absenteeism. As can good management of sickness absence and return to work.

Poor mental health is potentially disabling and it significantly increases the risk of poor physical health and is associated with a range of health damaging behaviours including smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, unwanted pregnancy and poor diet.³¹

People with two or more chronic physical conditions are seven times more likely to have mental health problems. Having both physical and mental health problems delays recovery from both conditions.³²

Having a purpose in life and being employed can protect people's mental health and well-being. Employment is an important part of many people's recovery from mental health problems. People with mental health problems have the lowest employment rate of any disability group, yet the overwhelming majority want to work, and, with the right support, many can. Only 30% of specialist mental health service users are in paid work or full-time education.^{33,34}

Children

To help children achieve economic well-being and for them to develop skills for adulthood it is necessary to ensure there are high quality vocational courses and young people are encouraged to engage in post-16 education, employment and training that is well planned, good quality and uses partnership working.³⁵

Skills

Access to jobs for disadvantaged areas, communities and individuals could be improved through promoting vocational and basic skill training. Work with the Skills Funding Agency, Jobcentre Plus, Local Authorities, Further Education and other agencies, will provide an integrated approach to training and learning.

Employers, Skills and Health

For a coordinated investment strategy to be implemented all sectors at every level need to identify and articulate their future workforce requirements and link this to learning programmes and courses.

Commitments will be needed from employers, those that deliver and fund education and training, the Government and individuals to maximise the investment available to support workforce development.

Those in lower NHS grades have least access to training and development. There is strong evidence that investment in formal and informal learning can improve organisational performance as well as impact on an individual's health and economic prosperity across all sectors.³⁶

Procurement

Organisations, including the NHS, procure a huge range of goods and services and they should demonstrate how their procurement contributes to wider economic development, which should lead to more opportunities emerging for local companies, and promote their corporate social responsibility.

It is necessary to work with local companies in order to help them become aware of opportunities and to break down some of the barriers which prevent their products from being adopted, and to work with local companies to enable local people to get jobs.

Life Science Industry

The UK life science industry develops life-changing medicines and groundbreaking medical technologies for the NHS and around the world. A strong driver of economic growth, the industry employs over 120,000 people and invests at least £4.6 billion in research and development. The combined annual turnover for the pharmaceutical, medical biotechnology and medical technology markets is more than £30 billion.

The UK is a global leader in this industry, exporting products and services as well as attracting inward investment. The Midlands and the North are powerbases for this industry and MedilinkWM, the Life Science industry association, has built a strong network of businesses, academics and healthcare professionals to maximise the industry's success. It provides an opportunity for companies wanting to venture into higher value added markets, and for profitable developments in the West Midlands.³⁷

The Royal Centre for Defence Medicine gives the West Midlands a real opportunity to develop trauma research, new therapies and products, and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham is one of the largest medical/academic complexes in Europe. These investments, and the large and diverse population in the West Midlands which is excellent for clinical trialling, can transform the local economy.³⁸



Case Studies

West Midlands Health at Work

Nationally, almost half of companies have an employee well-being strategy in place.³⁹ Many companies have implemented health at work programmes in the West Midlands, including:

- E-on - a gas and electricity company with a site in Coventry
- Shop Direct Home Shopping Limited – which has a contact centre in Worcester
- Instarmac PLC - a manufacturing and distribution company in Tamworth
- Allpay - which operates payment schemes and functions in Herefordshire
- AF Blakemore & Son Ltd - a national food service company with facilities in Birmingham, Walsall and Wolverhampton

The health at work schemes vary, but include:

- Embedding workplace health and well-being into all aspects of the business
- Actively addressing health and well-being of the workforce including nurse led occupational health and mental health programmes and tailoring interventions to the needs of the workforce
- Promoting and/or subsidising on-site healthy food choices, providing free fruit and a free gym and providing a good working environment including challenges, motivational awards and incentives
- Ensuring good communication with regular meetings between staff and managers, generating briefing newsletters, conducting appraisals and promoting training, and providing opportunities for staff to have an impact on their workplace
- Recognising corporate social responsibility including contributing to charities, the community and the environment and recycling

The health at work programmes have resulted in improved productivity, performance and reduced absences leading to substantial cost savings as well as improved mental well-being. These companies have received positive feedback from staff with a high level of engagement as well as external recognition from awards schemes. The programmes are helping businesses to become more resilient and are good for individuals and good for the population.

See reference sheet and the other briefing papers in the series:

Planning, Transport and Health
Housing and Health
Environment and Health
Culture, Leisure and Health
Safer Stronger Communities
Children, Young People and Families
Later Life

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Worcestershire Reducing sickness

absence costs through self-care courses

What was done and why

Evidence suggests that individuals recording high levels of short-term absence are likely to continue to be absent in the future. A 'self-care' course, designed by the Working in Partnership Project, was implemented at Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust to support employees, change behaviour and reduce absence rates. Offering a supportive, rather than disciplinary approach, the trust's trainers assisted employees and aimed to change their health belief model, while helping them to improve their own health and well-being at work.

How it was done

Working with the trainers, staff who participated examined individual perceptions of health and were trained in a model of change, confidence, self-esteem and stress management, as well as healthy eating and exercise. Nearly 70 individuals with episodic absence issues attended the two day interactive course, run by two trainers. The course offered practical guidance on individual health beliefs and how this might impact behaviour at work, as well as bespoke tools to help improve overall health and well-being and review sessions were held at three, six and twelve months.

Results and next steps

Following the self-care course, attendees' sickness absence costs reduced by an average of 55 per cent. Staff also reported improved team morale and continuity of patient care during the three-monthly review sessions. Individual participants also reported weight loss, sustained improved nutritional choices, and having 'the tools to create a better life' for themselves. The positive impacts were also felt by families and patients.

On-going programme

While the course was designed to deal with short-term issues, it has been found to be very beneficial for those on long-term absence as well and is now offered to those on long-term sick leave. Feedback from participants shows how bespoke techniques can help change behaviour and improve health at work by tackling the underlying problems, rather than simply dealing with symptoms.

Awards

The self-care course won the 2009 Excellence in Improving Employee Health and Well-being Award at the national Healthcare People Management Association (HPMA) Excellence in Human Resources Management Awards. Judges praised the course for its supportive approach to staff, which helps them improve their own health and well-being at work.

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Further Information, Organisations and Links

Learning for Public Health www.wmpho.org.uk/lfph	Department of Health www.dh.gov.uk
West Midlands Regional Observatory www.wmro.org	West Midland Councils www.wmcouncils.gov.uk
NHS Good Corporate Citizen www.corporatecitizen.nhs.uk	Advantage West Midlands www.advantagewm.co.uk
Health and Safety Executive www.hse.gov.uk	Business in the Community www.bitc.org.uk
Medilink West Midlands www.medilinkwm.co.uk	Sustainability West Midlands www.sustainabilitywestmidlands.org.uk
The Marmot Review www.marmotreview.org	www.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk
Department for Communities and Local Government www.communities.gov.uk	

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