

Evidence Summary

Gap in employment rate for

those with a long term health condition

Public Health Outcomes Framework indicator 13



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Measure

The gap between the employment rate for those with a long term health condition and the overall employment rate in persons aged 16 to 64.

Questions used to generate the evidence summary:

What actions are effective to support those with long term health conditions gain, and remain in, employment?

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NICE guidance is available on *Long term sickness absence and incapacity to work*. PH19 [NICE],¹ *Mental wellbeing at work*. PH22 [NICE],² and *Workplace health: management practices*. NG13 [NICE].³

Employees who experience long-term sickness or recurring long-or-short term sickness absence

People who have a poor prognosis for returning to work are likely to benefit most from more intensive interventions, for example coping strategies, psychological therapies, workplace modifications, referral to specialist services or vocational rehabilitation; those with a good prognosis are likely to benefit from less intensive interventions and services for example tailored advice on how to manage daily activities at home and at work and encouragement to be physically active [NICE].¹ Evidence about the effectiveness of employer provided workplace disability management programs promoting return to work is limited.¹²

Those receiving Employment and Support Allowance

Those receiving Employment and Support Allowance should receive an integrated programme to help them return to paid or unpaid work. Programmes should include a range of interventions for example an interview with a trained advisor; vocational training (this might include help with producing a curriculum vitae, interview training and help to find a job or work placement; a condition management component;

financial measures (for example return to work credit) and support before and after returning to work [NICE].¹

Mental illness

Offer supported employment programmes to people with psychosis, schizophrenia or bipolar disorder who wish to find or return to work [NICE].^{4,5,7} For those with depression there is moderate quality evidence that enhancing primary or occupational care with cognitive behavioural therapy may reduce number of days of sickness absence.⁸ Evidence on the benefit of workplace interventions including changes to work organisation, working conditions or environment in improving return to work for those with mental health problems is limited.⁹

People with a cancer diagnosis

For those diagnosed with cancer there is moderate evidence suggesting that multicomponent interventions, such as those combining physical training and psycho-educational or vocational elements, may help them return to work.^{10,13} However, psychosocial or workplace interventions delivered alone may not be effective.^{9,10,13}

Back pain and musculoskeletal disorders

Whether physical conditioning (graded activity aimed at increasing strength and flexibility) is beneficial as part of a return to work strategy for those with chronic back pain is uncertain; it may, as part of integrated care management, reduce sick leave in the longer term (12 months).¹¹ Current evidence suggests it does not reduce sickness absence in those with acute back pain.¹¹ Workplace interventions (for example changes to workplace or equipment or changes in work design or environment that involve both the worker and supervisor) may improve return to work for those with musculoskeletal disorders.⁹

Brain injury

There is insufficient evidence on the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation (VR) in individuals with brain injury to make recommendations on either approaches or intensity of intervention; the evidence on the effectiveness of specific VR interventions is inconclusive.⁶ Most randomised controlled trials seem to have been conducted in military personnel and veteran populations.¹⁴

High functioning autism

For adults with high functioning autism there is limited evidence that job interview training may improve interview performance but evidence on impact on employment status is lacking. Employment support may have a positive effect on employment status.¹⁵

Context in Wales

Healthy Working Wales is a Welsh Government funded programme that aims to improve and maintain the health safety and wellbeing of the work force in Wales. The programmes are aimed at any private, public or third sector business in Wales and have been developed in response to the review carried out by Dame Carol Black; *Working for a Healthier Tomorrow 2008*.

Healthy Working Wales has three areas of support for action within the workplace as a setting:

1. A Health and Wellbeing Framework: This is delivered through a Workplace Award scheme; the [Corporate Health Standard](#) targets workplaces with over 50 employees and the [Small Workplace Health Award](#) targets small businesses. The programmes offer support to implement a range of initiatives that will create a healthy, happy and safe working environment. Examples include effective return to work policies; health promotion initiatives that encourage healthy behaviours; health needs assessment; flexible working policies; reasonable adjustments; promotion of equality and diversity; and support to help people remain in work.
2. A health and Safety information service; [Workboost](#) supports small to medium sized businesses to understand their legal responsibility in relation to Health, Safety and Welfare. The program offers support to effectively manage the risks of the business particularly in relation to staff safety and people management including effective sickness absence management, return to work and stress management.
3. [Training](#) in the management of sickness absence through effective use of the Fit Note by employers, individuals, doctors and other health care practitioners. Enabling a safe and effective return to work from a period of short term or long term sickness absence relies on the cooperation of the physician, the employer and the staff member. The training targets primary care physicians and employers in Wales.

The In-Work Support Service (jointly funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and Welsh European Funding Office) is available in convergence areas of Wales and provides free and confidential support for employed or self-employed people who are **on or at risk of** sickness absence as a result of a mild to moderate health condition, with the aim of facilitating an early return to work. It is aimed at employees of small to medium sized businesses, who may not otherwise have access to occupational health support. The service offers access to a range of therapies including talking therapies, physiotherapy and group support. The service also provides liaison with employers to support early and supported return to work for the individual.

*References and further detail from the sources on which this evidence summary is based are available in the [evidence map](#).
User guide available [here](#).*