

looking after you always



# The drive to thrive

Attract and retain top talent by  
understanding the mental wellbeing trends  
that will shape workplaces in 2022

**Brave new era**

Mental health  
research snapshot  
October 2021



# Get ahead of the mental health crisis

**As the pandemic eases, we're at a critical juncture. Business confidence is growing and 60% of businesses plan to increase new hires, but this progress could soon be derailed by a mental health crunch point.**

A staggering 46% of referrals to our Occupational Health team in recent months have been mental health-related. That's a huge increase in demand and flags a crisis ahead. We're investing heavily in new employer supports in this area, and it's certainly time for decisive action by HR teams.

To keep you a beat ahead, we're sharing new research insights on mental health and wellbeing from our rolling Brave New Era research. For Mental Health Month in 2021, and to support the Let's Talk Mental Health event, we're sharing key findings and recommendations HR leads should act on today.

## Brighter times but crisis on the horizon

As Irish business starts to pick up, mental wellbeing in the workplace must be an urgent priority. It is now the leading worry for employers, while more than half of employees say the pandemic has impacted their mental health.

Worryingly, our research found high levels of suicidal ideation. Moreover, a significant stigma remains around speaking about mental health challenges, particularly in sectors such as manufacturing.

## Planning for The Great Resignation

We found there's significant turmoil in the jobs market, with many employees hoping to move on, making retention and recruitment crucial issues.

One way to elevate your employer brand, our research shows, is to showcase your active support of mental health and wellbeing – younger people are particularly likely to move to a supportive employer. It's also striking how valuable employees who use employer supports say they are.

## Return to normality?

This is not a time to sit back. It's more important than ever to have a mental health and wellbeing strategy and to implement it, bearing in mind any transition back to the workplace could exacerbate anxiety and other mental health issues for burned out employees.

We look forward to supporting our members as they continue to prioritise the mental wellbeing of their teams.

## Looking after you always,

**Sinéad Proos,**  
Head of Health and Wellbeing,  
laya healthcare



# About this research

**With this research, we wanted to take the mental health pulse of Ireland's workforce. Over the pandemic, we've been charting workplace health and wellbeing trends with our Brave New Era series, the largest-scale research of its type in Ireland.**

In this snapshot, you can discover how employees are coping, how has this changed since our previous report six months ago in spring 2021, what should employers and HR leaders be worried about right now and what can you do about it.

At laya healthcare, we're committed to supporting employee mental health and busy HR teams across Ireland. Over the coming months, we'll continue to share our Brave New Era research findings to keep HR leaders a beat ahead.

## How we carried out this pulse survey

For this snapshot, international insights and research agency Spark conducted independent research on our behalf in September 2021 into employee and employer attitudes, perceptions and behaviours around mental wellbeing. This included:



**Survey of 1,000 employees across Ireland**



**Poll of 68 HR leaders across a spread of sectors**

**[Discover core insights from Wave 1 and Wave 2 of our Brave New Era research and associated HR playbooks.](#)**



# Mental health snapshot: The grind goes on

**The shift towards more normal ways of working isn't boosting wellbeing. Absenteeism is down 13% and productivity is up 13%, but about a third of employers remain worried about employee burnout and ongoing damage to company culture.**

They're right to be concerned – a quarter of employees say a negative company culture has developed over the pandemic. While the number of employees taking holidays is up 20%, three in five employers are concerned about staff not taking their holiday entitlement.

## Burned out, not bouncing back

Overall, people are feeling stuck, dejected and burned out. Employee wellbeing is down 16%, with morale down 13% and motivation down 7% - all compared with six months ago. Two thirds of employers said mental health and wellbeing is their employees' biggest concern.

Despite the return to quasi-normal, 54% of employees still say Covid-19 has negatively affected their mental health, down from 63% in the spring. Money worries and concern about an uncertain future are driving stress, along with having to socialise with people again.

## Younger employees and those with a disability most affected

Two-thirds of 18-34 year olds and people with disabilities report a negative mental health impact, while one in four employees still feel stressed and anxious frequently (down from 43% in the spring).

Employers can't sit back and assume their workforce will thrive as life returns to some semblance of normality.

## What do employers need to do?

### 1. Build trust and smash the stigma

It's vital to prioritise psychological safety and counter employee stress, anxiety and burnout.

### 2. The Great Resignation: Win the talent war

Double down on health and wellbeing to ensure you're an employer of choice.

### 3. Offer support and address the mental wellbeing risks

Understand what your team needs and how to help.

# Build trust and smash the stigma

**It's time to understand and address the pandemic's mental health toll. We found many people aren't faring so well, but are afraid to speak up, while trust in employers is waning.**

About **1 in 2** people say they have felt lonely and isolated recently, with a shocking **10%** reporting suicidal thoughts. Equally concerning – **6%** of employees are struggling with substance abuse.

## Employers see the challenges

**Most employers (84%) told us they're concerned about their employees' mental health and 59% say employees are suffering.**

They must act to address this crisis before it damages morale and workforce wellbeing even more.

Addressing stigma around mental health is critical – **59%** of HR leaders say it still exists in the workplace.

## Employees psychological safety and stigma

**41%** say there is a stigma about mental health issues

**59%** in manufacturing point to a mental health stigma

**28%** said I feel safe to speak up at work about Covid-19

**24%** say they have confidence in their employer's plans for the future

**17%** say they sometimes have felt abandoned by their company

**11%** said I feel I've hit a psychological breaking point at work

## Trust in employers is slipping

**26%** I trust my employer to make the right return to work decision on behalf of employees (↑ from **32%** in Jan 2021)

**20%** I feel the company has my best interests at heart (↓ from **24%** in Jan 2021)

**13%** said their company really seems to understand what I am going through (↓ from **18%** in Jan 2021)

# Remember the managers: the squeezed middle

**In devising mental health and wellbeing strategy, it's vital to remember managers and team leaders.**

Our research found that **43%** of HR leaders claim Covid-19 has had a negative impact on their own mental health and wellbeing. Managers feel responsible for team members' wellbeing. They are carrying a real burden and need specialised individual support and training.

## 1. Sleep and sex showing the strain

The chronic stress and burnout caused by the pandemic, coupled with worry about money (**44%** of employees) and uncertainty about the future (**49%**), is leading to lack of sleep and intimacy issues.

Almost half of employees say they struggle to get a good night's sleep, while **21%** say their sex life has been affected.

These issues can in turn trigger more chronic mental health problems, so it's critical to support employees in addressing the root causes of stress.

## 2. Watch for socialisation issues

Most employers (**74%**) are worried about the reduction of social connections among colleagues, but only **44%** perceive employees may be stressed about socially readjusting to the workplace.

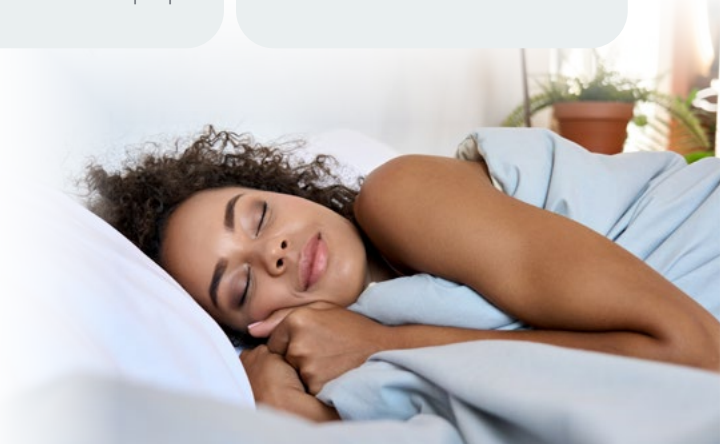
In fact, a third of employees whose mental health has negatively been impacted by Covid-19 are afraid to socialise with friends and a quarter are afraid to meet new people.

## 3. Crisis mode: what to do next

The first step is to evaluate current mental health and wellbeing across your workforce. Use pulse or ad hoc surveys to understand how employees are doing. Learn more about identifying and addressing the crisis in our deepdive article: [Four ways to know if your company faces a mental health crisis.](#)

## Always a beat ahead: how laya healthcare helps

laya healthcare members can access a wide range of supports such as a 24/7 Mental Wellbeing programme (available to members aged 16+) and Wellbeing Live sessions.



# The Great Resignation: win the talent war

Our research shows a dramatic swing in the jobs market since the spring, with **one in two HR leaders seeing an increase in resignations**, compared with six months ago when there was a **32% decrease in resignations**.

This huge upheaval is set to continue, with **34%** of employees planning to change jobs in the next year and **45%** saying they would like to change jobs, but are afraid there are no opportunities.

That's not all. Two in five say they are unhappy in their job but will put up with it for now, while one in five do not feel their job is secure.

## Boost your employer brand with a strong health and wellbeing vision

The encouraging news for employers is that they can elevate their brand in the jobs market by showcasing excellent health and wellbeing supports.

In fact, one in five employees would be very likely to move to an employer with better mental health support. The most likely to consider moving are 18-34 year olds (**32%**), and those with disabilities (**34%**)

Across the board, employees want to see due care from employers – **78%** of employees say employers providing mental health supports is valuable. However, only half of employees (**49%**) say employers have been effective in looking after their mental wellbeing.

That's a strong signal for HR teams to take action and ensure employees can access an array of supports and are aware of them.

## Why do employees want to leave?

3 in 5 under pressure to stay connected after hours

1 in 2 employees are finding it hard to switch off

3 in 5 in financial sector can't switch off

2 in 5 working longer hours than six months ago

1 in 2 working as much as they did six months ago

1 in 3 employees are less satisfied with their job than before the pandemic



# Younger workers feel the strain

**Younger workers (18-34) are particularly in need of support. They told us they are stressed, error-prone and not coping.**

They don't take enough breaks, find working from home stressful and have called in sick more than they used to.

Not only that, but our research also showed that the younger the employee, the more likely they were by far to struggle with concentration and productivity when working from home.

## Catering to diverse needs

A significant minority of the workforce has additional needs and this cohort is more likely to be struggling with the fallout from the pandemic. In fact, **67%** of those with disabilities have had their mental health negatively impacted by Covid-19.

Take time to listen to employees with disabilities and act to meet their needs. Our research found **34%** of this group would move to an employer that offers better mental health support.

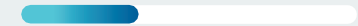
## Act now to stay ahead

Remember to highlight your mental health and wellbeing programmes and supports in your recruitment campaigns, so potential hires can see they will be well supported and cared for at your company. Likewise, consider fresh internal communications around these supports to help retention efforts.

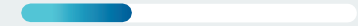
## Always ahead: How laya healthcare helps

Tough times are made easier with support from our 24/7 Mental Wellbeing Support Programme (available to members aged 16+). Any laya healthcare member can speak with our qualified counsellors about mental health, financial and legal issues, or work-related stress or anxiety. 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

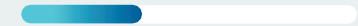
## Reasons for dissatisfaction



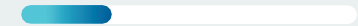
**35%** I struggle to motivate myself



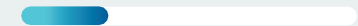
**33%** Less social interaction with colleagues



**36%** Less work life balance (31% WFH/Hybrid)



**27%** I'm feeling disconnected from my work



**26%** I am struggling to switch off after work

# Offer support and address the risks

**Despite the extraordinary pressure everyone has been under during the pandemic, only one in six employees have actually sought help to cope. A further one in six were unsure how to seek help, while about three in five told us they have not sought help for any particular issue.**

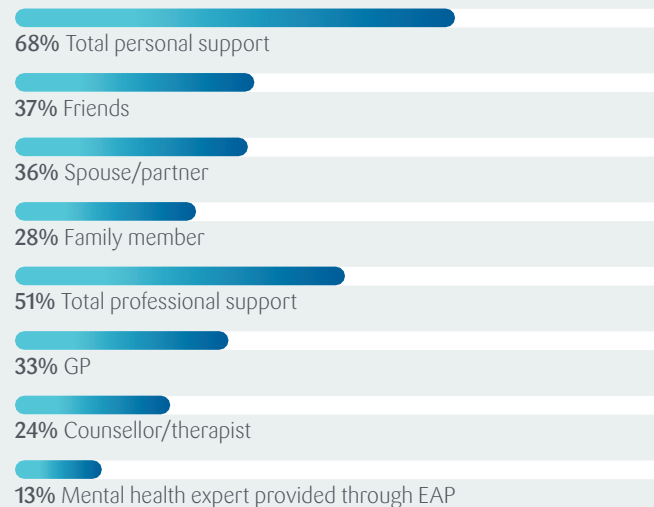
Of those who reported negative mental health impact, **58%** sought some support. As the graphic shows, most turned to friends and family rather than their employer for support.

## Users find employer support highly valuable

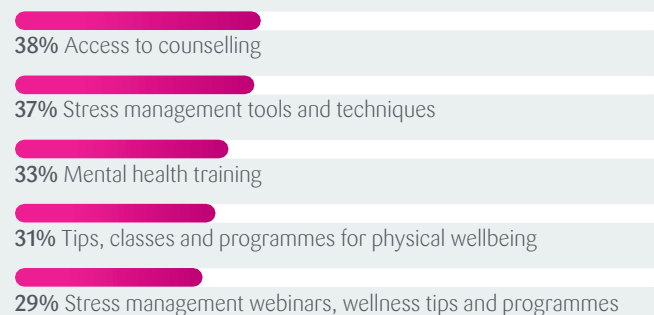
**Not all employers offer supports and not all employees know about supports that are available to them, but those who use employer supports find them incredibly valuable.**

Our research found that only **three in ten** employees have ever used mental health services offered by their employer, but that an impressive **82%** of those who have used mental health services offered by their employer would use them again.

## Where do people get support?



## Most sought after supports



# Investing in peer-to-peer support

**While our mental health pulse survey found more than two thirds of people seek help from their personal networks, it's fair to say these people may not always be best equipped to help them.**

That's why at laya healthcare we encourage employers to roll out Mental Health Responder programmes, in which employees are trained to offer peer-to-peer support to any colleague who may be experiencing stress, anxiety or other issues. In our experience, it has proven a strikingly useful intervention.

## 1. Bridge the information gap

While **87%** of employers say their employees can access an EAP, **39%** of employees say their employer doesn't offer mental health and wellbeing services and **24%** don't know if they do.

Employers need to explain employee support options, emphasise their confidentiality and normalise their use to help remove any stigma.

Make it clear to employees they don't have to be in crisis or profoundly depressed to avail of help. Instead, looking after mental health and wellbeing is like going to the gym for your mind.

## 2. Ensuring you understand who's at risk

Of the employers we surveyed, two thirds are interested in mental wellbeing assessments for employees, but **89%** don't carry them out yet.

These assessments are critical when it comes to understanding mental health and wellbeing risks, and providing relevant support and intervention.

At laya healthcare, we offer industry-leading specialist mental health risk assessment programmes to support HR teams in handling this sensitive issue.

## 3. Tackling the issue

To support your employees and mitigate against any mental health risks, it's crucial to conduct regular risk assessments in the workplace. Talk to us at laya healthcare about how we can support you with this, together with our expert partners.

## Always ahead: How laya healthcare helps

We know life is hectic, so the Laya App has been designed to make it fast and easy for every member to check their cover, book a video GP consultation\* and do so much more – all within the Laya App.

\* GPlive appointments can be booked by members aged 17+. Appointments can be booked for members under 17, but this can only be done by a parent or guardian.



# Key takeaways checklist

Only **56%** of organisations have a mental health strategy and over a third don't proactively offer any mental health support. Given the impending mental health crisis in the workforce, being without a strategy and failing to offer supports is a path to failure.

Follow our checklist to address these issues in your organisation



## Plan and implement a mental health and wellbeing strategy (or review existing strategy)

- Put mental health and wellbeing at the core of your employee relations plan.
- Build mental health and wellbeing into your retention and recruitment strategies.
- Consider the support needs of your management team.



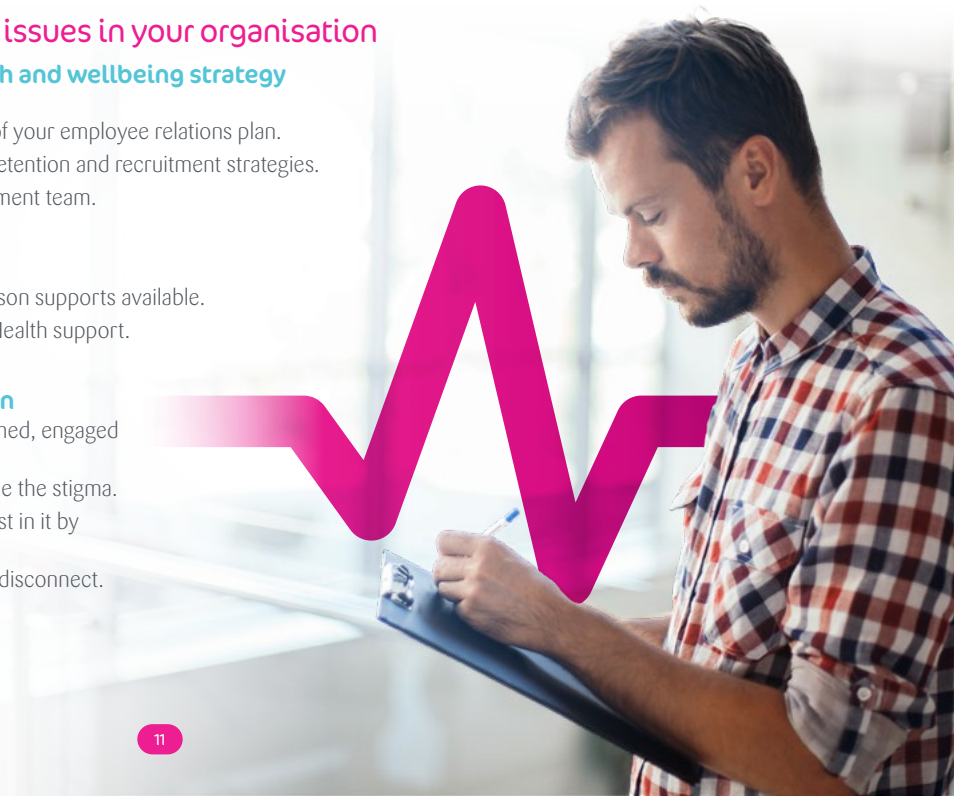
## Invest in health and wellbeing

- Plan how to make concrete digital and in-person supports available.
- Build in risk assessments and Occupational Health support.



## Overhaul your communications plan

- Remember it's vital to keep employees informed, engaged and motivated.
- Focus on ways to enhance trust and dismantle the stigma.
- If you offer an EAP, consider how to build trust in it by emphasising its confidentiality.
- Emphasise work-life balance and the right to disconnect.



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If you would like any further information  
please contact us via the below channels.  
Webchat also available



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[layahealthcare.ie](https://layahealthcare.ie)

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