



fit for work
uk coalition

Is the UK Fit for Work?

Confronting the challenge of UK workforce health

The UK's population is living and working longer. But these increased working years are not necessarily ones of good health. It is estimated that almost 21 million people of working-age will have at least one long-term health condition by 2030.¹ Already the annual costs of sickness absence and worklessness associated with ill health are over £100 billion in the UK.² Action is urgently needed.

The **Fit For Work UK Coalition** believes that all parties must respond to this challenge and make health and work a priority. Improving the health and workability of our nation will unlock benefits for individuals and for the wider economy.

The Fit for Work UK Coalition is urging the new Government to make health and work its priority and to implement the recommendations outlined in this document.

We want to see:

1. National health and work strategy
2. National leadership for healthy workforce
3. Accessible information for people with long-term conditions
4. Measures that capture health and work in NHS frameworks
5. Effective incentives to reward healthcare providers who support people with long-term conditions to return to work



1. National health and work strategy

The national strategy should encompass all stakeholders with the ability to influence occupational health in the UK, including the Government, the NHS, healthcare commissioners, public health agencies, employers and individuals. The strategy should describe the strength of the positive and mutually re-enforcing relationship between health and work; clearly assign responsibilities to the stakeholders involved in its delivery; identify objectives and goals for all parties; and, set out a detailed timeline for its roll-out.

2. National leadership for healthy workforce

The absence of clearly defined leadership has hampered progress in the area of health and work in recent years. A new, forward-looking leadership is therefore needed to provide direction to a new National health and work strategy. This leadership should assume the responsibility for establishing health and work as a policy priority on the political agenda; inspiring and facilitating collaborative working; and, supporting the dissemination of innovative practices and initiatives. A number of potentially effective models could be considered, including the appointment of a new minister with a cross-departmental portfolio, a working group of experts, an external expert reporting directly to the Prime Minister and/or a senior high-ranking official.

3. Accessible information for people with long-term conditions

Everyone with a long-term condition should have the name of a healthcare professional who can support him or her with information and practical advice on health and work issues. Evidence is growing that enabling people with long-term conditions to have early conversations about work and health makes them more likely to return to work sooner and stay in work longer.³ If people with long-term conditions know who to turn to for advice around work and health – whether their GP, a specialist nurse or another qualified professional – they can be supported to get back to work quicker, help employers to retain their workforce, and society as a whole will reap the rewards.

4. Measures that capture health and work in NHS frameworks

Successive governments have failed to fully harness the positive relationship that can exist between work and health. There are no measures on work and health in the current Clinical Commissioning Group Outcomes Indicator Set in England; nor is health and work adequately covered by the performance management frameworks of the UK's devolved health systems. Work must be recognised as a health outcome for patients, and metrics included in NHS frameworks and strategies that will incentivise and support healthcare professionals to consider work in consultations and open up early conversations with patients about their needs.

5. Effective incentives to reward healthcare providers who support people with long-term conditions to return to work

Healthcare providers have an essential role to play in supporting people with long-term conditions to manage their conditions effectively, enabling them to stay in work or return to work after illness. Incentives, such as commissioning for quality and innovation (CQUIN) payments and the Quality and Outcomes Framework, have been shown to encourage providers to focus on particular areas of need and shape clinical practice to improve patient outcomes. These and other incentives should be explored as a means to focus providers on their role in improving work and health outcomes and to encourage and reward innovation and good practice.



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The **Fit For Work UK Coalition** is an active partnership of healthcare professionals, policymakers, employers and advocacy groups. We represent individuals from the leading think tank on workforce effectiveness and a range of professional and patient groups and organisations supporting people with long-term conditions, particularly musculoskeletal conditions.

Our members are: AbbVie, Arthritis Care, the Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance (ARMA), Arthritis Research UK, BackCare, the British Society for Rheumatology (BSR), BT Group, the Centre of Musculoskeletal Health and Work, the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP), National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society (NASS), National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (NRAS), the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) and The Work Foundation.

We have been working since 2009 to change understanding, attitudes and behaviour around health and work for people of working age living with long-term conditions, including musculoskeletal conditions. We are working to:

- Improve the productivity of Britain's workforce
- Empower and support people with long-term conditions to remain in or return to work
- Reinforce the positive impact work can have on people's health and wellbeing

If you are interested in our work or would like to support or join the **Fit for Work UK Coalition**, please get in touch with our secretariat by emailing fitforworkuk@incisivehealth.com.

REFERENCES

- 1 Vaughan-Jones, Helen (2009) Healthy Work: Challenges and opportunities to 2030. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/a-million-workers-off-sick-for-more-than-a-month>, Accessed: February 2015
- 2 Black, Carol (2008) Working for a Healthier Tomorrow. London: TSO. Available at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/thwwb-working-for-a-healthier-tomorrow.pdf>, Accessed: May 2014
- 3 Vaughan-Jones, Helen and Barham, Leela. (2010) Healthy Work: Evidence into Action. Available at: <http://www.theworkfoundation.com/assets/docs/healthy-work-evidence-into-action-report.pdf>, Accessed: May 2014

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