



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.<sup>1</sup> Already the annual costs of sickness absence and worklessness associated with ill health are over £100 billion in the UK.<sup>2</sup> 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 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 a 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 a 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. The Fit for Work UK Coalition has welcomed the establishment of the Department of Health and Department for Work and Pensions Joint Work and Health Unit as a first step to ensure better integration of health and work. However, more needs to be done to bring these issues to the forefront of the policy area. As a Coalition we are calling for the appointment of a new minister with a cross-departmental portfolio, an external expert reporting directly to the Prime Minister and / or a senior high-ranking officials who would work in partnership with the unit. Responsibilities would include 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.

## 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.<sup>3</sup> 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 not only for NHS employees but for the population as a whole 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; Arthritis Research UK; the Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance (ARMA); BackCare; the British Society for Rheumatology (BSR); BT Group; the Centre for Musculoskeletal Health and Work; the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP); the Chronic Pain Policy Coalition; National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society (NASS); National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (NRAS); Neil Betteridge Associates; Pathways CIC; the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP); the Spinal Injuries Association; The Work Foundation – Lancaster University; Dame Carol Black, Expert Adviser on Health and Work to the Department of Health and to Public Health England; Dr Steven Boorman, Director of Employee Health for Empactis; and Phil Gray, Trustee of ARMA.

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](mailto:fitforworkuk@incisivehealth.com).

### REFERENCES

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

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