

The State of Mental Wellbeing on the Frontline

March 2020 - July 2021





Andy Bibby,
CEO 87%

Foreword

87% was launched in 2017 to solve one of the critical issues of our time: the negative impact of poor mental health on individuals, organisations, and wider communities.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been able to provide our services to frontline organisations when mental wellbeing resources have never been so crucial. With funding generously provided by the Aviva Foundation, we have facilitated a series of partnerships with frontline service organisations and have given almost 50,000 urgent and emergency care workers access to the platform. This funding has made a range of support services available to the national frontline workforce and facilitated this research during a time of exceptional need.

Since March 2020, the emergency services have faced unprecedented occupational stressors, adding to the challenges that were already present for the sector prior to the pandemic. The risk of infection from COVID-19, worries around personal protective equipment (PPE) supply and the risk of infecting loved ones have all been top concerns on the frontline during the pandemic. The loss of colleagues, with over 850 healthcare workers in the UK having lost their lives to COVID-19 since March 2020, has also affected many on the frontline.

Thankfully, the risk of mental health difficulties can be significantly reduced through proactive interventions that focus on prevention. These steps help to empower individuals to prioritise their health and organisations to make staff mental wellbeing a key part of their success. By providing frontline workers with 24/7 access to expert-curated wellbeing resources, community support, and self-assessment tools, we have helped frontline workers to understand their mental wellbeing strengths and challenges and manage the pressures of the past 18 months.

In this report, we share the insights that we have gained from working with a range of frontline services in areas including emergency medicine, ambulance services and policing. By understanding the current mental health landscape, we have contributed to the delivery of crucial wellbeing support for frontline workers and detailed the practical steps that can be taken across the sector to help organisations build cultures that incorporate tailored and strategic, expert-led wellbeing practices.

Andy Bibby, CEO



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Executive summary

Poor mental health is estimated to cost UK employers up to £45 billion a year and is the leading cause of work-related ill health.

Since March 2020, 87% has worked closely with frontline organisations and their employees to understand and support their wellbeing. Using our platform, we have collected and analysed data on the wellbeing of over 10,000 UK frontline workers. This report provides a summary of what we have learned about the wellbeing of frontline workers in the past 18 months.

The health and social care sector has the highest level of stress-related sickness and is estimated to be 46% higher than the UK national average¹.

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Connected health outcomes

Over the past 18 months we have measured areas of wellbeing that include work life, psychological health and physical health, to understand the key strengths and weaknesses across frontline organisations. We have used this insight to deliver tailored wellbeing strategies to frontline organisations, including policy recommendations and training programmes delivered by clinical experts.

Using our measures, we not only observed the high levels of professional challenges that the frontline has faced, but also the knock-on effect this has had on their frame of mind, performance, and personal relationships. Using these insights, we can see that improving one area of health has a powerful positive impact on other aspects of wellbeing.

87% also offers a comprehensive programme of training in workplace mental wellbeing best practice, delivered by our team of clinical experts.

As organisations implement a continual programme of measurement, research and insight, they can develop a culture where their workforce is empowered to make positive changes to their daily lives.



The current landscape

Key findings

From working with frontline organisations since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have developed unique insights into the wellbeing strengths and challenges of this fast-paced and highly pressurised sector.

10%

of staff have recently had suicidal thoughts

45%

of frontline workers have felt panic or terror

49%

have been distressed by unwanted images or memories



Female staff are more likely to have **difficulties with physical health**, whereas male staff are more likely to have **difficulties sharing difficult emotions**.



The majority of frontline workers are proud of the work that they do, are **highly adaptive and face challenges proactively** – all key sources of resilience.



Compared to their colleagues, medical students and junior staff are more **likely to feel depressed, anxious and less valued in the workplace**.



Across frontline organisations, up to **60% of staff are experiencing chronically poor work-life balance**.



Good mental wellbeing is central to everyone's ability to thrive. The positive impact good mental fitness has on individuals and organisations is clearly apparent when measured and evidenced. I believe everyone deserves to flourish and 87% is here to help people and organisations to do just that.



- Richard Glynn, Executive Chairman & Founder of 87%

Where do we go from here?

Despite the challenges the frontline has faced, we know that poor wellbeing is never part of the job. The risk of illness and absence due to workplace stress and burnout can be significantly reduced with proactive and preventative strategies.

Leading with wellbeing

It is essential that leadership develops the ability to recognise and address wellbeing challenges in their teams. By equipping leaders with the skills to identify and act upon indicators of poor wellbeing, conversations about mental health can be de-stigmatised, and staff can be empowered to manage their wellbeing more effectively. These efforts improve care, increase team-wide health and morale and reduce staff illness.

Making recovery a key performance indicator

For many frontline workers, being passionate about their work in a high-pressure environment can mean sacrificing their own needs for rest and recovery to support their team. Research² has shown that a culture that demands a heavy workload, normalises missed meal-breaks, and lacks support from management are contributing factors to poor wellbeing. Organisations that make breaks and taking entitled leave key performance indicators can prevent health challenges in the long-run and boost the productivity of their workforce³.

At all levels of seniority, being able to talk about mental wellbeing and emotional challenges in the same way as physical health is crucial to creating a sustainable and productive working culture.

The power of investment in wellbeing

Organisations that invest in the wellbeing of their staff see powerful returns on their investment. According to recent research³, for every £1 spent on wellbeing support organisations get a £4 return. This return increases to £6 when organisations use preventative, tailored organisation-wide initiatives. The benefits of wellbeing investment include fewer absences, decreased presenteeism, lower rates of burnout and greater workforce retention.

Empowering teams

For many frontline workers, engaging with colleagues is a powerful way to process the challenges they face in their role and make sense of their own experiences. Research shows that peer support acts as a buffer against work stress and significantly reduces the risk of burnout⁴. Building opportunities for mentoring and peer support into strategy can harness community in the workplace and de-stigmatise conversations around mental health.



Section 1

The current landscape

What have we learned about wellbeing on the frontline?

Across the globe, frontline workers have faced unprecedented challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Using data from the past 18 months, we have found that 40% of frontline workers are at high risk of developing mental health disorders. Thankfully, research^{5,6} has shown that this risk is **modifiable** and can be reduced by expert-led training and strategic programming.

40%

are at risk of developing mental health disorders

Performance on the frontline:

61%

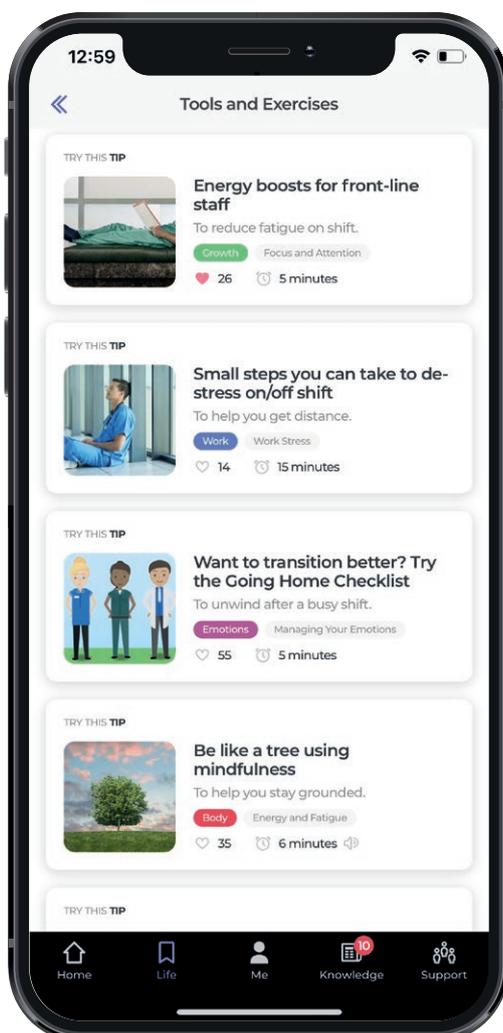
feel tired most of the time

33%

have difficulties with concentration and focus

32%

report regular symptoms of depression and anxiety



Using measures developed by clinical experts, we have collected in-depth assessments of thousands of frontline workers in organisations across the sector. Insights from these measures empower staff to understand their own wellbeing strengths and challenges and provide an opportunity for reflection and resilience-building. For each frontline organisation, we have also built a health profile describing the wellbeing of their teams and identifying practical opportunities for change and growth.

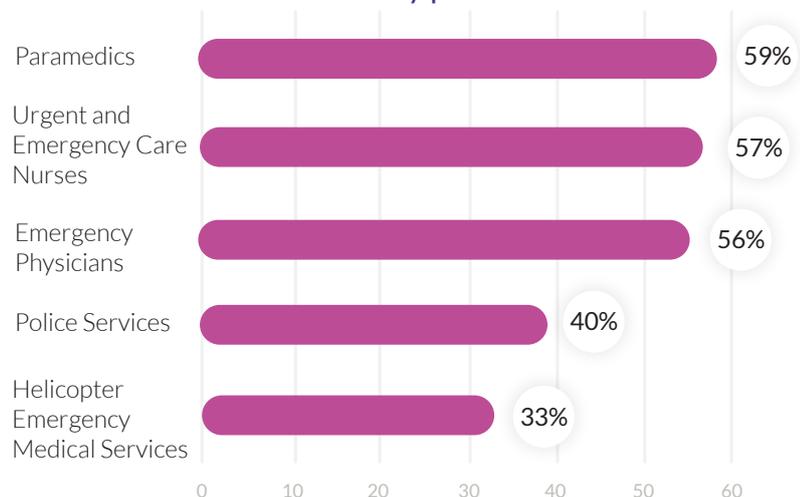
Work-life balance is the leading wellbeing challenge across the frontline sector

Work-life balance and the risk of burnout

When frontline workers put the demands of work above their wellbeing needs on a regular basis, this creates a chronic work-life imbalance that leads to high levels of stress and negatively impacts performance.

Having healthy boundaries between home and work is essential for recovery and rest and, over time, poor work-life boundaries will contribute significantly to poorer health outcomes. Through monitoring the health of this sector's workers over the past 18 months, we are able to understand primary risk factors and the impact on overall wellbeing for staff **before they become major health concerns**.

% risk of chronically poor work-life balance



For the NHS workforce, workload is a major contributor to poor mental health and wellbeing, as is the feeling of not belonging. Many describe feeling more like itinerant workers than valued members of a team. The evidence shows that there are clear, tangible objectives that we can and should be reaching.

- Dame Clare Gerada, Medical Director of NHS Practitioner Health



49%

say their work commitments are out of control

The impact of poor work-life balance

Chronic stress

While healthy levels of stress can help motivate us to get the job done and keep focused, stress that regularly overwhelms our capacity to cope is a serious health risk. Chronic stress affects our bodies in multiple ways, including disrupting the immune system, speeding up the ageing process and increasing the risk of a heart attack or stroke. Stress can even rewire the brain, leaving people more vulnerable to anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems.

Frontline workers struggling to maintain work-life balance are:

1.1x

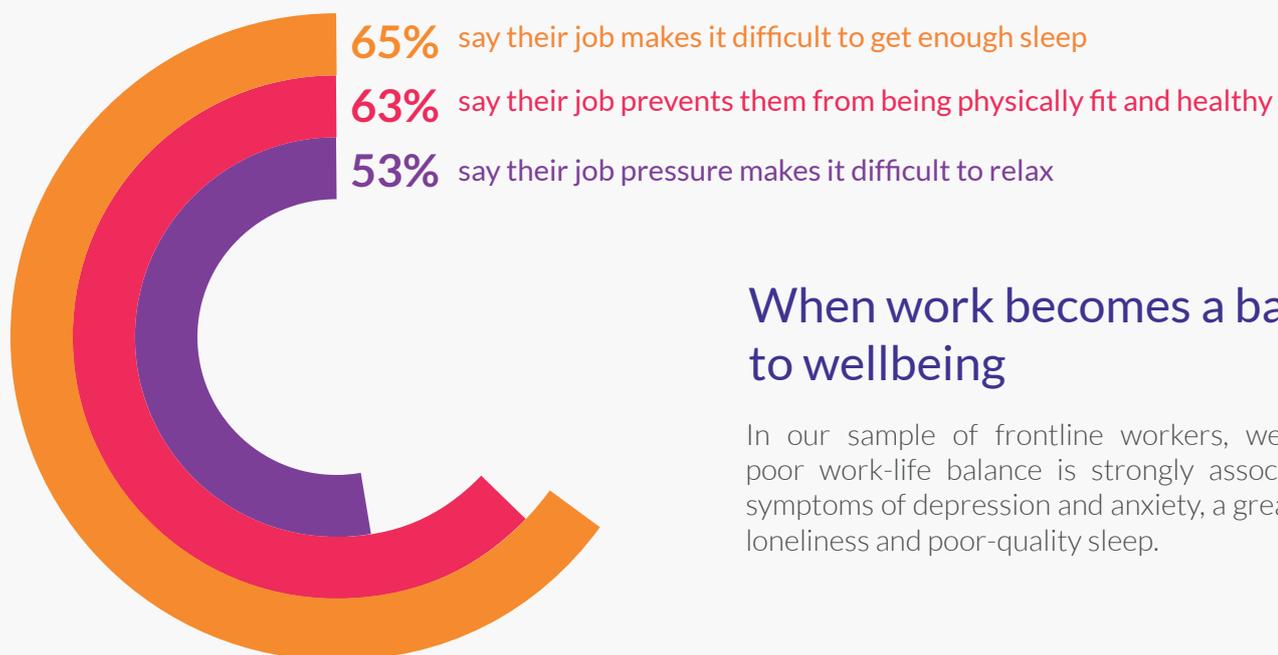
more likely to be socially isolated

1.5x

more likely to not be getting enough sleep regularly

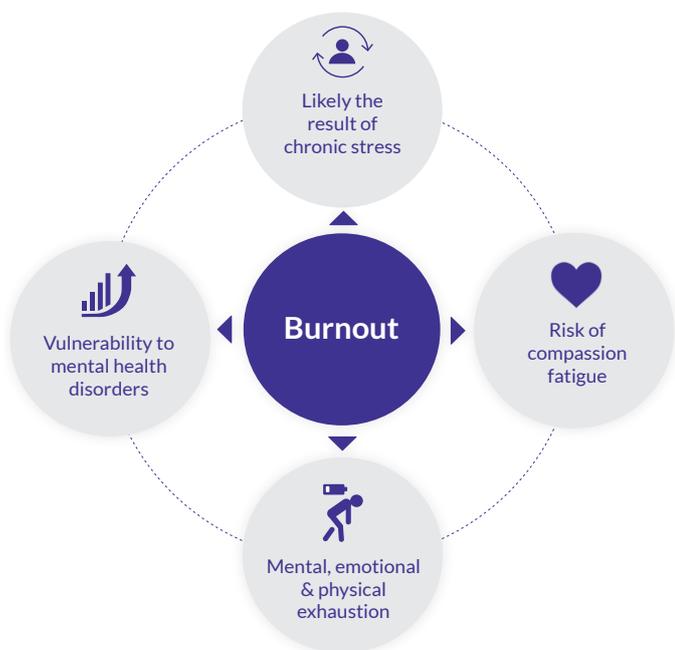
2.0x

more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression



When work becomes a barrier to wellbeing

In our sample of frontline workers, we see that poor work-life balance is strongly associated with symptoms of depression and anxiety, a greater risk of loneliness and poor-quality sleep.



A warning sign of compassion fatigue

65% of frontline workers say that talking to people has 'felt too much' for them in the past week. This is a warning sign of emotional exhaustion and compassion fatigue.

Burnout

Over time, chronic stress can lead to burnout, a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged pressure or demands that is more common among frontline workers than the general population. Burnout reduces productivity and saps energy, leaving people feeling increasingly helpless, hopeless, cynical, and resentful. This condition is a key concern for NHS staff following the pandemic⁷.

39%

say they are regularly frustrated by their work

40%

say their job can sometimes make them feel ill

Compassion fatigue

A wellbeing challenge for the frontline closely linked to burnout is compassion fatigue, a condition characterised by feelings of exhaustion, hopelessness and disengagement from work.

Compassion fatigue arises from working in highly distressing and emotionally challenging situations where the capacity to respond empathically to situations can become depleted. Along with burnout, compassion fatigue is a primary factor for workers prematurely leaving frontline sector roles^{8,9}.

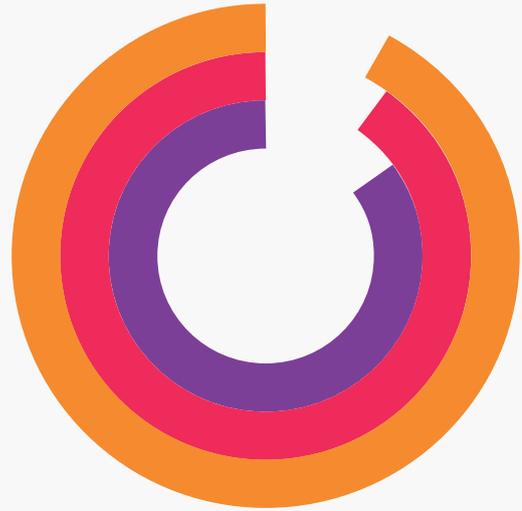
Organisations can prevent compassion fatigue by investing in training that helps leadership identify and address the warning signs in their staff and teams. A supportive working culture can reduce the risk of compassion fatigue by helping people to discuss issues openly, debrief after stressful situations and take regular rest breaks.



Strength and resilience for frontline workers

In the past 18 months, we've gained valuable insight into how frontline workers have dealt with challenging situations and how these skills can be used to increase resilience to mental health challenges.

Our findings support that frontline staff take great satisfaction from their work, are highly adaptable and benefit from supportive social environments. The majority of staff demonstrate a positive and proactive mindset in challenging situations, and these are skills that can be used to tackle wellbeing areas in decline.



92% of frontline workers are proud of the work they do

90% enjoy coming up with new solutions to problems

85% feel that their social relationships are supportive and rewarding

The power of a positive mindset

A proactive approach to challenge is associated with greater self-confidence, a greater sense of purpose in life and a lower likelihood of mental health issues.

60% of people on the frontline have very high levels of optimism

85% believe that there is a positive side to everyday challenges



The future of the frontline: medical students and junior staff

During the course of the pandemic medical students and junior staff have been challenged at the very earliest point of their career. We found significantly poorer levels of wellbeing for more junior staff, particularly around self-confidence, symptoms of anxiety and depression and low work autonomy.

Junior staff are 20% more likely to regularly feel depressed and 26% more likely to have poorer motivation. At work, younger staff are 45% more likely to feel less valued by their team. These are key areas of improvement for frontline workers at early stages of their career.

Medical students are:

2x
more likely to feel lonely

50%
more likely to feel regularly anxious

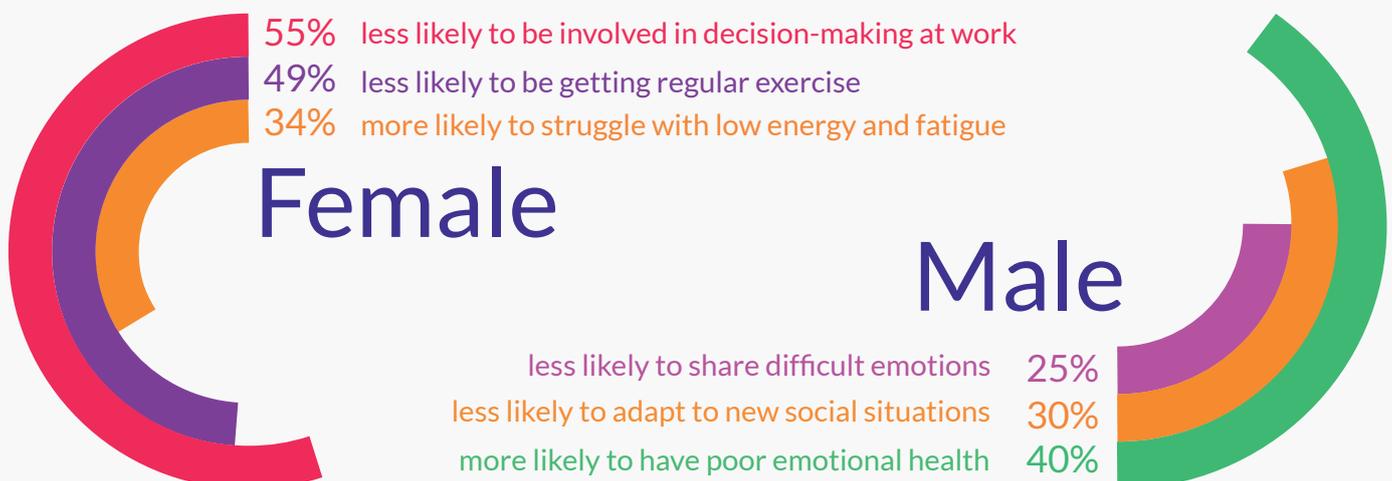
47%
more likely to have difficulty getting regular exercise

These insights will help leaders anticipate the wellbeing challenges faced by junior staff. By allocating training and education resources, organisations can reduce the risk of poor wellbeing and help this group gain lifelong skills to support their wellbeing.

Understanding wellbeing differences according to gender

Across the healthcare frontline we have observed significant differences in wellbeing according to gender. Across all organisations, and compared to male colleagues, we found evidence of significantly higher levels of fatigue, poor working relationships and less regular exercise for female staff.

Social and emotional health are common wellbeing challenges for male frontline workers; we have found that this group may struggle to identify and address difficult emotions, which means they are less likely to ask for help in times of crisis.



Differences between frontline services

By working with organisations across the sector, we have been able to develop sector-wide knowledge of wellbeing on the frontline and identify challenges that are likely to be specific to different urgent and emergency care services.

Urgent and Emergency Care (UEC) Nurses

The effects of COVID-19 have exacerbated wellbeing challenges for the nursing workforce, including those that were present prior to the global pandemic. This includes staff shortages, excessive workload and high work stress – each of which contribute to poorer patient care and staff wellbeing¹⁰. During May and June 2020, an estimated 44% of UK nurses reported considering leaving the profession because of the

way they were treated during the pandemic¹¹. As a predominantly female population, work-life balance is likely to be poorer compared to other services due to the increasing domestic burden on many women during the pandemic. UEC Nurses also reported the highest rates of kindness and compassion out of the frontline sector, with 92% reporting they would never hesitate to help someone in need.

57%

of UEC Nurses are more likely to have poor work-life balance

40%

of Paramedics report regular symptoms of depression

Paramedics

We have found significantly poor wellbeing in paramedic organisations compared to other frontline services. According to a recent survey, only 26% of ambulance staff rate their current mental health as good compared to 35% of police officers and 39% of firefighters¹². Our findings show that paramedics feel depressed more often, have poorer working relationships and feel socially isolated compared to other frontline services – all key drivers of poor mental health.

This evidence suggests that, along with occupational stressors and unprecedented demands on teams across the sector during the pandemic, there are service-specific challenges for paramedic services to address to improve wellbeing.



Police Services

During the challenges of policing both COVID-19 restrictions and managing non-COVID related incidents since March 2020, police services have experienced significant wellbeing challenges. We have found that the knock-on effects of these demands on wellbeing for a large proportion of policing staff include higher rates of anxiety, poorer nutritional health and lower job satisfaction compared to other frontline services. These findings are in addition to a significant risk of burnout in the sector, with over a quarter of policing staff feeling tired most of the time and are concerned about their sleep patterns.

32%

of Police report poor job satisfaction

35%

of the HEMS work force are having difficulties with low energy fatigue

Emergency Physicians

Our analysis shows that emergency physicians are highly adaptable to changing situations, and they have particularly high levels of emotional awareness. While these strengths are encouraging, this group showed significantly higher rates of work stress, a key risk factor for poor wellbeing. With a third of emergency physicians reporting difficulties with focus, our findings indicate widespread mental fatigue and a diminished capacity to perform well in a high-pressure work environment due to stress.

Emergency Physicians are

43%

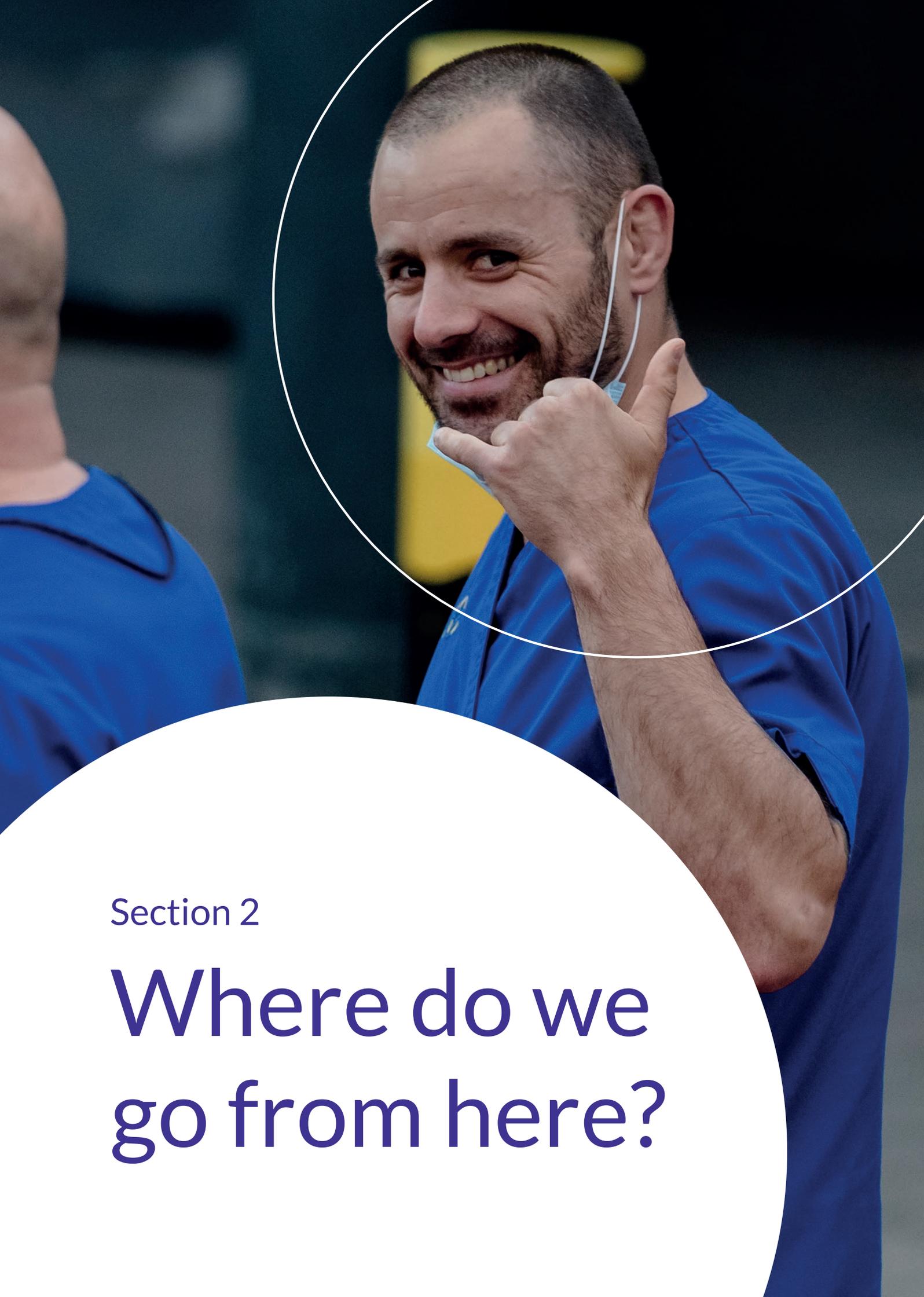
more likely to report chronic work stress

Helicopter Emergency Medical Services (HEMS)

For HEMS staff, getting enough rest is the leading challenge, which is demonstrated by high levels of fatigue across organisations. Changing shift patterns and high work demands contribute to fatigue and have a negative impact on performance and health. Research shows that shift work is associated with greater risk of poor mental health¹³, unhealthy weight gain¹⁴ and sleep disorders¹⁵, which highlights the need for policy and strategic planning in this area.

Despite these challenges, HEMS staff score above the sector average on our measure of job satisfaction. On the frontline, high job satisfaction is related to enjoying variety on the job, the opportunity to teach others, contact with patients and the adrenaline rush of urgent care.





Section 2

Where do we go from here?

Using insight to tailor strategies for better health

47%

say that their managers show appreciation for the work that they do

55%

of frontline workers say their manager cares for their wellbeing

It starts with leadership

Using insights gained from analysis, we have delivered tailored wellbeing solutions to each organisation. Our recommendations are practical and empower leaders to engage with wellbeing widely across teams. Leaders have been trained to spot the signs of excess stress and poor wellbeing in staff and have developed the skills required to address problems in the workplace.

Leaders who understand the needs of their teams can anticipate problems and deliver proactive ways to maintain and improve wellbeing.

Managers can make a big difference by...



Monitoring workload



Supporting healthy habits



Encouraging discussions about wellbeing

Analysing the impact of mental wellbeing on team success

For organisations, metrics on productivity are crucial for monitoring areas of success and growth. By combining mental wellbeing data and organisational metrics, 87% can benchmark and compare groups within organisations and across sectors to understand how wellbeing is directly related to:

- Employee engagement and satisfaction
- Staff retention
- Absence levels
- Diversity and inclusion

This can demonstrate return on investment (ROI) and value on investment (VOI) from investment in wellbeing and illustrate how wellbeing is integral to the success of an organisation.

“ Now is the time to normalise rather than catastrophise this sector’s distress and reduce the burden of mental illness on those who care for us. Every member of this workforce should be given support and we must make easy access to services a priority. ”

- Dame Clare Gerada, Medical Director of NHS Practitioner Health



Supporting work-life balance on the frontline

Frontline workers are passionate about the work that they do and have been under intense pressure these last 18 months. We have seen patterns of high work satisfaction and poor work-related wellbeing where focus on professional demands can come at the expense of their own wellbeing, increasing their risk of health problems over time.

Leaders must help their teams maintain healthy work-life boundaries by monitoring workloads and ensuring staff make time for rest and recovery. Through training, educational opportunities and awareness campaigns, organisations can empower a workforce to better manage a healthy work-life balance.

Making wellbeing part of continuous professional development

Through tailored webinars, training with managers and staff and 24/7 access to personalised wellbeing resources, 87% can make sustained and long-term improvements to wellbeing across sectors.

Some of the training that we have delivered to the frontline include:

- Spotting the signs of stress and burnout
- Maintaining resilience alongside a demanding career
- Coping with compassion fatigue

How can organisations support work-life boundaries?



Empowering staff with training and education around self-care



Regularly monitoring and analysing rest and recovery



Connecting wellbeing metrics to organisational performance



Challenging stigma as a team

Using peer support to build resilience

Communication around complex and challenging situations may be natural for workers on the frontline, but stigma around mental health can make identifying and talking about their own difficult emotions a greater challenge. Encouraging ways to talk about their experiences through informal and formal opportunities for peer support will promote healthy emotional regulation that builds resilience.

Being open about wellbeing challenges encourages a culture of solidarity, which means that when a difficult situation comes along, an organisation can react together as a team.

Periods of intensity and change affect people in very different ways, so it helps to build a culture of asking how colleagues are doing. Is everything OK? Have staff had an opportunity to rest and recover? Making wellbeing a part of daily business for colleagues means that teams won't feel that their mental health must be at crisis point before they talk about their concerns.

Wellbeing training delivered to teams by mental health professionals is a valuable tool. Our experts are skilled at helping people identify difficult emotions, normalising their experiences and teaching them how to express themselves and communicate more effectively. This training is also good for managers as it will help them feel more confident about having difficult and sensitive conversations with staff and foster open communication in teams.

Harnessing wellbeing strength on the frontline



Tapping into emotional support skills

Frontline workers are empathetic and highly skilled in building and maintaining relationships. Peer support and team-wide wellbeing initiatives where colleagues support each other around health measures will harness their prosocial and compassionate mindset.



Contributing to a learning culture

Frontline staff are driven to solve problems and thrive on learning new skills. Involving staff in the creation and delivery of wellbeing strategies will generate insightful and creative approaches to improving health. Taking a grass roots approach to implementing wellbeing policies will lead to high engagement from staff and greater impact.

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About our insights

Who we are

Founded in 2017, 87% is a wellbeing platform that brings together experts in psychology, technology and business to improve mental wellbeing for organisations across sectors. Our mission is to develop sustainable cultures of wellbeing that integrate with every organisation's wellbeing needs and resources to maximise return on investment and empower staff to maintain and improve their wellbeing. Using our data insight, clinically developed education tools and wellbeing platforms tailored to each organisation, we can deliver effective strategies to improve team-wide health. These strategies include policy and cultural change driven by mental wellbeing metrics that directly improve organisational focus, productivity and efficiencies.

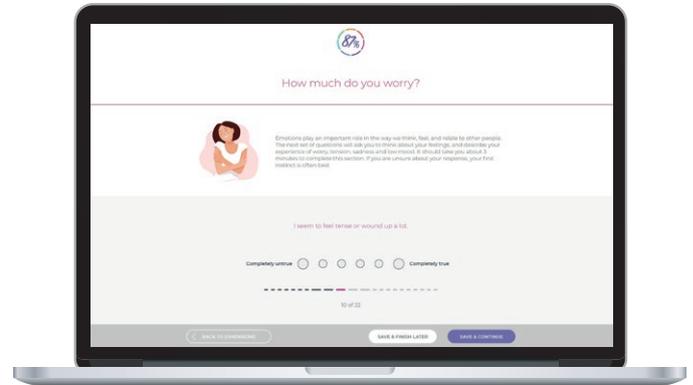
Our analysis

With support from the Aviva Foundation, we have provided access to the 87% wellbeing platform to over 50,000 frontline workers since March 2020 – providing 24/7 access to mental health resources during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Working with organisations and users of the platform, we surveyed a sample of these staff (approximately 10,000) on their health and assessed their risk of developing mental health disorders using a clinical self-assessment tool. We also collected data on demographics, department and staff seniority to provide in-depth analysis and identify wellbeing differences between and within groups on the frontline.



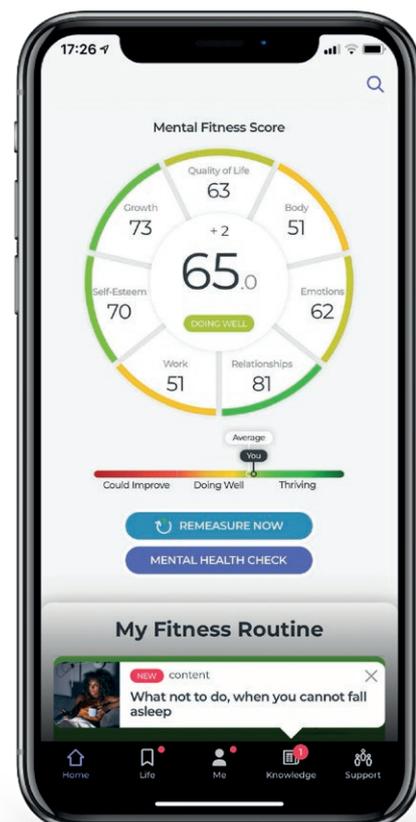
Foundation

The Aviva Foundation is a charitable trust administered by Charities Trust under charity registration number 327489. The Foundation has been set up to invest unclaimed shareholder assets in charitable causes for the benefit of our communities in the areas of financial capability and inclusion, community resilience and sustainable finance.



Our wellbeing assessment

Developed by experts in clinical psychology and medical research, our psychometric tool assesses wellbeing across seven dimensions of health and wellbeing to identify areas of strength and challenge. We then provide users with feedback on their own scores and personalised recommendations for ways to develop their wellbeing. User information is anonymised, while data is strictly confidential and stored securely in line with GDPR requirements.



Our ethos

Mental Fitness is for everyone

We want to help everyone find mental balance and focus through practical everyday applications. We do this whilst measuring individual Mental Fitness against your key organisational metrics. A healthier employee and a healthier organisation can now be explicitly linked.

How can we help you and your organisation?

We are experts in looking after your people's mental wellbeing and helping them maintain good Mental Fitness. Uniquely, we link our expertise and measurement directly to your key organisational outputs so you can understand the impact that mental fitness is having on your business metrics. This allows for focused strategies to be put in place for continuous improvement.

We give your people the tools to build Mental Fitness, so they are happier, healthier, and more productive at work. Our holistic offering serves to:



Optimise employee potential, both at work and at home.



Improve organisational performance by engaging with your workforce.



Build trust by demonstrating your commitment to employee wellbeing.



Positively influence the happiness and health of society.

Our Mental Wellbeing Ecosystem - The Four Pillars

Mental Fitness

Empower all employees with a personalised toolset for developing resilience and overcoming adversity.

Measurement

A holistic, clinically valid measure to baseline the organisation across key cohorts and track progress over time.

Education

Awareness building, foundational learning and skill development for individuals and managers. Online or instructor led.

Insight & Strategy

Understanding your key business metrics and deliverables and aligning them with our rich clinical data to drive unique insights into individual and organisational performance.

“ Our clinically validated approach combines technology, education and data driven insight, catalysing sustained behavioural change across organisations.

- Nick Reader, Director of Wellbeing Strategy at 87%



Empowering your people. Powering your performance.

What do 87% users think?

It's really exciting to see the emphasis on wellbeing promotion, both from a physical and mental perspective. The platform is full of resources which are beneficial for work and home, and the email newsletters give a good weekly reminder to relax from work and to look after myself.

- Paramedic

I absolutely love this beautiful intelligent platform! Made such a difference to how I perceive life by transforming my mental fitness. The introspection inspired me and helped me be more resilient than ever before. It has incredibly comprehensive tracks, offers reports, and curates invaluable insights. Highly recommend.

- Emergency Physician

Very grateful for having this platform. It's worth investing a minute or two each day to monitor mental wellbeing.

- Junior Doctor

I was looking for a proactive resource to manage (together with psychotherapy) my work-related PTSD and anxiety and this application seem to tick all the boxes. It allows me to enrol onto different programmes, depending on my needs. It is very user friendly and flexible in terms of available content.

- Paramedic

The platform is not the only proactive platform on the market but it is definitely the most tailored to the Emergency Services' needs. I have been a paramedic for more than 21 years now and wish it was around many years ago. It allows me not only to better understand my symptoms but it also gives me ideas of how to alleviate or even pre-empt them.

- Clinical Tutor

Our dispatch team really loves this platform, thank you!

- Helicopter Emergency Service Manager

Contact us

Talk to our team



www.87percent.co.uk



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[@87PercentLtd](https://twitter.com/87PercentLtd)



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This project was funded with support from the Aviva Foundation and delivered by Dr Serra Pitts, 87% Clinical Director. Data analysis and report preparation was carried out in August 2021 by Dr. Jazz Croft and designed by Amy Outterside, 87% Client Services Executive.