

Workplace wellbeing for manual workers

In January 2025, we asked 2,000 employees about their experiences of workplace wellbeing, their organisational culture and their mental health.

This short report outlines key findings and potential priority areas, to help HR and business leaders invest their wellbeing spend where it really counts.



About the data

For the purpose of this report, manual workers includes the following sectors: agriculture, manufacturing, construction, transport and logistics, health and social care.

All surveys were carried out online, using a third-party panel provider.

Mental health challenges affect almost half the workforce

Mental health and musculoskeletal problems are the biggest issues for manual workers.

Mental health is a challenge across all sectors, but almost half of employees in manual-working industries say it's impacting them at work.

Two in five workers (42%) sought mental health support in 2024. They most commonly went to their GP for help, but a significant portion didn't ask for support even though they needed it.

More than a third (38%) who haven't asked for support gave reasons such as a lack of time or fear of stigma preventing them from seeking help.

And with 49% of manual workers saying their mental health affects their productivity, there's a tangible impact for employers and colleagues alike. While mental health is a complex issue, committing to support your people doesn't have to require a huge financial investment — it's all about channelling your resources where they're needed most.

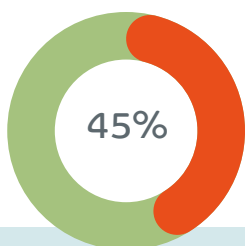


Almost half (49%) of workers surveyed say their mental health has impacted their productivity in the last 12 months.

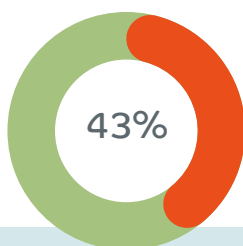


More than 1 in 10 manual workers (11%) say they always feel burnt out.

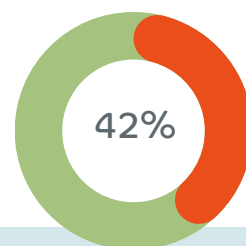
This rate of permanent burnout is twice as high as in desk-based sectors.



Don't feel comfortable talking to their manager about mental health.



Took time off due for their mental health in the past 12 months.



Have asked for mental health support in the past 12 months.



Manual workers want to be proactive about their health

Workers are worried about access to NHS healthcare, and a third have no additional support at work. This lack of access to preventative healthcare is leading to anxiety for many, and is likely to exacerbate common mental health and MSK issues.



1 in 3

manual workers say they have no wellbeing support at work (compared to 21% in other sectors).



62%

of workers say it's harder to get health appointments recently.



43%

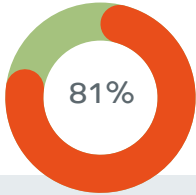
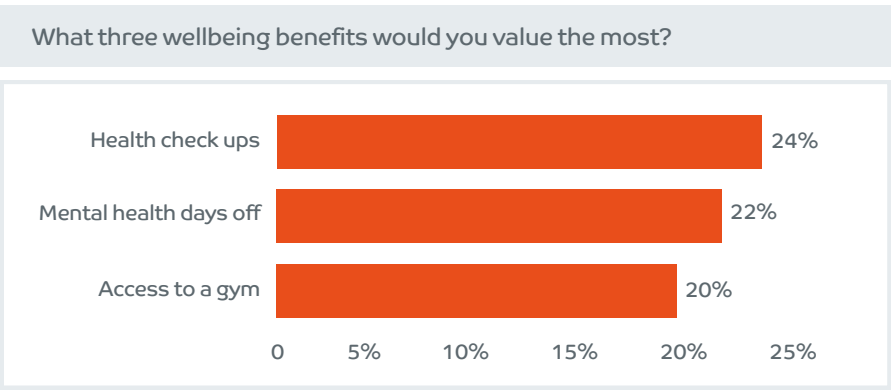
are worried about the ability of the NHS to be there when they need it.



87%

of people who are worried about access to the NHS say it's impacting their mental health.

What support do manual workers want?



Four in five manual workers say they find workplace wellbeing support useful.

The top three most-requested benefits all reflect how manual workers are trying to be proactive about their health. They're not asking for expensive perks, but they know it's important to look after themselves and their families, despite potentially long wait times for NHS services.

Businesses looking to reduce absence rates and improve employee wellbeing should start by addressing access to healthcare. This might include on-site health screenings or a telephone GP service (only 8% of manual workers say they currently have access to one).

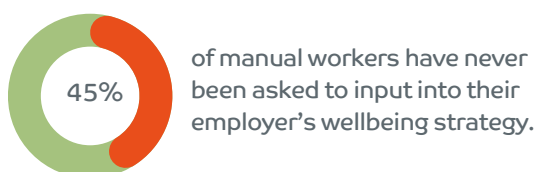


Only 44%

of manual workers agree that their manager is there for wellbeing support.

Company culture: getting it right

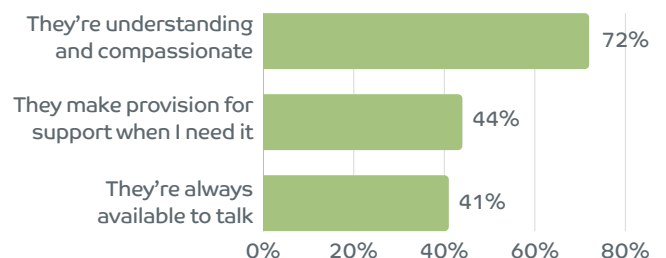
Manual workers value company culture, yet less than half of them say their manager is there for wellbeing support. For teams looking to remedy this, the first step is open communication.



More than half (53%) of manual workers say workplace benefits are highly important to them when looking for a job, and 30% say company culture is a key priority. These considerations far outscore more traditional factors such as company prestige (7%).

Creating a supportive company culture takes time and consistent effort, but [health leadership training](#) is a great place to start. Your leadership team sets the tone of the organisation, so they need to demonstrate compassion, resilience and healthy habits that empower workers to do the same.

Qualities of good managers, according to workers:



Managers also have a significant influence on the employee experience, by acting as a link between colleagues and leaders.

While they're often afraid of getting it wrong, the most important quality for a manager — according to employees — is simply that they're understanding and compassionate.

Managers don't need to have all the answers when it comes to health and wellbeing. Instead, they need to set a positive example, listen to their team's experiences and help them access any help they might need.



What works to support wellbeing?

To improve the wellbeing and productivity of manual workers, effective workplace programmes should include:

- ➔ **Health Promotion**
Opportunities for appropriate [physical activity](#) to support functional mobility and reduce MSK issues, and access to healthy food options.
- ➔ **Mental Health Support**
Stress management workshops, counselling services and promotion of a positive workplace culture.
- ➔ **Social Engagement**
Participative forums or committees, teamwork initiatives, and social interaction opportunities to improve morale.
- ➔ **Rest and Recovery**
Quiet spaces which allow individuals to 'switch off' from work, using technology that promotes relaxation and mindfulness.

Three steps to make an impact

While this guide provides some hints at what your people might need, there's no substitute for asking them. These three steps can help you put your wellbeing spend to work where it makes the most impact.

1 Ask your people what support they need

Listen carefully to what your employees say about their motivators for good health and barriers to better wellbeing. Bringing people together in engaging discussion groups is a great, informal way to start.

Make sure this is delivered in a way that reaches your entire workforce and makes it easy for them to respond. For example, don't rely on email if your employees mostly work offline or prefer in-person conversations.

2 Target support where it's needed most

Always be strategic about your wellbeing spend by using data and employee feedback to decide what support to invest in. Once you understand what is driving your workforce, you can use this information to co-create impactful support programmes and services.

People are more likely to engage with programmes they have helped to shape and design.

3 Invest in wellbeing training for managers

Training for managers and leaders can help drive company culture. Our free CPD-accredited course on [Managers and Wellbeing](#) is a good place to start.

You can also tailor your training to support specific challenges. This might include things like [Mental Health First Aid](#) or [workshops](#) targeted at issues that impact your people.



Need a hand getting started? Get in touch today

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