

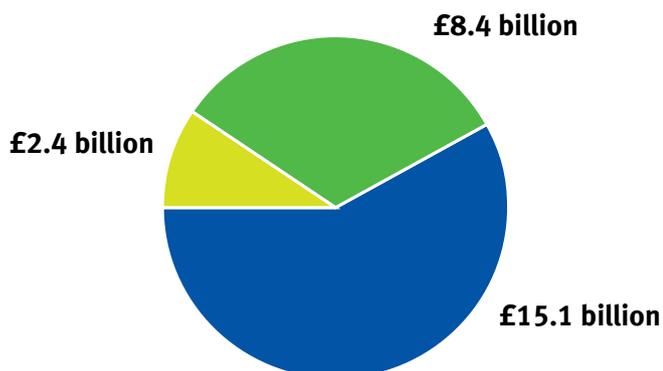


# Mental Health at Work: Developing the business case

Every organisation in Britain is affected by mental distress and ill health in the workforce. At any one time one worker in six will be experiencing mental distress, depression or problems relating to stress. Mental ill health is normal in every workplace in the land.

The total cost to employers of mental health problems among their staff is estimated at nearly £26 billion each year (UK, 2006). That is equivalent to £1,035 for every employee in the UK workforce.

## The business costs of mental ill health comprise:



- £8.4 billion a year in sickness absence. The average employee takes seven days off sick each year of which 40 per cent are for mental health problems. This adds up to 70 million lost working days a year, including one in seven directly caused by a person's work or working conditions.
- £15.1 billion a year in reduced productivity at work. 'Presenteeism' accounts for 1.5 times as much working time lost as absenteeism and costs more to employers because it is more common among higher-paid staff.
- £2.4 billion a year in replacing staff who leave their jobs because of mental ill health.

Simple steps to improve the management of mental health in the workplace, including prevention and early identification of problems, should enable employers to save 30 per cent or more of these costs – at least £8 billion a year.

## How can savings be delivered?

- **Awareness training** for line managers, to increase their knowledge and understanding of mental health issues and their ability to respond confidently and in a timely fashion to employees in distress.
- **Prevention** of mental health problems which are directly work-related (accounting for around 15 per cent of total costs). This may include providing mentally healthy working conditions and practices in line with the Health and Safety Executive's management standards on work-related stress.
- **Better access to help** for employees, particularly access to evidence-based psychological help, which wherever possible enables people to carry on working at the same time as receiving support.
- **Effective rehabilitation** for those who need to take time off work, including regular contact with the employee during periods of absence.

Taking action to promote mental wellbeing among staff, to give better help to those experiencing distress and to support those who need time off to come back to work makes business sense. The cost of neglecting mental distress at work is simply too high to be ignored any longer.

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This is a summary of the policy paper, *Mental Health at Work: Developing the business case* (Sainsbury Centre, 2007), copies of which are available from [www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk).