

Evaluating your health and wellbeing programme

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About us

NHS Employers is the employers' organisation for the NHS in England. We support workforce leaders and represent employers to develop a sustainable workforce and be the best employers they can be. We also manage the relationships with NHS trade unions on behalf of the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

Planning your evaluation



Evaluation is essential for identifying strengths and areas for improvement, helping to enhance services from good to excellent. It's crucial to think about evaluation from the beginning of an initiative to prioritise goals, gather support and develop a clear strategy, potentially using a [logic model](#).

Evaluations can be conducted at three levels: individual, organisational and system. Individual-level evaluations can assess the impact on staff health using feedback forms for initial insights, but they don't measure actual behaviour change. Standardised health questionnaires are recommended for comparability in measuring impact, while considering individual health status and potential biases in self-reports.

Process evaluations are also vital as they assess how interventions were implemented and can identify barriers to participation. Understanding these factors can lead to more effective future interventions. Ultimately, it's about what you do and how you do it.

Ahead of your evaluation, you should thoughtfully plan your initiative or campaign, use our [seven steps to an effective health and wellbeing campaign](#).

When planning your evaluation, consider the following key steps.

Define your objectives



Objectives should set out in your evaluation plan what your overall health and wellbeing programme/initiative aims to achieve, and the overall goals that will be used to measure performance.

The objectives should always be clear, provable and relevant to your role and the remit of your strategy.

Health and wellbeing initiatives often involve partners or participation from staff, and success can be dependent upon many external factors beyond your control. Make sure your objectives are not impossible for you and your team to achieve.

Questions to help set your objectives

- What will success look like? Ensure this is definable and achievable.
- How will you measure the impact of this intervention/programme? For example, via surveys or interviews.
- What would the outcome be? This could be improved mental health, reduced absenteeism or fewer occupational health referrals.
- Have you built in the opportunity for staff feedback on the overall process? Engaging staff are engaged is essential and incorporating their feedback can improve intervention effectiveness.
- Line managers play a key role in successful initiatives and should therefore be involved with planning and delivery. NHS England

has developed a useful guide for line managers on supporting health and wellbeing.

- Will you measure the impact of the campaign both quantitatively and qualitatively?
- Do you have the resource within your role/team to do this effectively? Make sure you are mapping out your evaluation activity relative to your capacity.
- How are you going to collect the information? Surveys or focus groups?

Use our seven steps to an effective health and wellbeing campaign to help with the planning.

Mapping tasks and activities



Mapping out your tasks and activities will help you demonstrate the full impact of your work by ensuring you choose the right performance measures to track and evidence impact. This is helpful because we don't often document our activities and the time required for a health and wellbeing programme. Start thinking about how to collect evaluation data as activities occur.

1. List everything you have done so far and how it has contributed towards your overall strategy.
2. Develop a logic model or theory of change to help you map out your future activities and intended impact.
3. Consider how your objectives and activities are likely to influence behaviour.

Consider use of real-time data



A key finding from the 2021 NHS England report The Future of NHS Human Resources and Organisational Development highlights the need for real-time data. The findings suggest that while the NHS Staff Survey is very good for benchmarking scores and data, it does not provide a real-time, truly representative reflection.

Capturing frequent snapshots of health and wellbeing data could be hugely beneficial to help identify key individuals, teams, departments or cohorts that may need additional health and wellbeing support.

Examples include regular NHS People Pulse surveys to identify health and wellbeing information over time and online tools that enable tracking of how staff are feeling at intervals.

Real-time data can help measure staff perception and can also be an indicator of behaviour change. Behaviour change is likely to take some time and may take three to six months to become embedded. Readily available technology, such as health fitness trackers that monitor and measure heart rate and steps, can provide more feedback on health status than has been the case in the past. Sentiment tracking is now possible through easy-to-use technology. But it is only useful if you can assess it and respond.

Define performance measures



When looking at what to measure to build your evaluation, it is helpful to think about the following:

Inputs – these are the activities that you will be doing, for instance, how many roadshows are you running?

Outputs – these are the number of people who have engaged in or been exposed to your intervention, for instance, web hits on your intranet or attendees.

Out-takes – this means the immediate impact on the audience after your intervention. This could be the number of people who intend to change as a result of your intervention, for instance, a health check or a mindfulness session.

Changed behaviours – this is how many people have changed something as a result of the intervention for instance, in the health check example, has the person made changes to their lifestyle as a result of the conversation?

The [NHS Health and Wellbeing Framework Implementation Guide](#) demonstrates the factors you may want to consider as part of your evaluation framework.

There are recognised measures of mental health and wellbeing that can be used as useful metrics to gauge the impact of interventions. For example, the [Office of National Statistics](#) has standard measures of overall wellbeing, and the [NHS Staff Survey 2024](#) has standardised questions on burnout and stress.

Identify data sources



How will you gather data? Will you create a survey or measure the impact indirectly on overall health and wellbeing data? Do you already have access to this data?

Some key places to look for data are:

- [NHS Staff Survey](#)
- NHS People Pulse survey
- [NHS England Model Hospital](#)
- sickness absence
- data dashboards - such as the [NHS health and wellbeing framework diagnostic tool](#)
- occupational health referrals
- employee assistance programmes.

You can consider collecting your own data through interviews or focus groups, depending on your resources and capacity. Alternatively, you might seek external support to gain deeper insights by utilising existing resources, such as in-depth health and wellbeing surveys like [Britain's Healthiest Workplace](#), which some NHS trusts employ. Engaging external support can provide a level of expertise in data analysis techniques and offer an independence that internal resources may lack.

Risks and constraints



Once you have gathered your findings, it's important to share these with your colleagues and act on them. It can be a great way of demonstrating the value of your interventions and deciding where to invest money in new initiatives.

Furthermore, demonstrating that you have taken into consideration the feedback from your sources can motivate them to give more feedback in the future.

Your organisation may want you to be able to show a Return on Investment (ROI). This would require you to show that the cost of the intervention has resulted in a reduction in spending elsewhere in the organisation, for example by demonstrating that it has helped an individual return to work sooner than expected. You can also show an ROI if overall interventions help reduce absence and therefore save money on costly bank or agency spending. It is hard to demonstrate ROI in advance, although some widely used interventions can show average ROI.

Further resources

Resources

- NHS England has developed a useful guide for line managers on supporting health and wellbeing.
- NHS England has produced a range of materials on evaluation which you may find useful.
- We also identified the evidence base for some widely used approaches.
- In partnership with RAND Europe, NHS Employers ran evaluation workshops to support health and wellbeing leads in their roles and help them understand how to effectively evaluate their strategies or initiatives. See a recording from a workshop and view the slides.
- Evolve Workplace Wellbeing website has free, evidence-informed workplace wellbeing resources developed and curated by the Workplace Wellbeing team at University of East Anglia and RAND Europe. There is also a free cost effectiveness calculator to help make a business case for workplace wellbeing initiatives.
- The developing and evaluating workplace health interventions: employer toolkit, developed by Public Health England and Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, sets out a four-stage strategy for developing and evaluating workplace interventions.
- The What Works Centre for Wellbeing provides a practical, eight-step guide for how to evaluate wellbeing interventions. The guide was designed for people who may have lots of different functions in an organisation, with busy working days.

The guide allows you to dip in and out of the content as needed, at your own pace.

- The What Works Centre for Wellbeing in partnership with the Economic and Social Research Council, University of East Anglia and University of Sheffield have created a [cost effective calculator and how to guide](#) to help you evaluate and compare cost effectiveness of workplace wellbeing activities.
- The What Works Centre for Wellbeing hosts a [wellbeing data usage library](#) which aims to increase the accessibility of wellbeing data for researchers by speeding up dataset extraction. In his [blog](#), Interim Head of Evidence at What Works Centre for Wellbeing and Professor of Public Policy at KCL Michael Sanders explains more.
- The Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM) [Evaluating and supporting Neurodifferences at work guide](#) is aimed at occupational health (OH) practitioners, human resources professionals and employers who are considering referring their staff for a diagnostic assessment of or services to support ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Tourette's Syndrome and/or similar. It outlines what to look out for in staff, different options available for support and legal duties of employers. The guide presents recommendations informed by research evidence, the latest guidance from regulatory bodies, current practice and case law.

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