

CVS Group Plc and its subsidiaries (“CVS”)

WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH POLICY



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1 INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

CVS cares about and is committed to supporting the wellbeing and mental health of all its employees.

Engaging work can have a positive impact on our health and wellbeing. Equally, good health and wellbeing can have a positive impact on our work, including:

- Increased performance and productivity
- Less human error
- Reduced employee turnover
- Better customer service
- Lower absence
- High level of trust
- Personal commitment.

However, many people will at some time or another have problems with their health and wellbeing, including those that affect their mental health. We recognise that our profession is at higher than average risk of mental health problems.

After reading this policy, colleagues will be aware of:

- CVS's commitments to support wellbeing and positive mental health
- Who is responsible for what in relation to wellbeing and mental health
- How we will respond to and support colleagues who disclose a mental health illness or wellbeing concern, and
- What support mechanisms and initiatives are available to help.

2 ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT

We are committed as an organisation to build a culture and workplace environment that supports the wellbeing and mental health of all our colleagues.

We are committed to raising awareness and tackling the stigma that surrounds mental health issues. We aim to create a culture where employees are able to talk openly and honestly about their wellbeing and mental health and to report difficulties without fear of discrimination or reprisal.

We acknowledge that certain working conditions and practices may affect employee wellbeing, including aspects of work organisation and management, and environmental and social factors. Some of these factors have the potential for psychological as well as physical harm. As part of our commitment, we will put in place measures to prevent and manage risks to employee wellbeing, together with appropriate individual support.

We will also foster a healthy culture by incorporating these principles into line manager training and running regular initiatives to raise awareness of wellbeing and mental health issues at work.

3 DEFINITIONS

Wellbeing

Wellbeing can be simply defined as a state of being healthy and happy in our bodies (physically) and in our minds (mentally).

Mental Health

Mental health is a neutral term that includes our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. Mental health is just as important as physical health. Our levels of mental health change throughout our lives as we are faced with different challenges and as we learn to manage our mental health.

Mental health problems manifest in different ways. Some people may struggle with their thoughts and emotions, many will also experience physical symptoms.

Mental Illness

Mental Illness refers to diagnosable conditions, for example anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.

Disability

A disability is defined by the Equality Act 2010 as a “physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day to day activities”. Certain mental health illnesses may fall under this definition. If an employee has an illness which meets this definition, they are protected from disability discrimination and by the requirement to make reasonable adjustments.

Pressure and Stress

We recognise that there is a difference between pressure and stress. We all experience pressure regularly – it can motivate us to perform at our best and keep us engaged at work. It is when we experience too much pressure and feel unable to cope that a negative form of stress can result.

Whilst stress is usually linked to life events or external stressors, some people may be more prone to stress than others. How a person perceives a potential stressor will impact on whether or not they feel a negative symptom of stress as a result. Therefore, we can potentially reduce stress by addressing both the (external) stressor and/or the (internal) perceived ability to cope of the individual.

Stress is not a mental illness in itself but has been linked to illnesses, such as anxiety.

Employee Assistance programme (EAP)

CVS gives all colleagues access to a free, 24 hours, Employee Assistance Programme provided by an external specialist provider. Calls to the service are confidential. The service supports both employees and managers with various issues including health and wellbeing, and provides colleagues with telephone access to a trained counsellor. See the Useful Links and Contacts section, below.

Occupational Health

CVS has access, via HR, to a specialist Occupational Health provider. Colleagues referred to this service will be assessed by a Doctor or Nurse specialising in Occupational Health. Following a referral the appropriate medical professional will provide bespoke advice to management on work-related matters, such as return to work and reasonable adjustments.

Wellbeing Champion/ First Aider for Mental Health

CVS has a network of Wellbeing Champions/ First Aiders for Mental Health who can be identified by local posters and communications, as well as via the Health and Wellbeing pages of the intranet (Pulse). These colleagues are trained in First Aid for Mental Health and can provide initial support to a colleague in distress. These colleagues will also promote wellbeing initiatives. For more information see the [First Aid for Mental Health Policy](#).

4 RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1 CVS Group PLC and its subsidiaries (“CVS”)

CVS has a legal duty of care to employees to ensure health at work, as set out in the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. This includes operating the business in a way that minimises harm to employees’ mental health, having procedures in place to support individuals experiencing mental ill health at work, along with good management practices and managers who are trained in effectively managing people issues. The Company will ensure that its policies and practices reflect this duty and review the operation of these at regular intervals.

4.2 Senior Management Team and Wellbeing Working Group

Senior Leaders will:

- treat wellbeing and mental health seriously
- promote this policy throughout the organisation
- lead, drive and promote a healthy workplace culture
- provide appropriate resources to support the health and wellbeing of all colleagues
- set an example as role model by adopting and adhering to the agreed health & wellbeing strategy
- ensuring effective communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes
- drive good leadership and management practices across the whole organisation.
- provide support and guidance for individuals where necessary.

The company will also maintain a Wellbeing Working Group who will be responsible for driving the implementation of this policy and developing and implementing a wellbeing strategy that will aim to:

- a) Prevent or reduce wellbeing/ mental health problems by:
 - identifying the causes of workplace stress and their effects on employees,
 - addressing the identified causes of workplace stress,
 - promoting and supporting healthier lifestyles to ensure that employees remain fit and healthy whilst at work.
- b) Support those with mental health conditions to recover, to help retain them in work and rehabilitate them back in to work, by:
 - Recognising the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions,
 - Providing appropriate support,
 - Signposting to relevant services to encourage access to appropriate treatment.

The group will review indicators to measure effectiveness of this policy, including:

- Absence levels and patterns
- Employee Turnover (attrition)
- Use of EAP Services
- Other staff Surveys
- Exit questionnaire feedback.

4.3 Line managers

All line managers must ensure that they support employee health and wellbeing by:

- undertaking available training on mental health and stress management and other related topics
- being mindful of the impact of their own actions and words on the wellbeing of their team
- putting in place measures to minimise the risks to employee wellbeing, including stress at work.
- familiarising themselves with the Health and Safety Executive's stress management standards, and use these to mitigate psychological risks in their teams by completing and regularly reviewing a [Stress risk assessment](#) for their team.
- familiarising themselves with CVS policies on equal opportunities and respect at work and tackling unacceptable behaviour, including bullying and harassment.
- when recruiting to vacancies and career opportunities, recognising that individual differences can often be strengths, and being fully open to and encouraging of all applicants including those with a mental health or other disability, whilst ensuring an ability to cope with the demands of the role.
- designing jobs fairly, so that workload is manageable and that work is allocated appropriately between people;
- ensuring good communication with all colleagues, particularly where there are changes
- ensuring employees are provided with the resources and training required to carry out their job
- monitoring working hours and overtime to ensure that this is reasonable and in compliance with Working Time Regulations
- monitoring holidays to encourage employees to take their full entitlement
- supporting all employees to maintain an appropriate work-life balance
- ensuring a quality induction is completed for new employees.
- having honest conversations with their team members, giving appropriate feedback and recognition.
- encouraging employees to develop their personal wellbeing and their resilience to stress by completing available training and accessing relevant resources.

All line managers must also support individuals who may be experiencing difficulties with their wellbeing or mental health by:

- ensuring that they are approachable to their team members
- responding in a supportive manner to those who disclose a mental illness or problem
- maintaining vigilance to employee's personal circumstances and offering additional support where appropriate for example referring to our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)
- addressing stress at work issues with employees who raise them
- managing wellbeing, stress and mental health difficulties effectively and sensitively
- managing absence in accordance with policy and ensuring appropriate return to work plans are implemented.
- managing performance issues sensitively and supportively, especially when there is a related mental-health issue.
- focusing on employee's capacity to carry out work rather than any incapacity
- understanding the need to make reasonable adjustments to help accommodate disabilities.
- seeking guidance from HR on managing all these issues as required.

4.4 Human Resources

HR will:

- develop and implement organisation-wide policies and procedures to help protect the wellbeing of employees and assist line managers in supporting individuals.
- arrange training and awareness to support line managers with their duties around stress management and absence management, promoting good management practice.
- provide timely advice to managers
- assist managers in identifying and addressing work place stressors
- encourage use of Employee Assistance Programme and Occupational Health as appropriate
- liaise as appropriate with occupational health and other medical professionals as required.

4.5 Health and Safety

As the legal obligation for stress management of employees falls under H&S legislation, the H&S department have a responsibility to:

- advise the company on health and safety best practice and provide guidance on workplace risk assessments
- provide managers with risk assessments which assess the risk around health and wellbeing. These can be found in the site Health, Safety and Wellbeing manual.
- ensure managers are given adequate training and support in completing risk assessments
- inform and involve the Health and Safety committee representatives of any proposed actions relating to the prevention of workplace stress.
- on a monthly basis review accidents at work and assess and support mitigation where a connection to work place stress is evident.
- update the business at the monthly executive meeting of any potential risks identified, how these have been mitigated and any further actions.

4.6 Employees

All colleagues are expected to take responsibility for managing their own health and wellbeing, by adopting good health behaviours (for example in relation to diet, exercise, alcohol consumption and smoking), and seeking appropriate support or medical attention when needed.

Employees are responsible for informing their management if they believe work or the work environment poses a risk to their health.

Employees must treat colleagues and all other persons with whom they interact during the course of their work with consideration, respect and dignity.

We encourage our employees to:

- seek help at an early stage through their line manager if they are experiencing wellbeing or mental health difficulties
- use the Employee Assistance Programme for expert support
- raise issues of concern including stress at work with their line manager
- support managers to seek resolution to issues or stressors that arise.
- have consideration for those around them, understanding that their actions and words may impact on other colleagues.

Employees are encouraged to disclose any mental health illnesses or concerns to their line manager (see section 5, below).

If an employee does not feel able to disclose an illness or issue to their manager, they may approach a different or more senior manager, or HR.

5 DISCLOSING A MENTAL HEALTH ILLNESSES OR CONCERN

All employees are encouraged to disclose any mental health illnesses (whether considered to be a disability or not) to their line manager.

If an employee does not feel able to disclose an illness or issue to their manager, they may approach a different or more senior manager, or HR.

We recognise that making a disclosure about a personal health issue can be a difficult step to take and we therefore set out the following commitments to reassure colleagues as to what will happen.

When an employee makes a disclosure of a mental health issue, the manager (and/or HR) will:

- treat this information as confidential and sensitive.
- listen and respond in a supportive and non-judgmental way.
- discuss with the individual what steps should be taken next, and how they can be supported at work.
- discuss and agree with the individual who else, if anyone, should be informed and for what purpose.
- support the individual to remain in work wherever possible, with reasonable adjustments if necessary.
- take HR advice if required.

The exact approach to any disclosure, in terms of support, adjustments or next steps, will be individual – there is no one-size fits all response. Individuals will be encouraged to participate fully in all decision making in relation to next steps.

6 SUPPORT AND INITIATIVES FOR WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

CVS will maintain the following mechanisms, resources and benefits for employees to help maintain positive wellbeing:

- [Employee Assistance Programme](#) (EAP) providing free, confidential advice and counselling available 24/7
- A network of trained [Wellbeing Champions/ First Aiders for Mental Health](#) to provide local support and wellbeing initiatives (see First Aid for Mental Health Policy)
- Subsidised [gym](#) scheme
- [Cycle to work](#) scheme
- Access to appropriate [training](#) for all employees, whether provided internally or externally, including Stress and Mental Health Awareness, Resilience Training and self-care methods which may include Mindfulness.
- Access to appropriate [training for all managers](#), including Stress Management and Absence Management, as well as appropriate Leadership training including Change Management.
- [Resources](#) on health and wellbeing
- Procedures for reporting and handling inappropriate behaviour (including [Whistleblowing](#) and [Grievance](#) policies)
- Special [leave arrangements](#), including the ability to buy additional holiday
- Opportunities for [flexible working](#).

7 RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER POLICIES

This policy should be read in conjunction with other related policies and procedures, including:

- [First Aid for Mental Health](#) Policy
- [Respect at Work](#) policy
- [Equal opportunities](#) policy
- [Absence/ Attendance](#) policy
- [Capability/ Performance Management](#) policy
- [Flexible working](#) policy
- [Grievance policy](#), [Whistleblowing policy](#) (Public Interest Disclosure).

8 USEFUL LINKS AND CONTACTS

Employee Assistance programme (EAP)

CVS provides a free 24 hours Employee Assistance Programme which supports both employees and managers with various issues including health and wellbeing.

Call 0800 030 5182 / Outside the UK +44 161 836 9498

Online Health Portal – www.healthassuredeap.co.uk

Vetlife

Independent, confidential and free help for everyone in the veterinary community including veterinary nurses and students.

www.vetlife.org.uk

Helpline 0303 040 2551

Veterinary Surgeons Health Support Programme - VSHSP@vetlife.org.uk - 07946634220

CVS Health and Wellbeing intranet pages – for more information and resources, including contact details for local Wellbeing Champions/ First Aiders for Mental Health <http://cvs-sharepoint/HealthandWellbeing/layouts/15/start.aspx#/>