The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB)

submission to

Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)

on the call for evidence on the

Mental health and wellbeing plan: discussion paper

7 July 2022

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CIOB response to the call for evidence on the Mental health and wellbeing plan: discussion paper

Introduction

The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) is the world's largest and most influential professional body for construction management and leadership. We have a Royal Charter to promote the science and practice of building and construction for the benefit of society, and we have been doing that since 1834. Our members work worldwide in the development, conservation and improvement of the built environment. We accredit university degrees, educational courses and training. Our professional and vocational qualifications are a mark of the highest levels of competence and professionalism, providing assurance to clients and other professionals procuring built assets.

Full response

1. How can we help working age adults to improve their own wellbeing?

Research conducted by CIOB in December 2017 found that that construction professionals were at particularly high risk of experiencing poor mental wellbeing.[1] The Grenfell Tower disaster in June 2017 shook the nation and the construction industry, since then we have seen corporate failures in several high-profile construction businesses, and challenges relating to the global economy have all had significant impact on the welfare of workers. Industries with the highest rates of mental health issues are often seen to have high levels of stress, and CIOB's May 2019 report titled *Understanding Mental Health in the Built Environment*, indicates that the construction workforce face significantly prolonged periods of stress due to workplace factors that contributes negatively towards their mental health.[2]

This is particularly pertinent for men working within the construction industry. Office for National Statistics (ONS) data indicate that on-site construction work is characterised by a labour workforce that is 82% male, compared to 18% female. While mental health issues are experienced by people of all genders, societal expectations, social stigma around mental health and a prevalent hyper-masculine culture within the industry have been identified as factors which act to discourage men from seeking help and leave many suffering in silence. Sadly, this has tragic consequences, and ONS data shows that the risk of suicide among low-skilled male labourers is three times higher than the male average in the UK. The ONS' 2017 *Suicide by occupation* report showed that the construction industry's suicide rate was 3.7 times higher than the national average, and construction workers were six times more likely to commit suicide than fall from height, showing that while great strides have been made in improving physical safety, mental health risks have not received the same level of attention until more recently.[3]

Our 2019 report contains wide-ranging recommendations to tackle the crisis as this must have a multi-faceted approach by industry, government and professional bodies. It calls on construction firms to do more to identify risks, improve awareness through training and events for staff, encourage more open discussion of mental health and

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[1] CIOB, The State of Well-being in the Construction Industry, December 2017
[2] CIOB, Understanding Mental Health in the Built Environment, May 2020
[3] Office for National Statistics (ONS), Suicide by occupation, March 2017

wellbeing in the workplace and provide specialist support services. Larger firms should also consider how they can support other businesses in their supply chain.

Recommendations for government include reviewing the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) to include mental health support, which has now been achieved, updating the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981 to ensure workplaces make provisions for mental first aid and implementing the recommendations of the government's own 'Thriving at Work' report from October 2017, which looked at mental health in the workplace.[4]

The report also calls on professional bodies to develop mental health and wellbeing awareness among members, create globally applicable mental health resources that will increase understanding and reduce stigma within construction. As well as provide guidance that will allow professionals to manage their own mental health within the workplace.

2. **How can we support different sectors within local areas to work together, and with people within their local communities, to improve population wellbeing?**

Local government plays a central role in community engagement, working with companies from various sectors and developing plans to address several issues in the local region. We therefore believe that there should be further communication between local government and the different sectors in the local areas to work together and address issues in their region.

For the built environment sector, they undertake a lot of building and maintenance work for where people are living, working and playing in. It is therefore important to consider the impact and role the built environment plays on people's wellbeing. Research by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) has revealed that the total amount of public greenspace within developments has reduced by a third over the last century from 13% to 9%.[5] Spending time in natural spaces is linked to improved life satisfaction, reduced anxiety and increased happiness, with 70% of UK adults saying being close to nature improves their mood.[6]

In addition to the provision of green spaces, the way houses are built also plays a role in people's wellbeing. The City Health Check – How Design Can Save Lives and Money[7] found the healthiest local authorities have almost half the housing density and a fifth more green space than the least healthy ones which saw high levels in diabetes, obesity in children, and physical activity. Additionally, the quality of the building is an important aspect for ensuring wellbeing as it needs to maintain a "comfortable" environment though air, warmth, light and sound quality.

Conversely, poor housing incurs significant health-related costs, with the Building Research Establishment (BRE) estimating that a £10bn investment in improving some of

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[4] Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), Thriving at Work: the Stevenson/Farmer review, October 2017

[5] New Economics Foundation (NEF), Exposed: The Collapse of Green Space Provision in England and Wales, May 2022

[6] Mental Health Foundation, Mental Health Awareness Week, May 2021

[7] Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), City Health Check, December 2019

England's 3.5 million worst homes would save the NHS £1.4 billion in first year treatment costs alone.[8] Improving the quality and energy efficiency of existing homes has wide ranging holistic benefits for their occupants, including the removal of health hazards, reduced utility bills, and support for their mental health and wellbeing.

As pointed out by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Health Homes and Buildings, white paper, Building our Future: Laying the Foundations for Health Homes and Buildings, the economic cost is only half the story. The true price lies in human misery and lives lost. In the winter of 2014/15, an estimated 43,900 excess winter deaths occurred in England and Wales,[9] with the impact of cold housing specifically estimated to cause a fifth of these excess deaths — more than road accidents, alcohol or drug abuse. Furthermore, with the energy price cap rise from April 2022 and further rises predicted, we are likely to see significantly more households at risk from experiencing fuel poverty and thus, potential negative consequences for occupants' health and wellbeing.

3. **What is the most important thing we need to address in order to reduce the numbers of people who experience mental ill-health?**

The level of ongoing, untreated workplace stress which can often lead to poor mental and physical wellbeing. A moderate amount of stress can put people in the right mindset to tackle work. However, if the amount of stress increases too much, this can be detrimental to the individual's concentration, productivity and mental health. If someone experiences too much stress for a prolonged period, it can cause them to feel fatigued, irritable and affect their reasoning, judgement and decision-making skills not only impacting their work life, but also their personal life.

Ultimately, severe or prolonged stress can lead people to feel burnt-out and develop serious health problems both mentally and physically. The UK's Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that over 11 million working days are lost in the UK each year due to work-related stress. Additionally, HSE reports 54% of all working days are lost due to stress, depression and anxiety.[10] It is therefore important for government to focus on addressing high stress levels and poor mental health in the workplace alongside employers.

4. **Do you have ideas for how employers can support and protect the mental health of their employees?**

With 54% of all working days lost due to employees experiencing stress, anxiety and/or depression, employers are encouraged to evaluate what factors could contribute to work-place stress within their business in order to minimise the impact. Many employers are already creating healthy workplaces by implementing and communicating a mental health at work plan, providing employees with good working conditions and monitoring employee mental health and wellbeing on a regular basis.

However, addressing mental health and wellbeing in the construction industry will take greater consideration. This is partly due to the industry's heavy focus on subcontracting, and the diversity of SMEs within the supply chain – both of which make it harder to

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[8] Building Research Establishment (BRE), The full cost of poor housing, May 2016
[9] Academic-Practitioner Partnership, Housing and Communities Research Group, School of Social Policy University of Birmingham, Good Housing: Better Health, July 2016
[10] Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Working days lost in Great Britain , December 2021

identify those that may be suffering from poor mental health. The culture of the industry and the working environment also plays a part in contributing to poor mental health and may mask issues in the workplace that are negatively contributing to employee's poor mental health.

Our 2019 report, Understanding Mental Health in the Built Environment, found that having too much work to do, unrealistic deadlines, time pressures and cost pressures were high contributors towards poor mental health. With only 38% of businesses offering helplines for their employees, and 71% offering no formal training for managing mental health and wellbeing over the past three years.

In the report, we recommended that industry must first identify risks that could contribute towards poor mental health, and routinely monitor the health of employees. We also suggested the development of mental health awareness among employees through training and events as well as encouraging a culture of openness around mental health and clarify support available to all employees.

We also encouraged employers to ensure all employees have access to high-quality mental health support, with managers and supervisors trained in mental health awareness and effective people management as well as looking at how large businesses should look at how they can support the wider supply chain in these initiatives.

5. What is the most important thing we need to address in order to prevent suicide?

Our research indicated that a quarter of construction employees in the UK considered taking their own life during 2019 and more than 1,400 workers in the industry committed suicide between 2011 and 2015.

Workers often suffer in silence when experiencing poor mental health and the 'macho' culture of simply dealing with it alone and not seeking help makes matters worse. Poor mental health impacts the individual, but it also affects their friends, families and colleagues.

Construction is a stressful industry, and the way it operates can contribute to poor mental health. If construction workers feel like they cannot seek support, this could be why we see such high rates of suicide within the industry. The risk of suicide among low-skilled male labourers, for example, is three times higher than the male national average in the UK according to the ONS.[11] Poor mental health in construction is world-wide, and research from Australia indicates that the elevated risk of suicide among males working in construction includes high levels of alcohol consumption, relationship problems, and multiple stressful life events in the months before death.

Government must work with industries, such as construction, which suffer from high rates of suicide to address work-related factors that are contributing negatively towards people's mental health and wellbeing before it is too late.

6. What more can the NHS do to help people struggling with their mental health to access support early?

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[11] Office for National Statistics (ONS), Suicide by occupation, England, March 2017

NHS could carry out more outreach work with hard-to-reach industries, such as construction, to better understand the unique issues impacting the sector and identify routes to raising better mental wellbeing. Profession and trade bodies can be useful conduits for this work which, in turn, can help to inform sector-specific campaign work to help people seek support early.

7. **Do you have any suggestions for how the rest of society can better identify and respond to signs of mental ill-health?**

Yes.

8. **If yes, please share your ideas. You might want to consider community bodies, public services and private and community sectors. We are particularly interested in how society and different sectors can work together to get people support early.**

Many approaches to identifying and responding to signs of mental ill-health can be applied across different business sectors. However, there are hard to reach sectors, such as the construction industry, who face heightened risks due to the type of work they have to undertake and the culture of the workplace. Therefore, broad approaches for these sectors may not have the desired effect. Cultural changes must take place to equip people with the ability to identify and response to signs of mental ill-health in an appropriate way that is backed by business leaders. One way to approach this would be to diversify the workforce and to put mental health policies in place that managers must adhere to.

9. **What should be our priorities for future research, innovation and data improvements over the coming decade to drive better treatment outcomes?**

There needs to be better understanding of the needs of those working in industries where poor mental health is above average, for example those working in construction.

Through working with industry, both at an employer and employee level to understand the issues and where improvements can be made, this will have a positive effect on the wider working population. Mental Health organisations are now offering toolbox talks for the construction industry to get the conversation going and to help workers understand each other better but companies do not have the right data to monitor and understand. Monitoring interventions is also important as that can indicate how well an intervention is implemented and highlight areas of improvement. Research organisations, such as the Centre for Mental Health, are starting to examine the effectiveness of implementation methods for interventions. Many organisations, across all sectors are carrying out laudable work in terms of raising awareness of mental health and are actively implementing ways to support workers (for example CIOB has mental health champions) but further research into their effectiveness would be welcome to understand whether these interventions are proving to be valuable.

10. **What do we (as a society) need to do or change in order to improve the lives of people living with mental health conditions?**

There is a huge stigma for men dealing with mental health issues to talk about their experiences and seek treatment. As a society we need to change the culture and stigma

around mental health to ensure that people feel as comfortable talking about their mental wellbeing as much as their physical wellbeing.

11. What things have the biggest influence on your mental health and influence your quality of life?

    a. Housing
    b. provision of social care
    c. employment and job security
    d. money and debt management
    e. social and family relationships
    f. physical health
    g. connection to your community
    h. other – please specify

From our perspective, as a professional body, we believe that housing; employment and job security; money and debt management; and social and family relationships are the biggest influences on mental health and quality of life. The Covid-19 pandemic has seen a shift in how people spend their time. Before lockdown, 1.54 million people worked from home, in 2020 this rose to 23.9 million which equates to 60% of the UK's adult population. Working from home means that housing is extremely important for your physical and mental wellbeing.[12] Job insecurity, particularly in construction, negatively impacts people's mental health and people often report symptoms of depression due to financial concerns.[13] Having no work and facing job insecurity links highly with money and debt management with almost 13% of workers in 2018/19 living in poverty.[14]

Challenges now sit with the cost of living crisis hitting the UK in 2022 and there will be a need for stable and well-paying jobs for those living in the UK. Humans are social creatures, and we often look towards support systems such as family and friends during times of need. Enabling people to continue to be social and promote good relationships is essential to reducing risk factors for poor mental health. However, the pandemic shone a light on the impact of loneliness and the impact it had on people's mental wellbeing[15] Certain sectors, like construction, often contribute negatively towards the feeling of loneliness due to long hours, periods of time spent away from home and working in long periods of isolation. It is therefore important to address all these factors that contribute negatively towards people's mental health and wellbeing.

12. How can we support sectors to work together to improve the quality of life of people living with mental health conditions?

For those who have had mental health problems and been off or out of work, it is common for people to be worried about going back. For those working in an industry that is male dominated and stigmatises poor mental health, it can be even more of a concern for how colleagues will react and how management will treat you.

Construction is unique in some ways as many projects are sub-contracted and we see high levels of self-employment. This results in a chain of people who look out for

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[12] Finder UK, Working from home (WFH) statistics, February 2022
[13] Business in the Community, Mental Health at Work 2019: Time to Take Ownership, October 2019
[14] Joseph Rowntree Foundation, UK Poverty 2020/21, January 2021
[15] Jo Cox Loneliness, Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time, January 2018

themselves and do not concern themselves with the physical and mental wellbeing of other workers onsite.

For the construction industry, it is important to look at how employers support all workers physical and mental wellbeing on a day-to-day basis as well as how they support those coming back to work due to poor mental health. Having support from Government and other sectors who face similar challenges may prove useful.

13. What do you think are the most important issues that a new, 10-year national mental health plan needs to address?

Below we have re-arranged the list to reflect what are the most to least important issues facing construction workers from our perspective. Within construction, mental health is still massively stigmatised, meaning that many people stay silent. If people continue to stay quiet in the industry, we will continue to see the high statistic of men working in the industry being three times more likely to die by suicide.[16] By focusing on promoting wellbeing and health, this will increase literacy and understanding of what mental health is, what good and poor mental health looks like and ways to manage mental wellbeing. This in turn will help to reduce the stigma in the industry and can have a positive impact on people seeking help and prevention.

G - Stigma
A - Wellbeing and health promotion
B - Prevention
D - Treatment quality and safety
C - Early intervention and service access
F - Crisis care and support
E - quality of life for those living with mental health conditions

14. Please explain your choice.

For the construction industry, the stigma attached to mental health is a large deterrent to seeking help and support from family, friends and co-workers. More needs to be done to address the negative stigma of those working in male-dominated sectors. To start addressing stigma, you then need to promote positive health and wellbeing which is why this is a second priority.

15. What 'values' or 'principles' should underpin the plan as a whole?

This should be guided by healthcare professionals, those living with mental health issues and those working in industries that have above average poor mental health statistics.

16. 'Principles' and 'Values' can help us to agree what the purpose of a plan should be, and what it should be seeking to achieve for people. How can we support local systems to develop and implement effective mental health plans for their local populations?

To support local systems there must be adequate funding in place that gives them the freedom to consult with their local population to understand their needs and tailor

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[16] Office for National Statistics (ONS), Suicide by occupation, March 2017

approaches to fit them. Current systems require local communities to apply for funding programmes, which often puts other places at a disadvantage and does not help to reduce the risk of developing poor mental health, rather than addressing those with pre-existing mental health issues. Therefore, providing all local councils with equal funding pots to manage and direct into mental health services and prevention strategies where necessary should not only reduce disparities but aid in developing effective mental health plans for the local population.

17. How can we improve data collection and sharing to help plan, implement and monitor improvements to mental health and wellbeing?

There should be standardised data collection on the workforce to understand the levels of poor mental health, how companies are trying to reduce poor mental health in their workers and what areas of support they need themselves.