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## The Great Reset

# Prioritising wellbeing

A guide on the importance of planning and communication to reassure and support your workforce.



Playbook 2 of 4

[layahealthcare.ie/bravenewera](https://layahealthcare.ie/bravenewera)

looking after you always

# Prioritising wellbeing



**It's fair to say 2020 has presented businesses with greater challenges than ever before. As the pandemic rolls on, we all need to prepare as best we can for the different scenarios that may arise.**

Some companies have brought workers back on-site, for example, but may need to shift back to remote working at times while tougher restrictions are in place. Others may still be operating almost entirely remotely, while the remainder are running with everyone or close to everyone physically in the workplace.

Regardless of your organisation's current situation, it's vital to protect and prioritise employee wellbeing. Across the board, there are steps you can take to ensure employees are well cared for and understand the supports available to them.

## **Navigating the Great Reset**

As Ireland's largest Health & Wellbeing provider, laya healthcare understands the complex challenges HR leaders face in evolving their health and wellbeing strategy, and ensuring it is fit for purpose through the pandemic and beyond.

To underpin our Great Reset: A Brave New Era of Work & Wellbeing series, we commissioned extensive research including surveys of employees and employers to uncover their concerns and needs around working in the time of Covid-19.

Drawing on this research, we have built a series of four playbooks that together give you a roadmap for supporting employee health and wellbeing during the current challenges.

## **Putting employees first**

This playbook, the second in our series, gives you guidance and practical tips on how to prioritise wellbeing, whether you are bringing or have brought employees back on-site or if you are trying to support remote workers. In particular, we focus on the importance of planning and communication, and on the value of having an always-on employee assistance programme.

Our experienced team of wellbeing experts at laya healthcare are here to support you and to Look After You, Always.

**Take care,  
Sinéad Proos,  
Head of Health & Wellbeing,  
laya healthcare**

# Making a wellbeing plan



**Our research found that employees across Ireland are anxious, lonely and struggling to cope. They are worried about the future and the economy. They need to know they can access support and resources whether working from home or returning to the workplace.**

Employers too need to remember that whether employees are working remotely or on-site, they have the same rights and should be given access to the same health and wellbeing support and resources.

## Prioritising wellbeing: Key actions

**Enable a safe return to work**

**Communicate safety and wellbeing measures**

**Tackle the challenges of remote work**

**Address presenteeism and burnout**

### **The Great Reset: our research**

On our behalf, an international insights and research agency conducted independent research in July 2020 into employee and employer attitudes, perceptions and behaviours. This included:

- Survey of 1,004 employees across Ireland
- Poll of 188 employers across a spread of sectors
- In-depth interviews with HR leaders and business owners

The fascinating insights from this wide-ranging research have informed this series of playbooks: 'The Great Reset: A Brave New Era for Work & Wellbeing'.

<https://www.layahealthcare.ie/bravenewera/>

# Enable a safe return to work



If you are planning the transition of employees back to a shared workspace, whether that is in 2020 or in 2021, it's important not only to get the logistics right, but also to reassure employees.

It's also important to understand the most critical concerns for your business or organisation as they can differ from sector to sector or in businesses of different sizes. Understanding the main concerns on all sides is the first step towards formulating a plan to addressing them.

## Top employer concerns about transitioning back to the workplace



## Prioritise employee care

If you don't already have occupational health services and a 24/7 employee assistance programme (EAP), now is the time to introduce this support. Occupational risk assessment is particularly important for vulnerable employees, but managing risks and providing support is vital across the board.

## Did you know?

Laya healthcare members can access a free 24/7 Mental Wellbeing Support Programme <https://www.layahealthcare.ie/yourbenefits/mentalwellbeingsupport/>

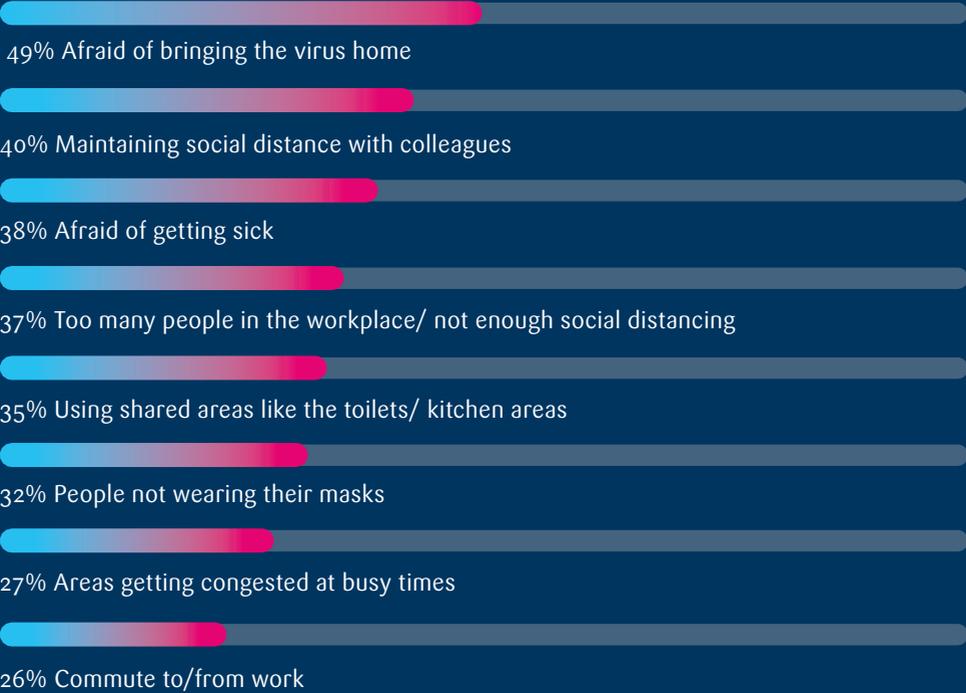
### Most common reasons members contact the 24/7 service

- Anxiety
- Mood
- Work-related issue
- Relationship issues
- Family issue

# Understanding employee concerns

We asked employees across Ireland how they feel about going back to a shared workplace and almost all of their core concerns were around the risk of getting sick. The health and wellbeing risk is not just around the spread of Covid-19, however, but is also about the related stress and anxiety in the workforce. For the physical and mental health of employees, it's important to put in place appropriate hygiene and social distancing measures, and to reassure employees that they will be protected in the workplace.

## Returning to the workplace: employee worries



# How to help: Communicate safety and wellbeing



**It's vital to have a detailed return-to work plan and/or plan to accommodate Covid-19 alert level changes in your location, but you must also communicate it well and make sure employees understand what is involved.**

Get help to do this if you need it – 43% of employers told us they would look outside their organisation for communications support around wellbeing, health & safety protocols and guidelines for employees.

**At laya healthcare, we recommend the CARE approach to transitioning employees back to the workplace:**

## **How to help: Remember remote workers**

**C – Communicate effectively with employees.** Set clear expectations, repeat clear messages and consult with employees.

**A – Anticipate potential risks and employee expectations.** Identify core Covid-19 risk reduction strategy, introduce pre-assessment checks, share virtual walk-throughs and document plans to respond national alert level changes.

**R – Respond to both operational needs and human requirements.** Take practical steps to manage and improve employee health and safety, but be sure to address mental health and wellbeing too.

**E – Engage with employees.** Listen carefully to their needs, hold return to work seminars and offer wellbeing supports

Discover the CARE approach in detail in our guide: Return to Work – A Wellbeing Playbook for HR Leaders:

<https://www.layahealthcare.ie/bravenewera/playbooks/returntotheworkplace/>

## **Focus point: Remember vulnerable workers**

We now know one in three people have a pre-existing condition that could render them particularly vulnerable to Covid-19. All employers need to consider flexible working options in future if they are to maintain productivity and ensure workers feel supported. Assess your organisation's need for specific return-to-work pathways for more vulnerable workers.

## Client story



**“Nurturing our positive and vibrant culture is a major focus for us at Taxback Group. Our global intranet has served as a powerful communication tool and a dynamic space for us to collaborate and share personal stories of our teams who are dispersed across the world while we continue to work remotely. Long term, we have implemented a Flexible Working Policy and are looking at ways of redesigning our processes to adapt to new ways of working collaboratively. It’s an exciting opportunity for us to shake things up and bring about new, positive changes that support our #OneTeam culture and outlook.”**

Rachael O’Shea,  
Head of Engagement & Employee Experience,  
Taxback Group



# Tackle the challenges of remote working

While our research found that employees working remotely are generally pleased not to have to commute and almost half say better work-life balance is a key benefit of working from home, many also found remote work difficult. The prospect of returning to the workplace was also daunting for most of those polled.

## Stressed remote workers: key concerns



# Combat isolation and loneliness



While many workplaces have already welcomed back some or all employees, fear of a significant second surge in the winter is widespread. Reassure your employees that they are as safe as possible by offering workplace screening and other practical protections.

## Introduce remote work guidelines

If you don't already have remote work guidelines in place, make a plan to design and distribute a remote work playbook. It should address the following.



### Ways of working

- core hours during which employees should be available agreed
- communications channels and tools
- regular team and project meetings



### Ways of collaborating

- suggestions for ensuring interaction and collaboration
- ideas specifically designed to beat loneliness and isolation in remote workers

## Focus point: Update existing policies

Sense check your company's existing Health and Wellbeing strategy to see if it needs to be updated or adapted to encourage employees make the best use of digital wellbeing resources, for example.



# How to help: Get interactive to beat loneliness



## 1. Encourage knowledge sharing

Ask teams to hold fortnightly or monthly knowledge sharing sessions, in which one team member can talk about a specialist area that might be unfamiliar but potentially useful to everyone else. This can include soft skills or even non-work related expertise.

## 2. Hold online group work sessions

Encourage employees working from home to organise group video calls for two or more people, aimed at replicating the sense of working quietly alongside teammates.

Ask them to start the call by taking turns to explain a work task they would like to achieve, then work on it for 40 minutes (while the video call is still live) and finally take a few minutes at the end to discuss how each person got on with their task. This can be a useful tool of motivation and accountability, while also helping to combat isolation.

## 3. Share mental wellbeing supports

Make sure remote workers have access to and are aware of virtual wellbeing supports. Through laya healthcare, for example, they can access online mental wellbeing and resilience training. They can also attend our [Wellbeing Live](#) free virtual classes and seminars, which cover a multitude of topics across movement, nutrition and mental wellbeing.

When promoting services such as laya healthcare's [24/7 Mental Wellbeing Support Programme](#), remind employees they are highly confidential. They're also available to everyone, whether they could do with some help juggling day-to-day challenges or really need support during acute periods of mental distress or anxiety.

## 4. Work out together while apart

Approximately 28,000 laya healthcare members have accessed our daily health and wellbeing classes with [Wellbeing Live](#). Why not suggest teams get together to enjoy virtual group team workout sessions using the service? Boosting physical fitness is a key way to support mental wellbeing, and team members who are feeling lonely may jump at the opportunity to enjoy a fun communal activity.

# When presenteeism is the problem



Despite the fears of some employers, absenteeism has been limited during the pandemic. Only 6% of employees say they have taken more sick leave than they normally would have, with 5% saying they have taken less.

If anything, presenteeism has become far more of an issue in 2020. More than one in two (54%) of employers are concerned, however, that employees are not taking their holiday allocation.

## Understanding presenteeism and its causes

**79%**

of employees have not taken any sick leave since March

**62%**

of employees have taken fewer holidays than normal

**47%**

of employees say there is nowhere to go, so they don't want to waste holidays

Remember too that presenteeism can be a manifestation of work-related insecurity or anxiety, both of which can be more likely for people working on their own at home away from the environment where they might normally get more validation. Look for different ways to recognise the hard work of employees and celebrate their achievements to help them feel more secure in their roles.

# How to help: Promote time off



**While it is possible to introduce schemes where staff can buy back holiday time or carry over more days than usual to the following year, for the sake of employee mental health, it's advisable to encourage staff to use the holiday days they are owed.**

Particularly when people are working remotely some or all of the time, they can be slow to take time away from work.

### Three time-off tactics

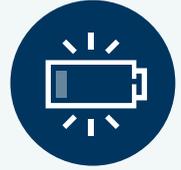
1. Encourage employees to take regular breaks during the work day and make sure everyone knows they should still take time off and holidays throughout the year.
2. Showcasing the wellbeing benefits of taking a break, whether that is in team meetings or in email updates.
3. Encourage senior leaders to share details of their breaks away from work, so a positive attitude to time off is seen as core to company culture.

**“Employers have a legal duty of care towards employees to take every reasonable step to ensure their health, safety and wellbeing. It is important to remember that this duty of care extends beyond those who wish to return to the workplace. Employers have an equal duty of care to those who choose to work remotely, which is a key consideration as we now look to live and work alongside Covid-19 for the foreseeable future”**

Jennifer Cashman, Employment Partner,  
Ronan Daly Jermyn



# Watch out for burnout



Most people are feeling pandemic-related stress and anxiety, as we know from our research. Increased presenteeism compounds that strain, meaning burnout is more of a risk than ever.

Not only are employees under more strain than usual, but most are not taking as many breaks as they should. Everyone needs time to rest and refresh, or they are in danger of becoming overwhelmed, drained and exhausted.

Burnout is easier to prevent than to treat, so make sure employees can recognise the signs in themselves and others, and understand they can and should take breaks.

## How to tackle the issue

1. **Talk about burnout.** Give managers relevant resources and talking points so they can address the issue in team meetings and one-to-one sessions with their team members.
2. **Have a burnout action plan.** Make sure concerned managers or peers know how to support a struggling colleague and can enable them to take the time out they need.
3. **Take extra care with vulnerable employees.** Do what you can to ensure they feel empowered and safe to speak up in confidence if they need additional support, whether they are returning to the workplace or continuing to work remotely.



# Spotlight: 24/7 Mental Wellbeing Support Programme



**Do you have an employee assistance programme (EAP) in place? If not, prioritise an EAP implementation. Laya healthcare's 24/7 Mental Wellbeing Support Programme could be the ideal EAP solution for your company or organisation.**

Our 24/7 Mental Wellbeing Support Programme, your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), is a confidential counselling service that provides support to your employees and their families to help them manage work and personal issues. It is also available to managers to support them with any unique issues they may face in their role as well as personal issues with which they may need support.

They can access the service quickly and easily through our dedicated video consultation app, through live chat on our website or on a telephone helpline, which is available day and night every day of the year.

## Top employer concerns about transitioning back to the workplace

- Financial assistance
- Legal assistance
- Life coaching
- Career counselling
- Consumer advice
- Mediation
- Support for non-Irish nationals and their families
- Day-to-day practical advice (home, travel, eldercare services, childcare)
- Health advice including physio, podiatrists and dietitians
- Work relocation advice

Our fully qualified counsellors are highly experienced in both personal and work related issues and can support anyone suffering a wide variety of problems, including but not limited to stress, depression, grief, relationship issues and career challenges.

Find out more about the [24/7 Mental Wellbeing Support Programme](#) from Laya healthcare.

# Other Supports



**Talk to us to organise return-to-work pre-assessments and testing, or to find out more about other supports we offer your employees:**

- Covid-19 and antibody testing for your team
- Return to the Workplace Seminar Topics, Workshops & Wellbeing Experts
- Wellbeing Live free virtual classes and seminars
- GPLive: video consultations with Irish-registered GPs through Laya app
- Mental wellbeing and resilience training
- Healthcoach programmes
- Ergonomics for remote workers: assessments, eLearning and seminars
- Psychosocial Risk Assessments

## **Make the most of this series**

This playbook is the second in our series: 'The Great Reset: A Brave New Era for Work & Wellbeing': [layahealthcare.ie/bravenewera](https://www.layahealthcare.ie/bravenewera). Rooted in extensive real-world research conducted for laya healthcare, they aim to guide HR leaders and business owners through the challenges of caring for employees during the ongoing Covid-19 crisis.

- 1. Future-proofing health and wellbeing**
- 2. Prioritising wellbeing**
- 3. Tackling fear and fatigue**
- 4. Fostering resilience**





If you would like any further information in supporting your workforce with flexible working and relevant digital wellbeing programmes, please contact your laya healthcare Account Manager or go to <https://www.layahealthcare.ie/bravenewera/>

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24/7 Mental Wellbeing Support available to members aged 16+.

Not available on 360 Care and 360 Care Select.

Healthcoach available to members aged 18+.

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