

**Comisiwn
Bevan
Commission**

Sharing Responsibility for Health and Wellbeing - the Role of Industry and Commerce

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Sharing Responsibility for Health and Wellbeing – the Role of Industry and Commerce

“The contribution of employers to the health of Wales is multifaceted and significant. Through Occupational Health initiatives, programmes like Healthy Working Wales, and additional wellness and wellbeing services, employers play a crucial role in not only enhancing the health of their employees, but also contributing to the broader societal well-being. As Wales continues to evolve in its approach to workplace health, the continued investment and commitment of employers to these initiatives will be key to their success.”

[Professor Ewan McDonald, Bevan Commissioner](#)

Former Dean of the UK Faculty of Occupational Medicine and founder of the Occupational Medicine section of the Union of European Medical Specialists.

Introduction and Context

The health and wellbeing of people in Wales plays a critical role in the economic prosperity of the country. A healthy workforce is vital to this to attract investment and provide meaningful jobs and employment for people. Work is good for health and good work is even better.

With approximately 1.54 million people in employment - 75.2% of the working age population (lower than UK average)¹ - sustaining workforce health is critical. Wales faces significant challenges both now and in the future. Long-term sickness accounts for economic inactivity among more than 150,000 working-aged people,² and work-related illness affects nearly 6% of the workforce.³ This is compounded by limited occupational health provision, an ageing workforce, and rising long-term conditions, placing additional strain on productivity and public services.

Industry has a critical role in and shared responsibility to play in improving health and wellbeing. It also has significant financial incentives. As major employers and community anchors/ businesses are uniquely positioned to drive positive change both within the workplace and in the communities where their employees live. By adopting proactive strategies to support employee health and wellbeing, and by embracing social and corporate responsibility, particularly among larger employers, the private sector can strengthen

¹ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/gor/2013265930/report.aspx#tabempocc> (Accessed 9th Sep 2025)

² <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/gor/2013265930/report.aspx#tabempocc> (Accessed 9th Sep 2025)

³ HSE, *Work-related ill health and injury statistics for Wales*, 2024

workforce and to reduce sickness and population health, ease pressure on public services, and help build broader economic and social resilience.

There is also much that the health and care sector can learn from the private sector's innovation, efficiency, and leadership strategies. As Wales' leading health and care think tank, the [Bevan Commission](#) is uniquely placed to convene industry partners to co-design practical, scalable solutions that improve health and wellbeing outcomes for employees and communities alike.

This paper is a call to action for industry partners to step up to share responsibility for improving health and wellbeing and contributing to 'healthy people in a thriving Wales'. The Bevan Commission aims to work with key businesses and industry leaders to:

1. Improve health and wellbeing of employees and wider communities
2. Maximise opportunities for greater Corporate Social Responsibility
3. Identify collaborative opportunities to develop and support innovation
4. Learn from industry and adapt to the health and care sector

By co-developing this with industry, employers, citizens, and the NHS, the Bevan Commission aims to promote greater 'shared responsibility' and accelerate the widespread adoption of practices that improve the health and wellbeing of people in Wales, now and for future generations to come. We want to collaborate to ensure that Wales is fit for the future.

Improving Health and Well Being: A Strategic Imperative for Industry

The World Health Organisation⁴ states that *creating a healthy workplace is not only the right legal thing to do, but it is the smart thing to do*, with **"synergistic benefits for workplaces, productivity and the economy"**.

The significant economic burden of illness alone provides compelling justification for action. Preventable physical inactivity in Wales alone accounts for over £314 million in lost productivity and NHS costs,⁵ contributing to an annual cost thought to be approaching £1 billion to the Welsh economy from sickness-related absences.⁶

The Health Foundation's report on *Inclusive Economies*⁷ highlights how economic development can be harnessed to improve health and reduce inequalities across the UK. Interventions that support labour market inclusion, such as helping people enter or stay in good-quality employment, can have a positive impact on health. For example, tailored return-to-work programmes for individuals with health conditions can address barriers to employment.

These efforts should be complemented by initiatives to improve job quality, focusing on job security, effective management, job design, and the working environment. Major employers

⁴ https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/113144/9789241500241_eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

⁵ Public Health Wales & Bangor University, *Physical Inactivity in Wales – Economic Impact Report* (2021).

⁶ Modelled on Wales' ~7.2 million sickness absence days in 2024 (ONS, *Sickness Absence in the UK Labour Market: 2023 and 2024*, released 4 June 2025) and CIPD/Simplifyhealth (2013) *Absence Management Survey* cost estimates (£120 per absence day), giving an estimated total of ~£864 million.

⁷ <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/using-economic-development-to-improve-health-and-reduce-health-inequalities>

rooted in their communities are well positioned to lead such programmes, particularly in deprived areas with limited economic opportunities, where they are often part of the public sector.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses across the UK actively supported the NHS, playing a vital role in vaccination and support programmes through their corporate social responsibility initiatives. This involvement had a positive impact not only on their employees but also on the wider communities they serve. The collaboration between the private and public sectors during this time highlighted the strength of cross-sector partnerships⁸ and their capacity to support the delivery of care during times of crisis.

The economic and social benefits of industry engagement in health and social care can be summarised as follows:

Economic benefits	Social Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Businesses need healthy employees to thrive• Reducing absenteeism• Expanding average years of healthy working life• Reducing the annual increase rate of accessing NHS services• Regeneration in local communities engaged in health promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved wellbeing and quality of life for Welsh citizens• Developing skills and knowledge to support and instil self-care• Creative, collective ownership and consciousness around health and social care• Improving healthcare access for employees and residents in local communities where businesses reside

Bevan Commission's Foundations for the Future Model of Health and Care in Wales

The Bevan Commission laid out core priorities for improving population health and wellbeing in their paper [*Foundations for the Future Model of Health and Care in Wales*](#), which include:

1. Resilient and Resourceful People and Communities
2. Prudent, Integrated and Equally Well Care
3. Sustainable Workforce, Services and Systems
4. Dynamic, Innovative and Transformational Culture

Workplaces provide a powerful platform to promote health, raise awareness of disease prevention, and support individuals to take greater responsibility for their own health and in making informed, healthy choices.

⁸ <https://wcva.cymru/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Welsh-NHS-Confederation-Cross-sector-partnership-working-to-support-the-response-to-COVID-19-in-Wales.pdf>

The Bevan Commission calls on industry partners to take action in line with the foundations outlined above, recognising their vital role in advancing the health and wellbeing of the workforce and wider communities.

	Employee Health & Wellbeing	Corporate Social Responsibility	Collaborative Innovation	Learning from Industry
Resilient & Resourceful People & Communities	○	○	○	○
Prudent, Integrated and Equally Well Care	○	○	○	○
Sustainable Workforce, Services & Systems	○	○	○	○
Dynamic, Innovative & Transformational Culture	○	○	○	○

Figure 1. Industry and Private Sector Partners Alignment with Bevan Commission Foundations for the Future Model of Health and Care in Wales

1. The Role of Industry in Supporting Employee Health and Wellbeing

Many employers across the private sector already implement a wide range of initiatives to support employee health and wellbeing. This commitment is often driven by a recognition that a healthy, engaged workforce is fundamental to organisational success. The examples below illustrate some common approaches that align with the principles of prudent healthcare:

- **Workplace Wellness Programmes**
These initiatives promote physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing through activities such as fitness schemes, stress management workshops, and access to mental health resources.
- **Health Insurance and Benefits**
Providing comprehensive health coverage enables employees to access essential healthcare, including preventive services, early interventions, and ongoing treatment.
- **Healthy Work Environments**
A safe and supportive workplace featuring ergonomic design, strong safety measures, and zero tolerance for harassment or discrimination is essential to maintaining wellbeing.

➤ **Flexible Working and Mental Health Support**

Flexible work arrangements, including remote and hybrid options, support work-life balance. Employers can also foster mental health through Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), counselling services, and a culture that promotes openness and destigmatises help-seeking.

➤ **Health Promotion and Prevention Initiatives**

Supporting preventive health measures such as smoking cessation, healthy eating, and physical activity helps employees take ownership of their health and reduces longer-term risks.

These practices exemplify prudent healthcare in action empowering individuals to manage their health, focusing on prevention, and using resources wisely. By embracing this approach, employers across Wales can play a meaningful role in improving national health outcomes. Becoming advocates for health within the workplace enables businesses to influence how people think about and engage with their own health and the healthcare system more broadly.

2. Corporate and Social Responsibility and Community Engagement

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is not new. For many companies, it is integral to the way they operate and engage with their employees. *Many companies intentionally integrate ethical, social and voluntary actions and initiatives into their business operational plans* to directly contribute to addressing environmental and social challenges.

Some approaches to corporate and social responsibility are directly linked to improving employee health. A good example is the *Cycle to Work Scheme* which encourages employees to adopt healthy physical behaviour in their daily commutes to work and is financially supported and incentivised. Another example is the allocation of ‘*giving*’ days to employees to encourage activities that directly support local communities for example through volunteering activities such as mentoring young people, supporting local charities, environmental cleanups, or delivering skills workshops, all aimed at giving back to the communities where they live and work. These examples demonstrate how businesses can create an opportunity to broker closer links between employees and local communities and in doing so, reinforce the importance of health and wellbeing for all.

Promoting active wellness in the workplace and in the local communities where organisations operate has been shown to improve productivity and positively influence employee health behaviours, including increased physical activity, healthier lifestyle choices, and greater participation in health screening.

Businesses can extend their impact beyond the workplace by partnering with local nonprofit organisations, supporting community health events, and providing resources to underserved populations, all of which contribute to broader population health and wellbeing and thriving communities.

3. Collaborative Innovation: How the Bevan Commission Is Partnering with Industry to Improve Health in Wales

The Bevan Commission is actively exploring innovative strategic opportunities to engage with employers in efforts to improve the health of the nation, particularly at a time when health and care services face increasing demand and limited resources.

With 73% of the Welsh population⁹ in employment and over one million people working in the private sector, employers have a significant role to play in advancing public health. Some of the major private sector employers in Wales include:

1. Admiral Insurance Group – employing over 10,000 people
2. GE, Tata Steel, Ford, Airbus – substantial employers with complex corporate structures, making employee figures difficult to quantify
3. Tesco, Sainsbury's, Iceland and other large retailers – major contributors to local employment
4. Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water – employing over 3,500 people

While this paper focuses on private sector engagement, it is important to note that over 300,000 people are employed in the Welsh public sector,¹⁰ including more than 90,000 in the NHS.¹¹ Similar opportunities for public sector collaboration will be explored in a separate report.

Private sector employers are often deeply embedded in the social and economic fabric of their communities providing not just employment, but identity, stability, and connection. Many of these businesses, such as the high street retailers Boots, also serve as trusted community spaces where health-related services are increasingly accessed.

Employment and the workplace play a central role in shaping individual wellbeing and community cohesion. Partnering with corporate organisations offers a valuable opportunity to explore innovative approaches and opportunities together. By combining the Bevan Commission's independent expertise in research, policy, and innovation with the ideas, insight, resources and reach, of industry partners, there is potential to tackle complex health challenges together in new and impactful ways.

Through these partnerships, the Bevan Commission is developing an evidence-based framework of shared practices and innovations that support employee wellbeing and promote healthier, more resilient workforces. By working and learning together we hope to develop new transformative ways of working to improve the health and wellbeing of people in Wales. This collaborative approach aims to drive meaningful, long-term improvements in population health, benefiting individuals, employers, and communities across Wales.

⁹ <https://www.gov.wales/labour-market-statistics-annual-population-survey-2022-html>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2023-06/labour-market-overview-june-2023-611.pdf>

¹¹ <https://heiw.nhs.wales/careers/working-in-nhs-wales/#:~:text=The%20NHS%20is%20the%20largest%20employer%20in%20Wales%20with%20over%2090%2C000%20staff.>

4. Learning from Industry

Industry has long dealt with system and workforce pressures by adopting proactive, customer-focused models, investing in innovation, improving productivity and embracing digital transformation to do more with less. Applying these principles to the health and care system and services can drive more efficient care delivery, improve patient experience, and create systems that prioritise prevention, data-driven decision-making, and workplace efficiencies and improved wellbeing.

The Bevan Commission plays a vital role in bridging this gap providing opportunities to share ideas, insights and experiences that can be adapted to health and care settings. By collaborating with leaders from industry, utilising their insights, expertise and experiences, the Commission aims to help translate these into practical approaches that influence policy and practice, shape strategy, and support innovation and transformation.

Learning from industry poses a vital opportunity for the sustainability of the health and care sector. It will help address current and future challenges, building the resilience needed to meet the future demands of an ageing population, a smaller workforce, and rising rates of multi morbidity.

Harnessing Industry for Health: Bevan Commission's Intended Outcomes

The Bevan Commission is working with industry to co-develop scalable, practical solutions that boost health and wellbeing across Wales. As major employers and community anchors, businesses have a vital role to play in driving shared responsibility for a healthier population.

Guiding Principles for Industry Engagement:

1. **Share Responsibility** – Position health as a shared goal between public and private sectors.
2. **Listen to Business** – Understand how employers view health, their current strategies, and what's holding them back.
3. **Spot What Works** – Identify, test and scale good practice from across Wales, using industry as a catalyst.
4. **Align and Innovate** – Co-create solutions that align with national health priorities and test new approaches.
5. **Build Tools Together** – Develop common frameworks, tools and methods for embedding health in business.
6. **Learn and Apply** – Adapt industry insights to strengthen health and care delivery.

Conclusion

Wales has a pivotal opportunity to redefine how we improve health and wellbeing by forging bold, strategic partnerships between industry, commerce, and health. This collaboration must extend beyond the workplace, embedding itself within communities and catalysing innovation in how care is delivered in the future.

By putting employee health and wellbeing at the heart of organisational purpose, businesses can become active agents of population health improvement. Together, through shared skills, knowledge, and innovation, we can create healthier workforces, reduce sickness absence and pressure on public services, boost productivity, and foster healthy and thriving communities. This is not just good for business but essential for building a fairer, healthier, and more sustainable Wales.

“Illness is neither an indulgence for which people have to pay, nor an offence for which they should be penalised, but a misfortune, the cost of which should be shared by the community.” Aneurin Bevan, Founder of the NHS.

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