

## **Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE1942: Encourage peer support programmes in public sector organisations, lodged by Fiona MacAulay**

### **Brief overview of issues raised by the petition**

A key challenge in addressing mental health at work is recognising and disclosing distress to others. For many, deciding whether to tell employers and colleagues about a mental health problem is difficult or different from disclosing physical health concerns. However, spotting signs of mental ill-health at an early stage and its disclosure can mean the problem is dealt with before it escalates into a crisis. A [survey](#) by the Mental Health Foundation found that:

'many people choose not to disclose their mental health problems for fear of jeopardising their career progression, being victimised as a direct result of a mental health issue and having a lack of clearly established protocols and procedures for managers to follow if staff experience mental ill health.'

Research shows that approximately [1 in 4 people experience a mental health problem](#) at some point in their lifetime, and at any one time, approximately 1 in 6 people have a mental health problem.

This petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to promote using two peer support programmes in public sector workplaces to promote better mental health support. Sustaining Resilience at work ([StRaW](#)) and Trauma Risk Management ([TRiM](#)) are workplace peer support programmes to support employee mental health.

StRaW aims to detect and prevent occupational mental health issues and boost psychological resilience. TRiM seeks to aid with managing situations and prevent the development of further difficulties after staff member/s witness or are affected by a traumatic event or repeated exposure within their working environment.

[The Stevenson-Farmer review of mental health and employers](#) published in 2017 considers how employees might be better supported and is relevant to all types of organisations. However, the report is particularly relevant to organisations that deliver care/support to other people as their primary

function, including those working in the public sector. Their report presents three challenges to employers, which are:

- Assisting employees to thrive at work
- Supporting staff who are struggling
- Enabling people who are ill to recover and return to work.

Overall, the report indicates that the human cost of mental health problems is enormous, with poor mental health impacting the lives of many people and those around them both at work and home. Furthermore, it highlights that rates of poor mental health and suicide are higher for employees in certain work settings, such as the NHS.

[Data](#) from the ONS and the Laura Hyde Foundation support service partner show that public sector staff are at approximately 40% higher risk of suicide than the general public. However, 53% of staff are 'very uncomfortable' taking up employer-based support services.

The Scottish Government has a [10-year mental health strategy](#) with 40 Actions. Concerning creating mentally healthy workplaces, the Scottish Government's ambitions are that people who develop poor mental health are supported to stay at work just as they would be with physical health issues and reflected through Action 36 and Action 37:

'Action 36: Work with employers on how they can act to protect and improve mental health and support employees experiencing poor mental health.'

Action 37: Explore with others innovative ways of connecting mental health, disability, and employment support in Scotland.'

The pandemic's impact on a societal level has meant that mental health has been brought to the fore. As a result, the Scottish Government published a [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): mental health – transition and recovery plan](#). This details what the Government is doing to address mental health challenges and create mentally healthy workplaces in Scotland and outlines its commitments and next steps.

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[21/06/2022]

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