

LEARNING POINT 35: is work good for your health?

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like more information about any of the issues mentioned in this learning point, please contact:

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Is Work Good for Your Health and Wellbeing?

This report provides evidence that work is good for health. You can access the Executive Summary of this report online: www.socialfirms.co.uk

Health Work Wellbeing

Across the UK, a lot of work is going on to create better links between health and employment. Health Work Wellbeing is a government initiative aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of working age people.

Worklessness and Health

In 2005, the NHS published a review of the literature on worklessness and health, which brings out findings relating to physical health, mental health, morbidity and social factors.

Other formats

You can also ask for this publication in large print, Braille or audio cassette, and we also provide translations into other languages. Please contact 0131 479 5162 or email translations@communitiesscotland.gsi.gov.uk.

The Scottish Centre for Regeneration is part of Communities Scotland, the Scottish Government's housing and regeneration agency.



What are learning points?

Learning points share what people have learned from their experience in regeneration – from people working or talking together, or from research into issues and evaluation of what is happening. Learning points can help people and organisations to improve their practice through identifying what works and what doesn't.

What is this learning point about?

This learning point is about the links between health and employment. It is based on the learning from a Scottish Government event for senior staff involved in health, social work and employability. This event was the first of its kind in Scotland to share best practice, and find better ways of working together to improve health through employment.

The views expressed in learning points are those of participants at various events and are not necessarily shared by their employers, SCR or Communities Scotland.

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What are the important issues?

- Why is work good for your health and wellbeing?
- What are people doing already to link health and employability services?
- What works and why?
- What are the challenges and how can these be addressed?
- How can we work better together in the future?

What is already known?

- There is a link between social exclusion, poverty and health. Poor health and long-term illness can also be linked to unemployment.
- Work can help improve self esteem, wellbeing, confidence, social status and income, and help build social networks. It can also be an important part of expressing yourself.
- Health is not simply an issue for health care professionals. There are economic, social, physical, psychological and medical factors which all influence people's wellbeing.
- It is better to prevent health problems occurring, than to react to them at a later stage.
- Organisations need to work together to help people into work, and support them to stay there.
- There are already excellent examples of organisations working in partnership at a local level – such as employment advisors in doctors' surgeries.

What has been learned?

Health and employment:

- There is strong evidence that work is good for your health and that long-term unemployment is bad for your health as it is associated with higher mortality and poorer general and mental health.



- The cycle in and out of employment can be harmful. Research referred to in the conference report below shows that health benefits are greater if employment is sustained.
- Work is just part of the process, not the end result. It can be rewarding and play an important part in helping people back to good health.
- On balance, work is good for most people. But in a small number of cases work will not help and may even be bad for health. Some types of work may not suit certain people and the quality of the workplace environment can have negative effects on people's health .

Good practice in health and employability

- There is a lot of good work already being done at a local level, where it can make the most difference.
- It is important to learn from the experience of others, to identify good practice and share what you have learned.

People who have been involved in successful approaches say that:

- Promoting the idea that work is good for health, backed up with research evidence, can help persuade different organisations to work together on a shared vision.
- Commitment from major organisations and people with influence in those organisations is essential.
- Effective communication is an important part of effective partnership working.
- Clients will need a broad range of support – financial, health, training and employment advice to help them move into work.
- It can be helpful for service users if organisations are based in the same location (or even have a presence in the same building) to simplify joint working and the process of making referrals.

There are challenges to joint working in health and employability:

- Organisational cultures are different. You need to spend time building relationships and understanding all partners' priorities.
- Government priorities and targets drive everyone's work. In some professions, such as the medical profession, these are very clearly specified. This can cause difficulties with flexibility and contributing to wider aims.
- Most people today recognise that health provision needs to focus on prevention and health improvement as well as treating health problems. But a more proactive approach is still needed to make this a reality.
- Doctors usually decide on a person's fitness for work, but a purely medical approach may not always be the most appropriate assessment for some people

- People can be suspicious of encouragement to work, and nervous of coming off benefits.

What next?

- Health and employability professionals have been talking about these issues for some time. The time is right for action.
- Evidence demonstrates that work is good for your health. The message should be reinforced by promoting it to health care professionals and the wider community.
- Employers should recognise the impact they have on health, and work jointly with health and employability organisations. Public sector employers could take the lead, and demonstrate by example.
- There are great opportunities for the relatively small network of major organisations involved in health, social work and employability to work together.

