

# Workplace Wellbeing in Ireland

By Stacey Machesney



Today, the definition of employee wellbeing has expanded beyond physical health to focus on a more holistic approach, enabling employees to make positive behavioural changes in their mental, social, and physical wellbeing. Stacey Machesney, Head of Health & Wellbeing Irish life, shares her thoughts on workplace wellbeing: current pain points and emerging challenges.



The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’<sup>1</sup>, a definition that links health explicitly with wellbeing. In Europe, one third of employees are living with a Chronic Disease<sup>2</sup> and chronic diseases represent the most common cause of disability pensions and the second most common cause of work incapacity<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, providing workplace education, guidance, and preventative strategies to combat unhealthy lifestyles, is an excellent way to target the primary prevention of chronic diseases.

According to the latest CIPD HR practices survey, three in five respondents reported that employee wellbeing was increasingly part of the senior management agenda though only 28% reported progress on training of line managers to deal with wellbeing issues<sup>4</sup>.

In my role as Head of Health & Wellbeing Irish life, my team supports HR leaders who want to deliver impactful wellbeing programmes, while also demonstrating the strategic value of employee wellbeing. Leveraging the expertise of our Wellbeing Consultants and Scientific Advisory Council, we help organisations design and deliver scientifically validated programmes that empower employees to be proactive about their own health and wellbeing. The results provide us with unique insights into the current and emerging challenges facing organisations in Ireland.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution>

<sup>2</sup> (Nazarov, S., Manuwalk, U., Leonardi, M., Silvaggi, F., Foucaud, J., Lamore, K...Rothe, U. (2019). Chronic diseases and employment: which interventions support the maintenance of work and return to work among workers with chronic illnesses? A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(10): E1864.

<sup>3</sup> Wege, N., & Angerer, P. (2013). Mental disorders and work ability - Implications for the health care. *Die Psychiatrie: Grundlagen & Perspektiven*, 10(2), 71–81.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cipd.ie/news-resources/reports/hr-practices-ireland-survey/2021>

## Current Pain Points

### Digital Resilience

The Right to Disconnect code came into effect in Ireland in April, 2021 and many organisations are keen to support employees in this area. We are working with organisations to raise awareness of the impact of technology such as zoom fatigue<sup>5</sup> on health; build frameworks to support digital wellbeing in the business and inspire effective working habits to prevent employee burnout and reduce stress<sup>6</sup>.

### Mental Health

Employees are feeling low and disconnected from teams. Mental health in general has experienced a great blow in recent years: the proportion of people feeling depressed more than doubled, from 6 percent in 2016 to 13 percent in April 2020<sup>7</sup>. This finding is supported by our own data with increased calls to the Employee Assistance Programme (EPA) regarding stress related issues and increase in claims for stress-related or diet-related illnesses. To help HR teams cope with a myriad of mental health issues, we have delivered programmes on subjects such as addiction, grief and loss, and positive minds.

### Behavioural Change

This year, we have tracked higher than average BMI scores and noticed an increase in gastrointestinal claims. Dietary quality has also been negatively impacted for many, with research reporting increases in the consumption of unhealthy food and snacks between meals or late at night, as well as episodes of uncontrolled eating during home confinement because of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>8</sup>. In response, we have developed several lifestyle interventions including a 7-week nutrition programme with health impact analysed.



Though the research and findings seem daunting, we are in fact in a great place to reset and change the way we are living and working. Knowing the common issues is a good start and I know we are adamant to build the right solutions to tackle issues that arise and positively impact long term behavioural change.



[Get in touch to find out more about our workplace wellbeing programmes.](#)

<sup>5</sup> <https://news.stanford.edu/2021/02/23/four-causes-zoom-fatigue-solutions/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://news.stanford.edu/2021/02/23/four-causes-zoom-fatigue-solutions/>

<sup>7</sup> Well-being in Europe: Addressing the high cost of COVID-19 on life satisfaction (mckinsey.com)

<sup>8</sup> Ammar,A., et al. (2020). Effects of COVID-19 home confinement on eating behaviour and physical activity: results of the ECLB-COVID19 International Online Survey. *Nutrients*, 12, 1583, doi:10.3390/nu12061583

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.rte.ie/news/business/2021/0924/1248853-the-great-resignation-will-people-leave-their-jobs/>

### Emerging Challenges

#### > Increasing MSK issues

A range of musculoskeletal problems, including neck, back and shoulder pain, have cropped up as working from home was not the long-term plan.

#### > The Great Resignation

Lockdown was a time for pause and reflection for many and anecdotally, employees are on the move.<sup>9</sup>

#### > Return to the Office

Latest NPHET guidance has delayed RTO plans and again businesses grapple with the challenge of operating remotely.

#### > Diversity and Inclusion

Line managers are expected to implement many people policies and to influence employees with respect to D&I

#### > Mental Health

Expecting an increased focus in 2022 with contributing factors including anxiety related to RTO, remote working, and technostress from the 'always on' culture.



**Stacey Machesney** is Head of Health & Wellbeing for Irish Life, where she leads the delivery of wellbeing solutions for Irish Life's 1.3 million customers. Irish Life Wellbeing is a multidisciplinary practice that works to support businesses and their employees solve complex social and environmental challenges. The practice draws on the experience of Irish Life's network of health, financial and sustainability professionals: combining insights, experience, and methodological rigour to help businesses and their employees maximise their health and wellbeing with improved lifestyle changes through proactive care.

Prior to her role with Irish Life, Stacey was the Head of Ireland at Spectrum Life, delivering wellness solutions for over 500,000 users across the UK & Ireland. Stacey's extensive experience in public health, HR leadership and health education drive her passion for creating impactful, measurable employee wellbeing solutions that achieve long-term success. To focus on her own health and wellbeing, Stacey enjoys cooking and competes with her mum, a food scientist, to produce the most nutritious recipes, sometimes sacrificing on taste.

