

## First Aid regulator announces new guidance on supporting mental health in the workplace

[Wednesday 21 November 2018, 12:30 GMT] The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety, has today announced [new First Aid guidance](#) on mental health. This updated guidance signals a fundamental shift in how mental health support will now be assessed and provided for in the workplace.

The First Aid guidance located on the HSE website now provides employers with advice on how to support employees experiencing a mental health issue, including training staff as mental health trained first aiders.

The HSE announcement follows the publication of an open letter to the Prime Minister, signed by the CEOs of over 50 leading employers, calling on the government to uphold its manifesto pledge to change Health and Safety law to include mental health. The letter was the most recent development in the 'Where's Your Head At?' campaign led by Bauer Media Group, MHFA England and Natasha Devon MBE which has attracted over 200,000 signatories on a change.org petition.

Clarifying what the guidance change means to employers, HSE stated, "The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has enhanced its First Aid guidance to help employers understand the existing need to consider mental health alongside physical health when undertaking their 'needs assessment'.

"There has, however, been no legal change to make mental health first aid-type training mandatory."

**Simon Blake OBE, CEO Mental Health First Aid England** commented, "We have worked in close collaboration with HSE to ensure that mental health is explicit in the guidance that employers refer to when assessing their needs around First Aid, so we very much welcome today's announcement. There is no golden bullet when it comes to workplace mental health and Mental Health First Aid training is just one part of the wider strategic approach that we recommend organisations adopt.

“Today’s guidance is an important step towards supporting employees’ mental health but we are clear that equality will only truly be reached when the law demands that every workplace must make provision for mental, as well as physical, first aid. We look forward to achieving legislative change so that Health and Safety regulations are designed to protect our whole health, mental and physical.”

Currently, MHFA England is delivering training into thousands of organisations across the country, including private and public bodies, schools, colleges and universities. Many of these organisations are reporting the positive impact that MHFA England training is having within their organisations and on their staff, including earlier access to support services such as Employee Assistance Programmes and in-house counselling. As an example, Thames Water has reported that for every physical first aid intervention they record, five mental health first aid interventions.

**Karl Simons, Chief Health, Safety & Security Officer, Thames Water, says,** “Mental Health First Aiders at Thames Water have been a catalyst for engagement, providing our employees with the confidence to come forward and seek support at their time of need.

“The HSE’s new guidance is a welcome step forward, but legislative change is needed if we want see real progress across society. At Thames Water we record five mental health first aid interventions for every physical first aid intervention, so it’s essential that every workplace has access to first aid support for both mental and physical health.”

MHFA England training also sits on a unique evidence base of over 70 studies which demonstrate the effectiveness of MHFA training in increasing mental health awareness, knowledge and confidence in how to support a person experiencing mental ill health. A recent RAND study commissioned by Public Health England studied 117 mental health and wellbeing programmes and found MHFA England training to be among the top five identified as meeting the highest standards of evidence (Nesta level 3).



Working with MHFA England, first aid charity St John Ambulance has trained 6,000 mental health first aiders in just over a year.

**Director of Training and Enterprise, Mel Fox, said,** “St John Ambulance welcomes the HSE’s new guidance as we firmly believe that taking care of mental wellbeing – whether it’s managing stress, depression or another condition – is as important as looking after physical illness.

“We expect demand for training to grow exponentially in the coming years and are fully committed to helping organisations support the health of their employees as a whole.”

*To find out more about the campaign to change the law around First Aid in the workplace, please visit [wheresyourheadat.org](http://wheresyourheadat.org)*

**-ENDS-**

#### Notes to editors

- For interview requests and case study information please contact the MHFA England media team on [media@mhfaengland.org](mailto:media@mhfaengland.org) or call 0207 250 8116
- Mental Health First Aid is the mental health equivalent of physical first aid training and provides participants with the skills and confidence to recognise the signs and symptoms of common mental health issues and effectively guide a person towards the right support, be that self-help or professional services.
- To date over 300,000 people in England are trained in MHFA skills.
- The core principles of MHFA include: spotting the signs of a mental health issue, helping to prevent issues from getting worse and giving confidence in helping someone who is experiencing an issue.
- As well as the Adult MHFA course, the organisation runs a number of tailored courses including Youth MHFA, Higher Education MHFA, Armed Forces MHFA and Workplace MHFA.

- MHFA England has a vision to normalise society's attitudes and behaviours around mental health by developing the skills we need to look after our own and other's wellbeing.
- More information about MHFA England and its courses can be found at [www.mhfaengland.org](http://www.mhfaengland.org) or by emailing [info@mhfaengland.org](mailto:info@mhfaengland.org).