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Business leaders join calls for Government to update health and safety legislation to protect mental health in the workplace

[Sunday 18 November, 09:00 AM GMT] An [Open Letter](#) to the Prime Minister signed by more than 50 leaders of some of Britain's biggest employers including PwC, Royal Mail, WHSmith, Mace, Ford and Thames Water is today calling on the Government to prioritise its manifesto pledge to amend health and safety legislation to put mental and physical first aid on an equal footing.

Signed by industry leaders from banking, retail, education and mental health sectors, this call comes at a time when one in six people of working age will experience mental ill health including depression, anxiety or issues relating to stress.¹ With over 28 million people in work in England, this represents nearly 5 million people.² Mental health issues are also estimated to cost the UK economy almost £35 billion every year³ and 15.4 million working days are lost to work-related stress, depression or anxiety.⁴

Fionuala Bonnar, Chief Operating Officer, Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England commented, "Today's open letter shows that business leaders clearly recognise the need to support their employees' mental health in the same way they do their physical health.

"The change in legislation we are calling for will establish a baseline for protecting mental health in the workplace, ensuring no one is left behind. This is just one part of improving approaches to workplace mental health, but it represents an important step forward. Ensuring that first aid support is there for the millions of people who struggle with their mental health every year will make a big difference to how we all think about our health as a whole."

Paul Keenan, CEO, Bauer Media UK & European Radio, said, "The impact of neglecting mental ill health in the workplace is two-fold: both an economic and human cost which we have the opportunity to alleviate.



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“By investing in the physical and mental health of our people we will not only unlock human potential in the workplace but reduce astronomical costs to the economy. It is imperative the Government takes notice of U.K. employers and the public who are standing up and calling for change.”

The Open Letter follows the delivery of a petition of over 200,000 public signatures to 10 Downing Street as part of a mental health campaign called ‘Where’s Your Head At?’ founded by Natasha Devon MBE, Mental Health First Aid England and Bauer Media, which has received cross-party backing. MPs from across the political spectrum originally showed their support for the issue by signing an Early Day Motion tabled by Norman Lamb MP in October 2016.

Stephen Clarke, CEO, WHSmith, said, “At WH Smith, our employees’ mental health is of equal importance to their physical health. Every one of our 14,000 employees has access to mental health support and we are proud to have the same number of Mental Health First Aiders across our business as we do physical health first aiders. We are calling for this legislative change, alongside many other leading employers, as we firmly believe that everyone should have access to first aid support for their mental health regardless of where they work.”

Read the Open Letter in full and sign the petition at www.wheresyourheadat.org.

-ENDS-

Notes to editors

About MHFA England

- Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England is a community interest company (CIC), established in 2009.



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- MHFA 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 or by emailing info@mhfaengland.org.

About Bauer Media UK

- Bauer Media UK reaches over 25 million UK consumers through a portfolio of world-class, multi-platform media and entertainment brands including heat, KISS, Grazia, Empire, Magic, Absolute Radio and the Hits Radio Network. These brands offer commercial partners access to highly engaged audiences, with creative solutions underpinned by insight and instinct. Bauer Media UK is part of the Bauer Media Group, one of the world's largest privately owned media businesses with media assets all over the globe.

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2. Estimates of employment, unemployment, economic inactivity and other employment-related statistics for the UK (ONS 2018) Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/october2018> (last accessed, November 2018).
3. Mental health problems at work cost UK economy £34.9bn last year, says Centre for Mental Health (Centre for Mental Health 2017). Available at: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/News/mental-health-problems-at-work-cost-uk-economy-349bn-last-year-says-centre-for-mental-health> (last accessed, November 2018).
4. Work-related stress, depression or anxiety (HSE 2018). Available at: www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/overall/hssh1718.pdf (last accessed, November 2018).