

# Healthy Ireland at Work

## A National Framework for Healthy Workplaces in Ireland

2021–2025



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# Foreword

## Minister for Public Health, Wellbeing and the National Drugs Strategy

I am very pleased to present the Healthy Workplace Framework which is one of the priorities identified in the Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan.

Improving the health and wellbeing of the people of Ireland is central to the work of Government.

The vision for Healthy Ireland is where everyone can enjoy physical and mental health and wellbeing to their full potential and where wellbeing is valued and supported at every level in society.



To achieve this, a whole of society approach is required and it is widely acknowledged at international level that the workplace is an ideal setting to promote employee health and wellbeing, providing multiple benefits to employees and employers, as well as broader social and economic gains. Given the dimension and complexity of workplace health, a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approach was required, and the development of this Framework was led by my Department with the support of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE), the Institute of Public Health (IPH) and key stakeholders. This Framework is underpinned by robust evidence and consultation, and provides strategic direction and flexible guidance that can be adapted to any workplace to help create and sustain health and wellbeing among the workforce.

COVID-19 created significant challenges for all our citizens however, in the midst of this pandemic, wellbeing moved centre stage and for workplaces, the wellbeing of employees became a priority for many organisations, both within the public and private sectors. To be effective, health and wellbeing needs to be embedded in the culture of the organisation as well as creating a safe environment and offering workplace wellbeing programmes. I would like to acknowledge the workplaces across Ireland who have embraced the healthy workplace concept and in particular the organisations who have shared good practice through case studies which have informed the Framework.

This is a key milestone for workplace wellbeing in Ireland and my Department is committed to develop an implementation plan to action the objectives with key stakeholders in early 2022. One of the priorities is to build a website which will provide content on health and wellbeing as well as interactive tools to support workplaces deliver and evaluate wellbeing interventions.

I would sincerely like to thank everyone who was involved in the development of this Framework, including professionals from Human Resources, Occupational Health, Health and Safety, Public Health, Health Promotion and representatives from other Government Departments. I look forward to progressing this agenda to enhance the health and wellbeing of Ireland's workers.

### Minister Frank Feighan

Minister for Public Health, Wellbeing and the National Drugs Strategy

# 1. Healthy Workplaces Framework At a Glance

## 1.1 What is the Healthy Workplaces Framework?

The Healthy Workplaces Framework is a government strategy to enhance the health and wellbeing of Ireland's workers. The Framework is one part of *The Healthy Ireland Framework 2013-2025*.<sup>1</sup> The Framework sets the strategic direction for workplace policies and programmes to enhance the health of workers. Annual operational plans will drive the delivery of the framework from 2022 to 2025.



## 1.2 How does this Framework fit in with existing laws and policies in the workplace?

The Framework integrates existing government laws and policies. It aligns with other government strategies on issues like reducing injuries and ill-health, promoting active travel and positive mental health. Employers have a legal obligation to comply with health and safety legislation, but there is no legal obligation for employers or workplaces to participate in health and wellbeing. However, taking part in good quality health and wellbeing initiatives in the workplace has multiple benefits for both workers and businesses.



## 1.3 How was this Framework developed?

A committee led by the Department of Health and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment oversaw the development of this Framework. The Framework has been informed by a review of the evidence as well as consultation and engagement with key stakeholders. To build capacity and enhance knowledge and skills a postgraduate course in *Health Promotion in Workplace Wellness* was initiated in 2018 to support the subsequent delivery of the Framework.<sup>2</sup>



# 1. Healthy Workplaces Framework At a Glance continued

## 1.4 Key Issues



### What about COVID-19?

The COVID-19 pandemic started while this Framework was being finalised. Working lives have changed significantly in a short period of time. The health and wellbeing of our workforce is more important than ever, and the Framework has been adapted to reflect these changes. It highlights government initiatives and guidance for employers (Appendix 1). In relation to health and wellbeing, a number of core issues identified during COVID-19 need to be considered in the development of the implementation plan, namely;

- (i) supporting the health and wellbeing of frontline workers
- (ii) health and social responses to remote working and
- (iii) health impacts of precarious employment.



### Does the Framework apply to all workplaces?

Yes. The Framework aims to improve health and wellbeing for workers in both the public and private sector. The unique challenges for those working in small and medium organisations and the self-employed were raised during the consultation and engagement work. These have been taken into account in the Framework design, and will be actioned in the implementation plan.



### Is this basically more health and safety?

No. This Framework focusses on developing the workplace as a setting that creates the social, environmental and cultural conditions for health. It supports workplaces to foster better mental health, work life balance and health promoting behaviours like healthy eating, physical activity and smoking cessation. Employers are required by law to provide a safe working environment for employees. All organisations must ensure they are fully compliant with statutory health and safety requirements before developing workplace wellbeing initiatives.



### I am an employer – what will this Framework mean for me?

This Framework highlights the benefits of developing or enhancing health and wellbeing policies and programmes in your organisation. It showcases the approaches that are based on evidence and most likely to deliver positive results. The Framework gives foresight on the types of government initiatives that may be coming down the line, and time to consider how your organisation can link with these, develop best practice and build your experience and reputation as a healthy place to work.



### I am an employee – what will this Framework mean for me?

This Framework shows you some ‘good practice’ approaches to enhancing your health and wellbeing and that of your workplace colleagues. The success of health and wellbeing policies and programmes depends not just on engagement by management but also the meaningful involvement of all workers. If you are employed in an occupational health, health and safety, health promotion or human resources role, the Framework will signpost ways in which your vital specialist skills can further contribute to workplace health and wellbeing policies and programmes.



# 2. Context

## 2.1 What is the scope of this Framework?

This Framework is a strategic document. It sets out the roadmap or direction that the government wants to take. It seeks to foster an expansion of effective approaches to promote worker health and wellbeing within all workplaces. This work forms part of the wider Healthy Ireland agenda.

### The intention is to realise the full potential of the workplace as a setting to:

- Improve physical and mental health of the population in line with government health improvement strategies;
- Enhance the work satisfaction and productivity of our labour force by creating healthier workers;
- Enhance the impact of the work of professionals in roles like health and safety, occupational health, employee assistance programmes, human resources, health promotion, public health and organisational development;
- Contribute to Ireland's progress on the UN Sustainable Development Goals and EU initiatives such as Europe's Beating Cancer Plan.

## 2.2 How the Framework was developed

### This Framework has been informed by evidence including:

- 1. International policy approaches**  
Understanding what other countries are doing in promoting health and wellbeing of workers, and what they have learnt;<sup>3</sup>
- 2. Effectiveness**  
Understanding ‘what works, why and for whom’ in workplace programmes;<sup>4,5</sup>
- 3. Context**  
Understanding Ireland's employment and health policies and laws; profiling the health of Ireland's working population;<sup>6</sup>
- 4. Pandemic impact**  
Health and wellbeing of workers relating to COVID-19;<sup>7</sup>
- 5. Tacit knowledge and experience in Ireland**  
Consulting and engaging with stakeholders to better understand the opportunities and challenges.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, in 2018 the National University of Ireland (NUI) completed the Proposal for the Development of an Accreditation Model for Healthy Workplaces<sup>9</sup> and the Health Research Board (HRB) carried out an evidence review on Healthy workplace tools in five countries which was published in 2019.<sup>10</sup> To inform the implementation of the Framework the HRB completed a further review on Promoting workplace wellbeing through culture change.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.3 How will it fit into our health system?

The Healthy Ireland Framework 2013-2025<sup>1</sup> is the cross-government approach to enhancing health and wellbeing.

### Healthy Ireland aims to:

- Increase the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life;
- Create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a healthy Ireland.

Alongside Healthy Ireland, the Government's Sláintecare programme<sup>12</sup> aims to reform Ireland's health system. This reform includes a renewed emphasis on promoting health, preventing disease and reducing inequalities in health in other words, to keep people healthy as long as possible and to give everyone a fair chance at staying healthy.

### Sláintecare recognises that employment is a significant social determinant of health and states that:

*“when residents of a country are healthy, they are more productive and are able to participate in employment and in the economy... Up-front investment in health promotion and primary care is a wise investment which promotes better outcomes and higher quality of life but also will result in lower total healthcare spending.”*

Both Sláintecare and Healthy Ireland recognise that an unfair gap exists in the health experience of different types of workers. The life expectancy of people working in professional roles is over five years higher than that of people working in manual roles.<sup>6</sup>

Over two million people are at work in Ireland and there are significant opportunities to promote the health of the population in the workforce. The workplace has been recognised as a setting for building health as well as preventing illness and injury in many government policies (Appendix 2).

## 2. Context continued

Organisations realise that the health of their workforce is critical to productivity, innovation and business growth. The number and range of workplace health and wellbeing policies and programmes operating in Ireland has grown. However, there is limited intelligence on the quality and reach of these programmes, and limited structures in place to support their development and evaluation. It is not clear to what degree the expansion of programmes may be contributing to better population health and to addressing health inequalities. A government-led strategic framework is now essential to guide future activity so that health and wellbeing initiatives in the workplace develop in an effective way. The development of this Framework has been led by the Department of Health with the support of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The *Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021–2025*<sup>13</sup> recognises the importance of a settings-based approach to health and sets out the high level objectives for the Healthy Workplace Framework from 2021-2023.

### 2.4 What policies and laws are currently supporting health and wellbeing in workplaces?

#### Policies and laws

This Framework has been developed within the wider context of existing government legislation and policy relating to the health and wellbeing of workers, further information can be found in Appendix 2.

The COVID-19 crisis has led to significant changes for Irish workplaces with a significant number of employees working from home in line with government guidance. 70% of organisations indicated they were willing to facilitate more employees to work remotely after COVID-19 than before the crisis.<sup>15</sup> In July 2020, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment launched a public consultation on remote working. In January 2021, the Government published a *National Remote Work Strategy* to support people to work from home permanently.<sup>15</sup> The Strategy sets out plans to strengthen the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees, to provide the infrastructure to work remotely, and sets out clear guidance on how people can be empowered to work remotely from the office. A summary of the Strategy's main provisions can be found in Appendix 3a. A Code of Practice on the 'Right to Disconnect' has also been introduced, while legislation on the Right to Request Remote Working is currently being prepared, further information can be found in Appendix 3b. These commitments aim to create more flexible family-friendly working arrangements and support better work-life balance.



#### Workplaces in Ireland

- 32%** have a formal health & wellbeing strategy
- 84%** reported an employee assistance programme
- 45%** have mental health support
- 44%** have onsite wellbeing initiatives

#### Developments in Ireland – overview

There is no database of workplaces engaged in health and wellbeing programmes in Ireland. The HR Practices in Ireland 2020 survey carried out by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) found that 32% of workplaces have a formal strategy to address health and wellbeing, while 84% of workplaces reported an employee assistance programme, 45% mental health support and 44% onsite wellbeing initiatives.<sup>14</sup>

To support good practice and recognise the contribution of workplaces to health and wellbeing, Healthy Ireland sponsors awards with Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) and the National Irish Safety Organisation (NISO) on Healthy Workplaces. Human Resources, Occupational Health and Health and Safety have taken the lead in many workplaces guided by their own policies and practices. This has led to many diverse approaches to workplace wellbeing. There is no national standard guidance to steer health and wellbeing initiatives in the workplace, no monitoring system to access their overall contribution to government policy goals on health improvement, and there are only limited evaluations to demonstrate the effectiveness of the initiatives undertaken.



#### Case Studies

The Framework intends to integrate and enhance the valuable work already being undertaken, drive effectiveness and increase the reach of successful approaches. As part of this project, a number of case studies, demonstrating good practice in workplace wellbeing, have been collated. It is hoped that these case studies will provide guidance to other workplaces who wish to engage in promoting workplace wellbeing in their organisation. A supporting document detailing the Case Studies can be found at [www.gov.ie/workplaceframework](http://www.gov.ie/workplaceframework).

### 2.5 What is a healthy workplace?

The World Health Organization defines a healthy workplace as follows; “A healthy workplace is one in which workers and managers collaborate to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety and wellbeing of all workers and the sustainability of the workplace by considering the following, based on identified needs.”



Health and safety concerns in the physical work environment



Health, safety and wellbeing concerns in the psychosocial work environment, including organisation of work and workplace culture



Personal health resources in the workplace



Ways of participating in the community to improve the health of workers, their families and other members of the community<sup>16</sup>

This description recognises that a healthy workplace is multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary. Building health is a 'long-game' and requires more than a one-off intervention. It takes time and a commitment to engagement, problem definition, reflection and quality improvement. The definition also recognises that health and safety is central to a healthy workplace, but that the scope of a healthy workplace extends beyond safety concerns.

Advice about making healthier choices is valuable but the evidence is clear that 'health education' alone cannot deliver sustainable change in the health and wellbeing of workers. A healthy workplace has health integrated within its culture, policies and systems. It progresses the health agenda through staff engagement. It respects and builds on the professional expertise of key specialities including occupational health, health and safety, human resources and health promotion practitioners.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) standards are also a key reference point in understanding a 'healthy workplace'.<sup>17</sup> These standards are based on rigorous reviews of evidence and recommend that workers should:

- Work in organisations that have a named senior manager who makes employee health and wellbeing a priority;
- Be managed by people who support their health and wellbeing;
- Be managed by people who are trained to recognise and support them when they are experiencing stress;
- Have the opportunity to contribute to decision-making through staff engagement forums.



## 2. Context continued

### 2.6 Good for health, good for business

Healthy workers are more efficient, energetic, alert and better able to manage stress.<sup>8</sup>

When employee health is managed well, staff engagement increases and sick leave decreases. A considerable amount of ill-health amongst the working population is preventable.

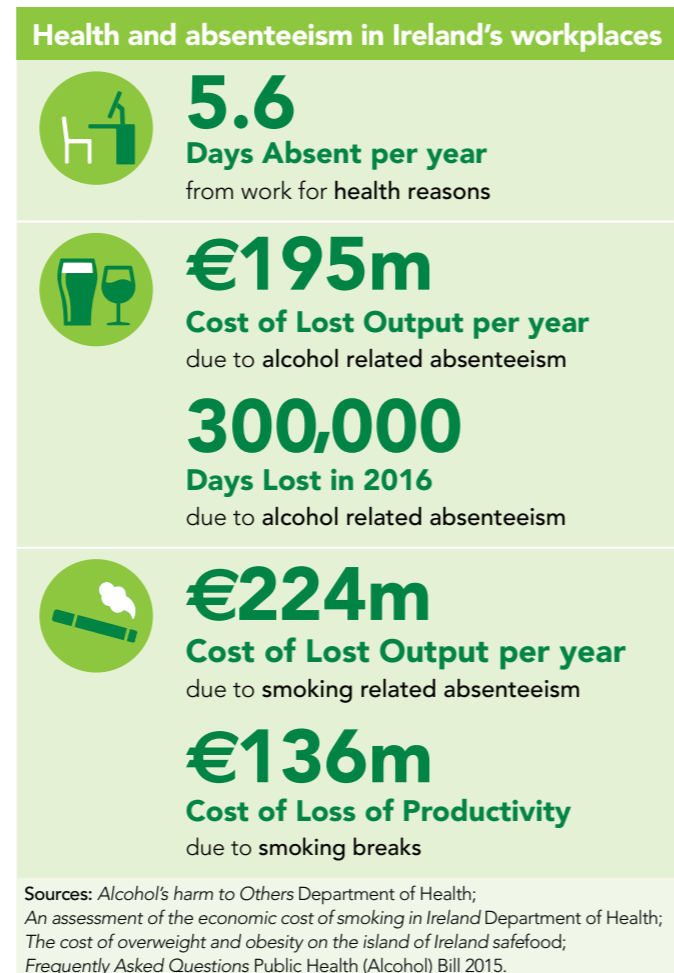
Studies have found that the primary causes of short-term absence for both manual and non-manual workers in Ireland are minor illnesses, back pain, musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) and stress. The main causes of long-term absences among manual workers were acute medical conditions, back pain, MSD, stress and mental health problems.

Stress was the number one cause of long-term absence among non-manual workers, followed by acute medical conditions, MSD and back pain.<sup>18</sup> Stress is a major contributor to absenteeism in Irish workplaces with 42% reporting workplace related stress as a common cause of medically certified absence.<sup>14,19</sup> It has previously been estimated to cost up to €20 billion per year in the EU.<sup>18</sup>

Figure 1. Benefits of Workplace Health and Wellbeing



Figure 2. Health and absenteeism in Ireland's workplaces



When workers are ill, health and wellbeing initiatives can play an important role in supporting recovery and appropriate transitions back to work. Many organisations make an employee assistance programme available to staff. An employee assistance programme is a set of professional services, provided by an organisation internally or externally, to help support employees with personal or work-related difficulties.

### 2.7 The health of the workforce

Ireland's workplaces, and the people who work in them, are diverse. Both the working population, and the nature of the work that they do, are changing. A profile of the health of the workforce was created to inform the development of this Framework. The profile presents data on the health and wellbeing of the working population. These data can be used as indicators of change in health outcomes for workers. A detailed health profile of the workforce, including a summary of data sources used can be found in: *The Health of the Workforce*.<sup>6</sup> A summary of the profile categories is available in Appendix 4.

## 3. The Healthy Workplaces Framework

### 3.1 What is the vision?

Success looks like... the health of Ireland's workers is improved. Changes in the culture, policies and practices in workplaces lead to improvements in physical and mental health and wellbeing and work-life balance.

### 3.2 What is the aim of the Framework?

To support the growth of effective approaches to enhancing health and wellbeing in the workplace setting.

### 3.3 What will delivery of the Framework do for government, employers and workers?

For Government	For Employers	For Workers
<p><b>A healthier workforce</b> that contributes to better population health and enhanced business productivity.</p>	<p>A roadmap for <b>delivering changes</b> in workplace cultures, policies and practices that can improve workers health.</p>	<p>Workplace cultures, policies and practices in the workplace which <b>support individuals</b> to increase control over, and improve, their own health.</p>

Table 1. What will the implementation of the Framework look like?

Level	Benefits
<p>Macro Government</p>	<p>When workplaces engage with the Framework and implementation plan there will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved effectiveness and return on investment;</li> <li>Integration and co-ordination with existing government policies and programmes relating to workplace health and wellbeing;</li> <li>Standardised systems of evaluation and data collection to inform ongoing Government investment.</li> </ul>
<p>Meso Workplace</p>	<p>When business management engages with the Framework and implementation plan there will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear guidance and a structured approach to health and wellbeing catered to a diverse set of workplaces;</li> <li>Access to practice-development supports;</li> <li>Opportunities to grow professional relationships and partnerships in health and wellbeing;</li> <li>Recognition through the Healthy Ireland Healthy Workplace Awards enhancing organisational reputation.</li> </ul>
<p>Micro Worker</p>	<p>When workplaces engage with the Framework and implementation plan, there will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A structured and evidence-informed approach that can really support and empower me to address my health and wellbeing;</li> <li>Opportunities for me to meaningfully engage on health and wellbeing in the community of my workplace.</li> </ul>

### 3. The Healthy Workplaces Framework continued

#### 3.4 What principles will guide implementation of this Framework?

Table 2. Principles that will guide implementation of Framework

Principle	What we mean	What it looks like
Sustainable culture change	Position health and wellbeing within workplace culture, policies and practices in the context of a long-term change management process.	Actions that drive deep change in workplace values and activities.
Safety first	Ensure workers are safe and that risk in the workplace is managed in line with the law and best practice.	Health and safety is a priority in every workplace.
No health without mental health	Recognise mental health as core to health and wellbeing in decisions both at a strategic level and in delivery of change.	Health and wellbeing programmes that both promote positive mental health and respond effectively to mental distress and ill-health.
Engage and empower	Provide workers with real opportunity to engage in creating and sustaining a healthy workplace.	Quality improvement and monitoring of staff engagement.
Integrated ways of working	Enhance and co-ordinate the work of professionals in roles related to workplace health.	An approach where everyone understands their role and knows how they can work towards better health in the workplace.
Proportionate universalism	Invest in improving the health of those at greatest risk of ill-health.	A narrowing of the health gap between the most socially advantaged and disadvantaged of the working population.
Evidence-led	Using the best available evidence to inform actions.	Using the most effective models of enhancing health and wellbeing and monitoring progress.

The implementation plan will drive positive change



#### 3.5 Implementation

A Healthy Workplaces Implementation Plan will be developed following agreement on the strategic direction set out in the Framework.

The implementation plan will drive positive change in the way that health and wellbeing programmes in the workplace are supported, designed, delivered, evaluated and improved. This is a significant change management project for delivery under the Healthy Ireland agenda. It requires partnership across Government departments, State agencies, public and private employers and a range of stakeholders.

#### 3.6 What are the objectives?

The objectives set out the high-level areas of activity to achieve the Framework aims



**Objective 1**  
**Build implementation structures**



**Objective 2**  
**Raise awareness**



**Objective 3**  
**Drive engagement**



**Objective 4**  
**Transform culture**



**Objective 5**  
**Provide supports**



**Objective 6**  
**Share good practice**



**Objective 7**  
**Drive quality improvement and ensure sustainability**

### 3. The Healthy Workplaces Framework continued

#### 3.6 What are the objectives? continued



#### Objective 1 Build implementation structures

The first objective focusses on building implementation structures and systems, that support health and wellbeing. The consultation process, as well as international evidence, clearly signal that progress on health improvement is dependent on good leadership, trust and investing in effective systems of partnership working. This needs to happen at government level as well as at workplace level.

##### Actions

- The Department of Health will appoint a HWF Implementation Committee.
- Develop and agree implementation plan and timelines.
- Develop effective partnerships with policy and programme leads to support healthy workplaces.
- Assign leadership roles and responsibilities for implementation with key partners.



#### Objective 2 Raise awareness

Actions under the second objective seek to ensure that communication on the Framework is consistent and clear. It seeks a structured approach to communication that is planned and appropriate to the broad range of partners and stakeholders. The actions under this objective recognise that earning the trust and commitment of partners, organisations and their workers relies on good quality communication. It also recognises the importance of producing regular periodic reporting on the health of the national workforce, and its relationship with productivity, to inspire workplaces to engage with the Framework and its implementation plan.

##### Actions

- Design a Healthy Workplaces Framework Communications Plan.
- Build on existing Healthy Ireland Networks to engage with key stakeholders.
- Publish a periodic report on health and wellbeing in the workplace based on an agreed set of indicators.
- Produce and disseminate periodic reports regarding implementation of the Framework.
- Host a Healthy Workplace Conference every two years.



#### Objective 3 Drive engagement

The third objective seeks to drive both wide and deep engagement in health improvement in the workplace. While the actions under objective two seek to inspire organisations to engage and signpost them to the resources available through the implementation plan, these actions seek to present an attractive offer to organisations who are open and ready to engage, or already engaged in some form of health improvement work.

##### Actions

- Agree a delivery model for Healthy Workplaces and consider a phased approach to implementation.
- Provide centralised information and signposting for all workplaces.
- Develop resources to support workplaces.
- Seek engagement through high level partnerships with groups (membership bodies, professional associations) with significant reach to the workforce.
- Establish a stakeholder group of community and voluntary sector organisations who are engaged in workplace wellbeing to support alignment with the Framework.



#### Objective 4 Transform culture

Organisational culture emerged as a core consideration in health improvement in the workplace setting. This was strongly emphasised in the consultation responses as well as in the evidence reviewed as part of the development of the Framework.

Organisational culture can be a difficult concept to define, measure and change. Structured approaches to enhancing a culture of health and wellbeing were a core 'ask' of many parties working in health improvement in the workplace setting.

The actions below seek to operationalise the Framework principles of 'sustainable culture change' and 'proportionate universalism', placing organisational culture centre stage in workplace health promotion. The actions commit the government to ensure that the implementation of the Framework delivers equitably and enhances the health of socially disadvantaged workers such as those working with low wages and insecure employment.

##### Actions

- Consider the key cultural drivers for workplace wellbeing identified in the HRB report.
- Develop guidelines for workplaces on assessing and transforming organisational cultures to promote health and wellbeing.
- Develop a roadmap for how to target health inequalities in the workplace within the implementation of the Framework.
- Develop specific resources to support SMEs.



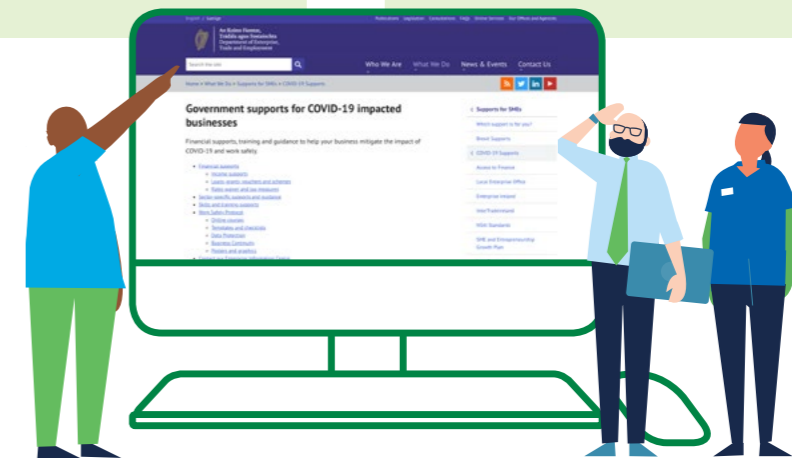
#### Objective 5 Provide supports

This objective recognises that many workplaces do not have the skillset or resources in-house to know how to go about supporting their workers to enhance their health and wellbeing. The provision of supports emerged as a key success factor in international analyses of workplace health and wellbeing strategies and programmes.

The tasks under this objective seek to create a user-friendly interface between engaged workplaces and expertise in health behaviour change, disease management, human resources, occupational health and health and safety.

##### Actions

- Develop signposting to fiscal incentives and resources to support workplaces to adapt workplace environments.
- Develop topic toolkits to support workplaces building on existing resources (eg. healthy meeting guidelines).
- Develop and implement a training schedule including workplace champion training.
- Continue to support the delivery of the Post Graduate Programme in Workplace Wellness in NUIG.
- Develop standards for healthy food provided in workplace canteens (all sectors) and agree a programme for roll-out in the public sector.
- Develop a network of workplaces engaged in healthy workplace approaches.
- Host practice development events for network members.





### 3. The Healthy Workplaces Framework continued

#### 3.6 What are the objectives? continued



##### Objective 6 Share good practice

This objective recognises that there are already exemplars of workplace health promotion in Ireland and internationally. Significant leadership and achievements are evident in both the public and private sector and within small businesses and large global enterprises. The opportunity to share good practice, and share learning, was emphasised in the consultation process. Supporting networks of practitioners from diverse professional backgrounds has been a success factor in the roll out of Government-led strategies seeking health improvement in the workplace setting.

These actions commit Healthy Ireland to building opportunities and infrastructure for sharing good practice and building a rich community of practitioners.

##### Actions

- Build a repository of case studies and feature it on the online hub – with specific examples for SMEs to enhance the support for small and medium-sized enterprises.
- Continue to support Healthy Workplace Awards with NISO and CIPD.
- Engage in European cooperation and sharing of good practice internationally.
- Engage in North/South cooperation and sharing of good practice.
- Undertake a comprehensive mapping exercise of Ireland's workplaces to assist with the targeting of priority workers.
- Commission an analysis of Government level legislative/regulatory options to support organisations to enhance health and wellbeing in the workplace.



##### Objective 7 Drive quality improvement and ensure sustainability

Health improvement and health promotion work takes time and is a long-term commitment. In Ireland, like most other countries, there is a lack of structured evaluation of workplace health promotion in terms of process as well as outcomes.

The tasks under this objective seek to enhance the availability of 'hard evidence' of effectiveness to attract managers to invest in health improvement initiatives. Good quality health improvement work is inclusive and empowering, informed by data and evidence and sustained by good leadership.

The award system developed under this Framework will be an important vehicle to guide organisations to build these approaches and to celebrate good quality programmes.

##### Actions

- Agree the structure and resource requirement for operation of the Healthy Ireland Healthy Workplaces Awards.
- Develop a Healthy Workplaces Research Plan.
- Address knowledge and data gaps relating to workplace health and wellbeing.
- Agree a monitoring and evaluation programme with key performance indicators.
- Consider the development of a National Quality of Working Life survey.



#### 3.6 What are the objectives? continued

##### Core elements of the approach at workplace level

A delivery model supporting workplaces to implement the Healthy Workplaces Framework will be developed to drive implementation. The delivery model will have both 'system' and 'unit' components. System parameters specify how the government, its relevant agencies and partners will support the development of a growing number of high-quality workplace wellbeing programmes. Unit parameters specify how each individual workplace will develop their own workplace wellbeing programmes in line with best practice.



##### Steps to developing healthy workplaces

The government will provide resources to workplaces seeking to engage in workplace wellbeing programmes and these will support workplaces to move through the steps outlined in Table 3, below.

Table 3. Steps to developing a Healthy Workplace

Steps	What it looks like
<b>Gaining and demonstrating support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior leadership in organisation taking ownership</li> <li>• Identifying a workplace lead with responsibility for wellbeing</li> <li>• Establishing a working group</li> <li>• Developing a business case</li> </ul>
<b>Assessing needs and setting objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting a holistic workplace needs assessment on:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– what is already available in the workplace</li> <li>– what are staff health needs</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Presenting results to staff and senior management</li> <li>• Agreeing objectives for the Workplace Wellbeing Programme (WWP)</li> </ul>
<b>Planning and resourcing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreeing a budget for workplace wellbeing</li> <li>• Designing an implementation plan</li> <li>• Communicating details on the WWP</li> </ul>
<b>Implementing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering agreed interventions</li> <li>• Monitoring staff engagement</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluating and improving</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing and evaluating</li> <li>• Agreeing quality improvement actions</li> <li>• Planning next phase</li> </ul>

# 4. Appendices

## Appendix 1 – COVID-19 Government Supports and Guidance for Employers

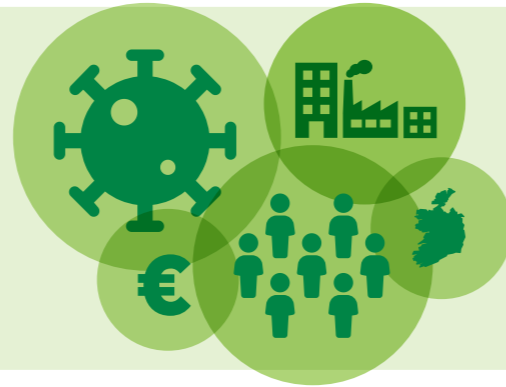
Financial supports, training and guidance to help your business mitigate the impact of COVID-19 can be found here:

### Government supports for COVID-19 impacted businesses

Contact the DETE Business Support Call Centre for information on the government supports available to businesses and enterprises affected by COVID-19.

+353 1 631 2002

infobusinesssupport@enterprise.gov.ie



## Appendix 2a – Legislation and policy

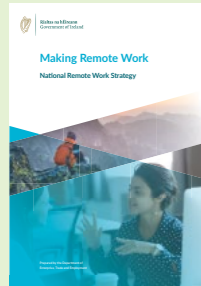
Background	Legislation and Statutory obligations	Policy and Guidance documents
<b>Safety, Health and Welfare</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005</li> <li>Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Applications) Regulations 2007</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report on Economic impact of Safety, Health and Welfare at Work legislation<sup>20</sup></li> <li>Workplace Health and Well-Being Strategy<sup>21</sup></li> <li>Workplace Health Toolkit for Small Businesses<sup>22</sup></li> <li>Strategy Statement 2019–2021<sup>23</sup></li> <li>Workplace Health page on the HSA website<sup>24</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Protection of employees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2015</li> <li>Disability Act 2005</li> <li>Organisation of Working Time Act 1997</li> <li>Protection of Employees (Part-time Work) Act 2001</li> <li>Protection of Employees (Fixed-Term Work) Act 2003</li> <li>Employees (Provision of Information and Consultation) Act 2006</li> <li>Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Applications) Regulations 2007</li> <li>Protection of Employees (Temporary Agency Work) Act 2012</li> <li>Workplace Relations Act 2015</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guide to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Applications) Regulations 2007, Chapter 3 of Part 6: Night and shift work<sup>25</sup></li> <li>Guidance for employers and employees on night and shift work<sup>26</sup></li> </ul>

## Appendix 2b – Workplace health promotion as featured in government health policies

Health policy	Time period	Workplace provisions
Connecting for Life <sup>27</sup>	2015–2024	Includes a commitment to work with partners in developing guidance and providing training and support to workplaces in relation to suicide prevention.
Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone <sup>28</sup>	2020–2030	The strategy notes that workplaces which allow for open discussion about mental health, including people’s own personal experiences, can promote overall organisational and individual wellbeing. States that good mental health enables people to work “productively and fruitfully.” Emphasises that equal employment opportunities must be afforded for individuals with mental health problem. Acknowledges that evidence-based approaches to training and employment must be adopted to assist those with difficulties, provided for by expert agencies.
Tobacco Free Ireland <sup>29</sup>	2013–2025	Ensures continued compliance with and enforcement of existing legislation in relation to the ban on smoking in the workplace.
The National Physical Activity Plan <sup>30</sup>	2016	Includes an action that “employers will make it easier for people to be more physically active.”
A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan <sup>31</sup>	2016–2025	Identifies the workplace as a sector with a leadership role in the prevention and management of obesity... active engagement with leaders in the workplace in order to shape the obesity prevention environment.
Healthy Food for Life – the Healthy Eating Guidelines and Food Pyramid <sup>32</sup>	2016	Provides guidance which can be interpreted in the workplace, including a food pyramid and materials to help people makes choices to maintain a healthy, balanced diet.
Breastfeeding in a Healthy Ireland <sup>33</sup>	2016–2021	Sets out the policy and practical supports for breastfeeding mothers in the workplace.
National Cancer Strategy <sup>34</sup>	2017–2026	Acknowledges that the ban on workplace smoking greatly reduced exposure to second-hand smoke. States that occupational related cancers are preventable and strong workplace regulation, worker education and surveillance are needed. Recognises that outdoor workers should be prioritised in relation to skin cancer prevention and that employers must support the successful transition of cancer survivors back to work.
National Men’s Health Action Plan <sup>35</sup>	2017–2021	Recognises the workplace as a setting in which to promote men’s health and optimal work-life balance for men. Contains a specific action to contribute to the development of the ‘Healthy Workplaces Framework’ and support the implementation of workplace health promotion initiatives.
Evidence Base for the development of the Women’s Health Action Plan <sup>36</sup>	2019	A Men’s Health Action Plan is already in existence and, once developed, the Women’s Health Action Plan will complement this, in terms of a comprehensive health service response to gender differences in health behaviours, outcomes and engagement with health services. This review was undertaken to examine how best to support a focus on women’s health needs, within the broader context of the need to achieve gender equality in health outcomes for women and men in Ireland. The evidence highlights that women’s experience of health is influenced by gender differences, including employment.
Making Remote Work – National Remote Work Strategy <sup>15</sup>	2020	One of the core pillars to this strategy is to creating a conducive environment for the adoption of remote work (rights and responsibilities of employers and employees, health and safety legislation, tax arrangements).

## 4. Appendices continued

### Appendix 3a – Summary of the National Remote Work strategy



In January 2021, the Government published a *National Remote Work Strategy*<sup>15</sup> to support people to work from home permanently. The Strategy sets out plans to strengthen the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees, to provide the infrastructure to work remotely, and sets out clear guidance on how people can be empowered to work remotely from the office.

The Strategy identifies a number of key actions that will be taken by Government, driven by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

#### Key actions

1. Mandating that home and remote working should be the norm for 20% of the public sector.
2. Reviewing the treatment of remote working for the purposes of tax and expenditure in the next Budget 2022.
3. Mapping and investing in remote working hubs across Ireland.
4. Legislating for the right to request remote working.
5. Developing a code of practice for the right to disconnect.
6. Accelerating the provision of high-speed broadband to all parts of Ireland.

#### Objective

The objective of the remote working strategy is to ensure that remote working is a permanent feature in the Irish workplace, in a way that maximises economic, social and environmental benefit.

The Remote Work Strategy is built on three fundamental pillars which will be bolstered by underpinning conditions.

**Pillar 1:** Creating a conducive environment for the adoption of remote work (rights and responsibilities of employers and employees, health and safety legislation, tax arrangements).

**Pillar 2:** Development and leveraging of remote work infrastructure to facilitate increased remote work adoption (development of national hub infrastructure, national delivery of broadband).

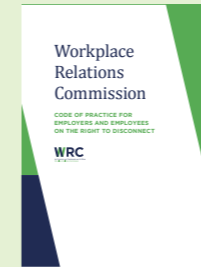
**Pillar 3:** Maximising the benefits of remote work to achieve public policy goals (shared vision and access to relevant data to inform evidence-based policy).

#### Underpinning conditions

The three pillars are bolstered by underpinning conditions that focus both on the promotion of remote work and best practice, and the skills needs from its increased adoption. This section also highlights the opportunity the public sector holds to lead by example and demonstrate best practice to employers nationally.

The strategy promises to deliver these actions throughout 2021. While many actions involve collaboration between departments and agencies, individual departments and agencies will take leadership of the progression of actions and commit to deliver them over the agreed timeline. The Interdepartmental Group run by Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment will monitor the progress of the actions, they will also promote alignment and information sharing in order to support the wider goals of the State, such as increasing participation in the labour force, balanced regional development, transport infrastructure development, carbon mitigation, improving child and family wellbeing, and improving work/life balance.

### Appendix 3b – The Right to Disconnect



In April 2021, the Government announced the *Code of Practice on the Right to Disconnect*.<sup>37</sup>

All employees officially have the Right to Disconnect from work and have a better work-life balance.

The Right to Disconnect gives employees the right to switch off from work outside of normal working hours, including the right to not respond immediately to emails, telephone calls or other messages.

#### There are three rights enshrined in the Code:

1. the right of an employee to not have to routinely perform work outside their normal working hours;
2. the right not to be penalised for refusing to attend to work matters outside of normal working hours;
3. the duty to respect another person's right to disconnect (for example: by not routinely emailing or calling outside normal working hours).

As of May 2021, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment is conducting a public consultation on the introduction of a statutory right to request remote work.

Both are part of the Government's commitment to create more flexible family-friendly working arrangements, including working from home and working more flexible hours.

## 4. Appendices continued

### Appendix 4 – Health of the workforce: worker profile

Categories of data collated for the worker health profile

Category	Subcategory
Social and demographic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Age</li> <li>Gender</li> <li>Poverty by household type</li> </ul>
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employment by industry</li> <li>Job Satisfaction</li> <li>Absenteeism for health reasons</li> <li>Working while ill</li> </ul>
Health, illness, injury and disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-perceived general health</li> <li>Long standing illnesses or health problems in the workforce</li> <li>Workforce limited in daily activities</li> <li>Prevalence of work-related stress and injuries</li> <li>Emotional and mental health</li> </ul>
Health behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical activity/active travel</li> <li>Dietary behaviours</li> <li>Tobacco &amp; e-cigarette use</li> <li>Alcohol use &amp; alcohol-related harms</li> <li>Overweight and obesity</li> <li>Breastfeeding</li> <li>Sleep hygiene</li> </ul>

## Glossary of Terms

### Absenteeism

Intentional and/or habitual absence from work without valid reason.

### Asset-based practice

Asset-based approaches recognise and build on a combination of the human, social and physical capital that exists within local communities.

### CIPD

Chartered Institute of Personnel Development. The professional association for human resource management professionals.

### Corporate Social Responsibility

Where enterprises incorporate social and environmental concerns into their business operations on a voluntary basis. Promoting health and wellbeing as a core value of the workplace is recognised in *Towards Responsible Business: Ireland's National Plan on Corporate Social Responsibility 2017–2020*.

### Cost-benefit analysis

When costs and consequences are expressed in monetary items.

### Cost-effectiveness analysis

When the difference in costs between interventions is compared to the difference in interventions effects.

### CSO

Central Statistics Office.

### Dignity at Work policies

Policies that aim to ensure an environment free from bullying, harassment and sexual harassment for all workers.

### DETE

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

### Effectiveness

Whether an intervention achieves its objective.

### Employee Assistance Programme

An Employee Assistance Programme is a work-based service that provides support to those experiencing personal and/or work-related difficulties.

### Empowerment

A process through which individuals and social groups are able to express their needs, present their concerns, devise strategies for involvement in decision-making, and achieve political, social and cultural action.

### Evidence-based policy

Where policy is informed by the best available objective scientific evidence.

### EU-27

The 27 member states of the European Union.

### Health Promotion

The process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health.

### Health promotion setting

The place or social context in which people engage in daily activities in which environmental, organisational, and personal factors interact to affect health and wellbeing.

### The Healthy Ireland Framework 2019–2025

The *Healthy Ireland Framework 2019–2025* is a roadmap for building a healthier Ireland. It is based around four key goals; increase the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life, reduce health inequalities, protect the public from threats to health and wellbeing and create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a healthy Ireland.

### HSA

Health and Safety Authority. The national body in Ireland with responsibility for the promotion, regulation and enforcement of occupational health and safety legislation.

### HWF

Healthy Workplaces Framework.

### HRB

Health Research Board. A state agency that supports research and provides evidence to prevent illness, improve health and transform patient care.

### HSE

Health Service Executive.

### KPI

Key Performance Indicator.

### Meta-analyses

A systematic review that synthesizes the data from several studies into a summary.

### MSD

Musculoskeletal disorders. Disorders related to soft tissue and bones that affect the body's movement.

## Glossary continued

### NICE

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Provides national guidance and advice to improve health and social care in the UK.

### NGO

A non-profit organization that operates independently of any government, typically one whose purpose is to address a social or political issue.

### NISO

National Irish Safety Organisation is a membership organisation and aims to promote and improve health and safety at work.

### Occupational Health

Occupational Health is an area of work in public health to promote and maintain the highest degree of physical, mental and social wellbeing of workers in all occupations.

### Presenteeism

The practice of an employee being present at the workplace when ill, often leading to reduced productivity.

### SME

Small to medium-sized enterprises. A small enterprise is an enterprise that has fewer than 50 workers. A medium enterprise has between 50 workers and 249 workers.

### SMART Objectives

Used to guide the development of measurable goals. Each objective should be; Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Oriented.

### SSBs

State sponsored bodies. Government-owned corporation that is a commercial business owned, either completely or in majority, by the Irish Government.

### Statutory requirement

An action which is required by law.

### Systematic reviews

A review of literature that has a detailed and comprehensive plan and search strategy.

### Worker

Someone engaging in or available to engage in paid employment.

### Work-life balance

Balance in one's life in work/career and lifestyle.

### Workplace culture

The sum of the organisation values, beliefs, behaviours and environment.

### Workplace health programmes

Health promotion and protection strategies implemented at the worksite.

### Workplace wellbeing programmes

Workplace wellbeing programmes are a subset of workplace health programmes. These include single or dual focus interventions (e.g. physical activity, dietary behaviour and weight management; smoking and alcohol behaviours; stress, anxiety and depression) and multi-focus programmes.

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