



## WEBINAR SUMMARY

# How businesses can communicate and signpost to mental health support

The Global Business Collaboration for Better Workplace Mental Health's Leadership Pledge consists of six commitments towards making mental health a visible priority in every region in which businesses operate. The Pledge with Us series of webinars aims to support signatories deliver the pledge commitments in their organisations.

The webinar held on 24 May 2023 focused on Commitment 5 of the Leadership Pledge: **My organisation will signpost our people to mental health tools and support they need.**

Here we provide a summary of the presentations from our invited panellists, and the Q&A session.

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## THE PANEL

**Catherine Gilbert Dessessert, Head of Group Employee Benefits, Sodexo**

**Anagha Belwalkar, Insurance and Wellness Portfolio Lead, Sodexo**

**Katherine Gostling, VP Global Wellbeing, BP**

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## PANEL PRESENTATIONS

**Catherine Gilbert** began by summarizing Sodexo's comprehensive approach to mental wellness for their people, who work across multiple countries and sectors. The mindset and culture of the organisation is important, and leadership/management training plays a role in embedding this at Sodexo. Beyond culture, Sodexo's comprehensive benefits package includes psychological support and schemes such as parental and caring leave to promote better balance between family and work life.

In a diverse and complex organisation, with people scattered around the world, one communication cannot fit all. At Sodexo they rely on local teams to adapt central communications to be culturally appropriate and deploy them through the most effective channels for their region.



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**Anagha Belwalkar** described the way that Sodexo India communicates the support that is available to their people. Their easy-to-use Access Portal includes a mental health hub, delivered in partnership with ICAS. Weekly mailers and regular SMS mailers keep mental wellness topics high on the agenda. The Sodexo Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) helpline number is clearly visible on the Access Portal, laptop screensavers, and on posters at staff accommodation and office washrooms. New starters receive training on the available support services as part of their induction, and a buddy scheme has recently been put in place, so starters have a named colleague assigned to help them settle in.

A current priority is to develop greater support for nearly 9,000 migrant people in Sodexo's Indian workforce. Living in staff accommodation, these workers often feel lonely away from their families, and are known by Sodexo to be at higher risk of mental health issues. They are recruiting HR mentors to provide greater support to this staff population.

The Sodexo team continually monitors and tracks the effectiveness of wellness initiatives, using an automated audit process to check whether messages are landing, and inform what they need to do differently.

**Katherine Gostling** described BP's similarly wide range of support initiatives but stressed that no matter how great your products are they are only effective if people know about them and trust them.



BP researched the key health risks among their employee population to inform a global wellbeing education calendar that focused wellness conversations to five themes. By working closely with the central comms team, these have been embedded into the drumbeat of global employee engagement. The calendar is set and shared across BP globally at the beginning of the year so business units and wellbeing champions know what to expect in advance and can adapt messaging for local relevance and cultural appropriateness.

The themes cover many aspects of health and wellness, but each theme has a mental/emotional component to keep the conversation going. For instance, in the cancer theme, a mental health lens was applied to the psychological impact of symptoms, diagnosis, bereavement etc.

An educational guide – containing clinically validated content – is developed for each theme, and communications focus on three key messages that are: proactive, bitesized and encourage action. All content is translated into local languages and can be adapted by local teams, particularly around signposting to relevant support services.

Mental health support doesn't tend to come with 'quick wins', but Katherine noted a few priorities that can help businesses to improve their offering:

- Empower and upskill leaders to support their people.
- Have a balanced reactive:proactive approach, so as well as being there for those that are struggling, do more to prevent crisis by encouraging self-care.
- Make your offering relatable (this can be by using case studies) and provide choice in the ways people can access support – these factors are important for the diversity and inclusivity of your approach.



- Be aware of the risks that come with creating a compassionate workplace. Set boundaries so people don't overshare in a way they later regret, and to safeguard those who are offering support.



## Q&A SESSION

### Q: ARE YOU ABLE TO SHARE THE % OF YOUR EAP USAGE AND DOES IT VARY BY LOCATION?

**Catherine Gilbert** – In Sodexo there are different levels of usage in countries and this depends partly on how well it is communicated across regions. In some countries terms like 'psychological support' need to be reframed, for instance to 'life management' to make it more appealing to the local population. Sodexo are due to launch the service via an app, which may help to increase usage.

**Anagha Belwalkar** – Sodexo India have succeeded in doubling usage due to better awareness, from 5% of staff per day to 11.3% in one year.

**Katherine Gostling** – Noted caution with using EAP usage as a key metric. Lots of people reaching out is not necessarily a good sign.

### Q: HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU'RE HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION?

**Katherine Gostling** – BP uses employee surveys, which include a wellbeing index. They also evaluate all wellbeing initiatives for use and engagement.

**Catherine Gilbert** – A clear indication of direction of travel won't come from a single metric, but from the combination of several measures, for instance including staff engagement and absent days.

### Q: HOW DO YOU PROVIDE MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION THAT CAN REACH EVERY EMPLOYEE?

**Katherine Gostling** – By building it into the way everything is done. It has to filter through in day-to-day language and behaviour to reach everyone, and leadership is key.

