

The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

## Mental health crisis in social care

With recruitment problems caused by low pay, Brexit and increased competition for employees in the post-lockdown economy, this is putting even more pressure on those care workers who remain.



**mentalhealth**  
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## Huge vacancy rates across care sector adding to staff mental health crisis

**The government's failure to deal with the growing staffing crisis in social care risks worsening the mounting mental health toll on workers, says UNISON.**

Figures from a recent UNISON survey show a substantial proportion of care workers have suffered problems during the pandemic including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with more than two thirds (68%) saying their mental health has declined.

The vast majority said their work had contributed to the difficulties they were experiencing. UNISON says there is a serious risk their health woes could worsen

because severe staff shortages across the care sector are piling on the pressure.

Staffing problems are likely to become more acute in the coming few weeks as thousands of care workers leave their jobs because of new compulsory vaccine rules, says UNISON.

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### Contacting Derbyshire UNISON

01629 582266

[branch@unisondc.co.uk](mailto:branch@unisondc.co.uk)

[derbyshireunison.com](http://derbyshireunison.com)



lockdown economy, this is putting even more pressure on those care workers who remain, says UNISON.

The union surveyed more than 4,000 staff working in care homes and delivering care in communities across the UK. More than eight in ten (85%) of those who had experienced mental health deterioration since the start of the pandemic said their work had been a factor.

Problems reported by the workforce ranged from what staff described as PTSD, to depression and anxiety, the inability to leave work stress behind and sleeping difficulties.

In addition to an overhaul of the sector to sort out chronic understaffing and endemic low pay, UNISON is calling for an immediate increase in support for care workers' wellbeing, which staff must be able to access directly.

Last week the government announced some money from the new health and social care levy would go towards funding mental health resources and helping staff recover from the pandemic.

But the union says this much-needed support must be developed with staff, not just by speaking to employers. And while online help is a start, there's also demand for one-to-one and group counselling that employers must find the time and space for.

### **UNISON general secretary Christina McAnea**

said: "Care workers have been through the mill these past 18 months. They have seen dozens of people they look after either fall seriously ill or die. They've been terrified about becoming sick themselves or taking the virus home to their families. Many have struggled financially because of the absence of proper sick pay.

"Despite the Prime Minister's promise to fix social care, there is still no plan. With the sector facing the abyss and thousands of staff down with others leaving all the time, more must be done to support those that remain in post.

"The government's commitment to funding mental health support is welcome. But help is

needed now, not at some unknown point in the future."

### **Notes**

- UNISON surveyed 4,264 workers employed in care homes and out in the community from 3 April to 7 May 2021. When asked to identify what best described their work-related mental health issue, more than a third of care workers said they were having difficulty sleeping (35%), 16% couldn't wind down after leaving work, 11% felt unable to cope at times, 13% felt depressed or sad, 22% were experiencing anxiety and 3% what they described as PTSD.
- Issues having the greatest impact on staff mental health included: the fear of catching Covid or infecting family and friends (74%), increased workload (63%), financial worries (39%), seeing people in their care sick or dying (37%) and the strain of dealing with their employer about sick pay (18%). When asked if they'd been offered professional mental health support during the pandemic, 28% had, but 72% had not.

### **Case study quotes:**

- "My anxiety has increased. I have noticed a significant change in employees' mental health during the pandemic, which as a manager has been difficult. It's hard to navigate the demands of their roles while looking after their wellbeing, especially when they want to be at work to help and feel bad for having time off."
- "When staff are off self-isolating or have the virus, they don't get paid anything more than statutory sick pay. It's so wrong. It makes me feel low and unappreciated."
- "I have lots of anxiety about the future. I've had Covid and am back to work, but I'm not feeling 100%. I'm finding things tough. I don't want to let my team down, so I'm just soldiering on. Morale at work is the worst it has ever been. Staff are

leaving. It's such a worry."

- "I became very low and teary so sought help from my GP. I'm on tablets now and back at work, but I dreaded returning as I'm over 60 and a lifelong asthmatic. However careful I am about hand washing and social distancing, I still think I'm at high risk.
- "I feel despair. I can't plan anything. I'm nearly 65 and struggling with ill health and low wages."