

Funding boost to support patients to stay in and return to work

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Patients will receive better support to help them stay in and get back to work in areas of high economic inactivity.

- £25 million for NHS to continue to innovate how to support work outcomes
- Part of 10 Year Health Plan drive to treat work as health outcome
- Tackles economic inactivity, showing how NHS is a driver of economic growth

Patients will receive better support to help them stay in and get back to work, thanks to a £25 million funding boost for a pilot scheme in areas of high economic inactivity.

Health and Growth Accelerators bring together work and health support for people with health conditions – aiming to stop health problems becoming work problems. The pilots in the north of England target the most common conditions that are experienced by people who are economically inactive because of poor health, such as musculoskeletal conditions, metabolic disorders such as diabetes and hypertension, and mental illness.

A record 2.8 million people are out of work citing health conditions as the main reason – but there are a further 10.2 million in work with health conditions, some of whom could be at risk of leaving the workforce. Many of these people have more than one health condition and complex needs that can make returning to work difficult without the right help.

Using Health and Growth Accelerator funding, the NHS is finding innovative ways to tackle this by setting up specialist support for patients at risk of falling out of work so they don't spiral into a cycle of unemployment when they encounter a health problem. Interventions could include NHS funded employment coaching, gym memberships, counselling or physiotherapy – depending on the condition in question.

They also aim to reduce the burden on doctors by making use of professionals like occupational therapists, employment advisers and physiotherapists, who are often better placed to provide the support patients need to get back to work.

Health and Social Care Secretary Wes Streeting said:

The NHS is great at patching us up, but too often it then sends us home without the support we need to get back on our feet. That's bad for patients, bad for our economy, and bad for the NHS, because we end up walking back through its doors sooner than we should.

For the first time, we are making the NHS accountable for patients' employment outcomes, to drive better rehab and long-term health.

This is what our 10 Year Plan is all about – an NHS that doesn't just treat illness, but helps people live fuller, healthier lives. Thanks to our changes, the NHS will play its part in getting Britain back to work.

Work and Pensions Secretary Pat McFadden said:

For too many people, a health condition can become the start of a long and difficult journey away from work, with real consequences for their finances, their wellbeing and their sense of purpose.

These Health and Growth Accelerators show what is possible when we join up employment and health support, meeting people where they are and giving them the tailored help they need to stay in, or return to, work.

Through our Pathways to Work programmes, we will continue to support people to stay healthy and employed – benefitting individuals, businesses, and our economy as we keep Britain working.

Run by the NHS in South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, the North East and North Cumbria, Health and Growth Accelerators are focussed on parts of the country most affected by economic inactivity driven by ill health.

Building on an initial £45 million delivered last year, this cash injection will allow these schemes to continue exploring how investing in prevention can help people stay in work – a key part of the government’s 10 Year Health Plan.

West Yorkshire ICB has so far used its funding to develop a variety of programmes to support patients suffering from these conditions to stay in work.

One patient – an accountant who had experienced a stroke and was suffering from fatigue and brain fog – benefitted from its Stroke Rehabilitation Service. She was provided with a tailored return to work plan and supported to work with her employer to request an occupational health review, ultimately allowing her to return to her original work hours within months.

Another patient was referred to a service in Halifax by his GP following a prolonged period of sickness absence due to severe burnout and a serious deterioration in his mental health. Through the programme, he received tailored support from an employment support key worker, including wellbeing coaching, practical advice and a referral to local counselling charity. The combined support helped him regain confidence, and begin exploring new career opportunities, all while remaining connected to work during his recovery.

Other patients who are recovering from surgery, or struggling with obesity, benefit from referrals via GPs to the Active Leeds programme, which provides tailored physical activity sessions, health coaching, and peer support.

Rob Webster, CEO NHS West Yorkshire Integrate Care Board said:

Today’s announcement is good news for people, communities and businesses in West Yorkshire and the wider region. The work we have done together over the past year has made a measurable difference to people’s lives.

More than 60 initiatives have been delivered in partnership to help keep people in work. This has resulted in improving health outcomes and experiences for people across West Yorkshire, and helped businesses to retain their staff, skills, knowledge, and experience.

Good work and health go hand in hand together.

This is the latest in a series of government commitments that recognise the impact of health on work, and work on health. Sir Charlie Mayfield's Keep Britain Working Review is clear that the fit note is 'not working as intended', meaning that neither employees nor employers are getting the support they need to manage health in the workplace - work is now getting underway to transform the system. Last month the government launched the National Cancer Plan which recognised the impact that cancer has on work outcomes and highlighted the importance of the evidence generated by the Accelerator programme to bring health and work support together for cancer patients and survivors.

This funding also comes following a £3.5 billion package of employment support by the end of the decade to help more sick or disabled people into work as the government acts to support more people into employment, boost living standards, and grow the economy.

Background

- 93% of the 11 million fit notes issued electronically in primary care in England last year simply declare people "not fit for work" with no constructive alternative.
- 90% were issued by doctors, adding administrative burden to overstretched primary care and cutting into vital consultative time for patients.
- The programme is generating evidence on how health interventions impact employment outcomes — this is the first time the NHS has had accountability for employment outcomes.
- Definitive evidence on whether Accelerators have met their outcome target will come from the full evaluation, concluding 2027.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/funding-boost-to-support-patients-to-stay-in-and-return-to-work>