

How non-health charities address the social determinants of health



Good work

Being out of work is not good for us. Yet it's not just employment that matters for our health. People need *good quality* work in order to stay well.

Evidence summary

Pages 51–56 of the [Evidence Review](#) discuss in detail the evidence that suggests the following:

- Being unemployed is bad for a person's general health.
- Being unemployed increases the likelihood of poor health behaviours such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and lack of physical exercise.
- Good quality employment improves mental and physical health.
- Being in work is not always good for a person's health. Low stability and security, long hours, poor working conditions, and repetitious and routine tasks are bad for health. 'Good work' is what matters.

The longer someone is unemployed—the larger the negative effects on their health.



Key evidence links to Money and resources: Unemployment or low paid work can result in a lack of money and resources. People with mental illness, disabilities, and those who are young, carers or lone parents are all more at risk of having a low income due to unemployment than other groups.

Case study: [Citizen's Advice](#) provides free, confidential and independent advice to millions of people each year, and works to fix the underlying causes of people's problems. The charity aims to provide holistic and tailored support, to help people with a range of problems, such as managing debt, or stabilising their employment or housing circumstances. As well as improving employment or debt outcomes, the charity feels that health has always been 'part and parcel' of its work through the impact of these social factors on health and well-being.

Citizen's Advice has undertaken work to understand its impact—including its employment advice—such as its 2017 Outcomes and Impact Research which shows the direct benefits on health. Using [New Economy's cost-benefit-analysis tool](#) has enabled it to place a financial value on its impact, including the reduced cost to the Department of Health—in 2016/2017, this was estimated at £50 million. Citizen's Advice uses a combination of existing questionnaires such as [ONS](#) and [WEMWBS](#) to measure a client's wellbeing, but is aware of a need to be proportionate—particularly as health can be a sensitive area. Data like this enables Citizen's Advice to best meet client needs in the future. This research has enabled Citizen's Advice to articulate its impact on health, and helped it think about—and make the case for—health as primary outcome of its work.

Employment concerns are some of the most reported causes of poor mental health. In response to this, Citizen's Advice is part of the [VCSE Health and Well-being Alliance](#), and is responding to a consultation on mental health by NHS England.

Challenges

Barriers to gathering and using evidence

- Many charities in this sector focus on getting people into a job. Charities have very little control over the actual quality of employment in other organisations—which is one of the big links to health.

- A charity working in this sector may lose direct contact with the individual once they gain employment. This may mean tracking any change in health outcomes is difficult.

Barriers within the sector and wider environment

- Charities in this sector tend to be very dependent on government funding. Government funding streams focused on creating employment opportunities may not fund measurement of health outcomes.

- The benefits of good work are varied, and their relevance alters across the different sectors and government departments. This means that evidence needs to be built for a wide range of stakeholders.

- Other bodies, like employers, are key players in improving quality of work. This makes it challenging to quantify and attribute the impact a charity has made towards work and health outcomes.

Opportunities

Opportunities for gathering and using evidence

- Data on employment and type of employment is generally good, and can therefore provide a useful resource for charities linking employment and health outcomes.

- Many charities working in this area have direct contact with their beneficiaries. This makes capturing health outcomes more possible, if the charity wishes to do so.

- Employers are interested in staff productivity—which is often related to health. This may provide an opportunity to gather data and look at correlations between work and health.

Opportunities within the sector and wider environment

- The government's Work and Health Programme targets those with health conditions and disabilities, reflecting an interest in this link from the government.

- Due to an increase in zero hours contracts, the gig economy and flexible working, there is an increasing focus within public debate on quality of work. A health focus might be a way to drive improvements in this area.

- The reverse link between health and work—the impact of poor health on work—is salient and of concern to all employers and government. NPC's report *Job well done* highlights interventions in this area from which examples can be drawn.

- The What Works Centre for Wellbeing have done several evidence reviews of well-being and work, such as *Gender and unemployment*—a report on the differences in effect of unemployment between men and women, and *Job quality and well-being*—looking at what needs to happen in a job for it to improve well-being.

See more at www.thinkNPC.org/KeepingUsWell



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