

WHAT REMAINS TO BE DONE TO SUPPORT EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH IN HONG KONG?

AN ANALYSIS OF COMPANY SELF-ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Since 2020 the City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong (CMHA HK) has conducted an annual workplace assessment survey, the [Thriving at Work Assessment](#) which allows companies to audit their workplace mental health practices to recognise progress and identify initiatives that have stalled or yet to be effected.

The survey is based on the Standards and Initiatives of the [CMHA HK Guide to Thriving at Work](#), the keystone document for CMHA HK, which sets out six standards which underpin the implementation of an effective workplace mental health strategy, with each standard comprising a set of initiatives. In 2021 the assessment results were quantified to enable benchmarking across companies and between years.

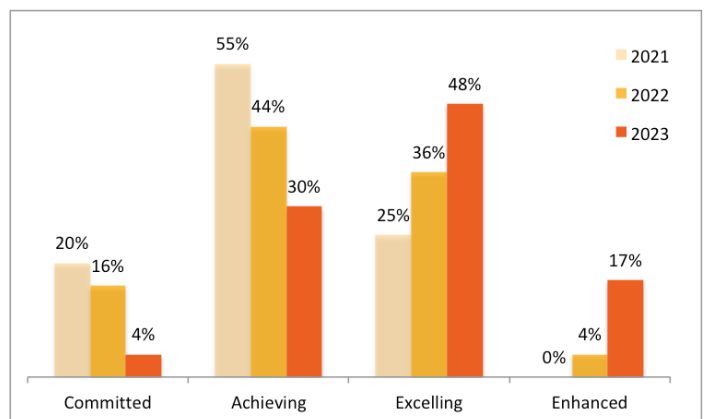
This insights paper will identify the advances companies have made over these last three years and highlight areas that companies are finding more difficult to progress. Our aim is to inform future areas of focus for our member companies and the development of resources and support services for members and where appropriate the broader Hong Kong corporate community.

What's been achieved?

Comparison of the overall level attained by companies over the period 2021 to 2023 (the years where quantitative results have been provided) shows a clear shift in results, with an increasing proportion of companies reaching a higher level of workplace mental health performance.

Among companies undertaking the 2023 Assessment, 13 had also completed the Assessment in 2021. Comparison of aggregated company results across these two years found that the most significant improvement occurred in the following areas:

- 59% improvement in initiatives which support employees through different **life-cycle events**
- 50% increase in the use of **informal and formal sharing** of employee sharing opportunities through networking and resource groups
- 48% improvement in **the collection and use of data** to improve implementation, monitoring and revision of employee mental health strategies



Committed: Senior leader commitment, mental health planning commenced and early interventions in place

Achieving: managers and employee mental health awareness training, focus on workplace culture and prevention strategies

Excelling: data collection and reporting, senior leadership support and mental health champions

Enhanced: mental health embedded in work practices and culture, measured and evaluated

Life-cycle events refers to the company's efforts to support employees during specific life-time events and potential stress points with tailored mental health awareness information. It includes sharing information on the company's commitment to mental health and the resources, tools and support services they provide during employee induction, to ensure successful integration to workplace culture. The use of resilience and recovery plans for those returning to work following diagnosed mental health conditions is also included in this category.

The collection and use of data has been an area of focus for CMHA HK in the last years, providing resources and information-sharing sessions for members to support progress in this area. It is therefore gratifying to see this has become one of the areas showing greatest development across the three years. It involves both the identification of indicators of success to monitor strategy implementation, an assessment of the data available and how it can be used, and a process to collect and report data to inform senior leaders and adjust the mental health strategy as appropriate. It also encourages companies to look at ways in which presenteeism can be identified and measured.

Stigma remains a key area to be addressed in Hong Kong workplaces. Creating **informal opportunities for employees to share their experiences** and organising formal discussions during employer mental health activities and training can be effective strategies to break down stigma and encourage employees to engage in more mentally healthy self-care and awareness to offer support to colleagues.

Where is improvement lagging?

In our discussions with companies completing the assessment, many are aware that there remains much to be done to create a workplace that enhances employee mental health and wellbeing. A further review of the data from companies that completed the assessment in both 2021 and 2023, identified the following areas as those where overall advances were limited or where there remained significant scope for improvement:

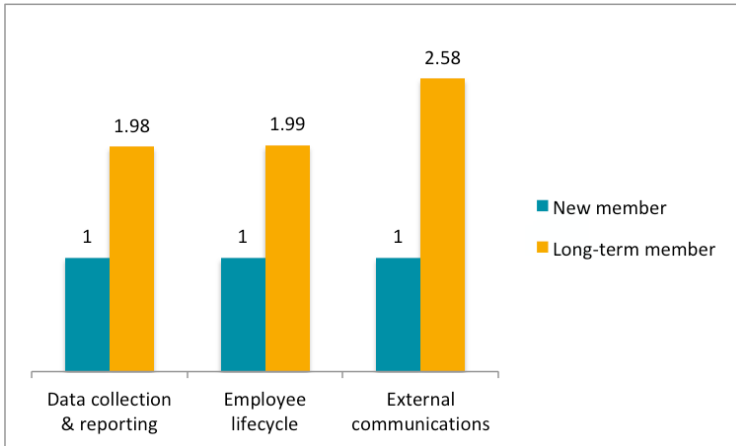
- appointment of **mental health champions** to act as role models and promote mental health awareness and resources
- **communication** both internal to promote resources and initiatives, and external to promote the company's commitment to employee mental health in recruitment campaigns and to their peers
- ensuring **senior leaders** are appointed and have clear reporting duties and responsibilities and will cascade mental health information to both employees and through discussions at senior levels
- **supporting line managers** to fulfil their role to engage in mental health and wellbeing discussions with their direct reports and identify workplace risks
- provide **mental health awareness training** to all employees and mental health skills and wellbeing training for managers and HR professionals.

Where are companies excelling?

- **Intervention and support** such as online and digital resources, EAP services, access to care through insurance and Mental Health First Aiders (MHFAs)
- Developing and resourcing a **mental health strategy** including insuring capacity and capability of those who will implement the strategy.

How does membership of CMHA HK influence company performance?

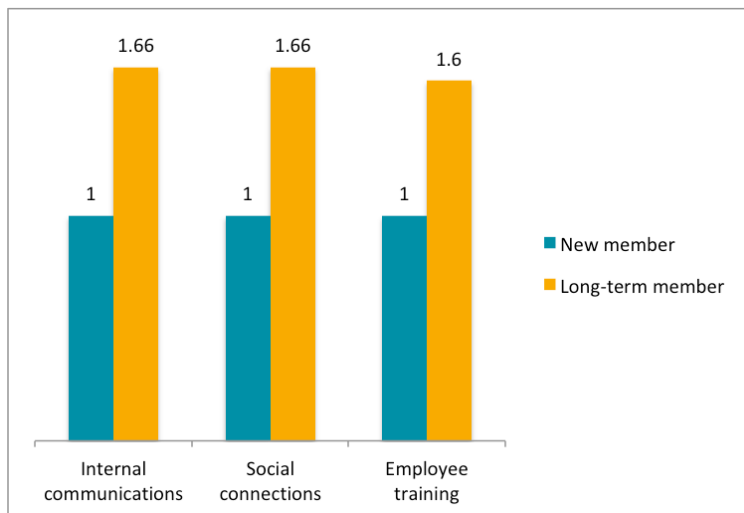
Of the member companies who completed the Thriving at Work Assessment in 2023, 30% joined CMHA HK less than two years ago, while the remaining companies are either founding members or joined before mid-2021. To examine how membership of CMHA HK impacts performance, we undertook a comparative analysis of results across these two groups.



Long-term CMHA HK members performed significantly better than new member companies in:

- Data collection and reporting and employee lifecycle - double the score
- External communications - 2.5 times higher

The significant difference in external communications between new and long-term CMHA HK member companies is likely to be a reflection of workplace mental health programs being more deeply embedded within the workplace culture for long-term member companies, so that sharing information on their commitment to workplace mental health in recruitment programs and communications with external parties has become standard practice.



In the areas of **internal communication, training**, and creating opportunities for employees to make **social connections** and share mental health stories to break down stigma, long term members scored 65% higher than new member companies.

The analysis also identified areas where new and long-term member companies performed to a similar level:

- Developing, implementing and resourcing a **mental health strategy**
- Providing **intervention and support services** such as EAP, insurance cover and digital and online resources
- Appointing **mental health champions** to act as role models and promote mental health resources and help to break down stigma.

While both groups are close to fully completing the initiatives relating to the development of a workplace mental health strategy and providing intervention and support services, the data shows that both new and long-term members can do more to address the initiatives relating to mental health champions outlined in the *CMHA HK Guide to Thriving at Work*.

What are employees telling us?

As part of our research program, CMHA HK also undertakes a bi-annual [Employee Wellbeing Survey](#) to better understand how employees in the professional services sector are dealing with workplace stressors and how they respond to the programs and services offered by employers.

Increased incidence of mental ill-health

The 2022 survey found that 40% of employees had experienced mental health problems in the last 12 months which is a significant increase from 27% in 2020 and 23% in 2018. The greatest increase in mental ill-health was reported by Administration staff and Assistants, with the survey results showing 41% of Administration staff had experienced periods of mental ill-health over the last 12 months, up from 15% in 2020. Mental ill-health also increased among Senior Managers with 41% reporting mental health problems in the last 12 months, up from 26% in 2020.

Admin staff need more support

Administration staff ranked role clarity, hours worked and relations with colleagues as the highest sources of work-related stress. They were least likely to share their mental health concerns with colleagues at work, were the lowest users of employer provided mental health services and were unaware of many of the resources available. With Admin staff potentially having less influence on workplace practices, it is essential that managers ensure these needs are recognised and addressed in workplace mental health strategies.



68% not using any employer mental health services



70% did not speak to anyone at work



46% did not feel confident to speak with their line manager



50% had personal experience of mental health stigma

Employees appreciate flexibility

48% of employees told us that workplace flexibility, including working from home, had a positive impact on their physical and mental wellbeing and was, they felt, reflected in higher productivity. When asked about turn-over intention, reasons most commonly cited for considering moving to a new employer included workload, career progression, working hours, role ambiguity and difficult colleagues/manager. These are key workplace practices that can be addressed through workplace mental health strategies to improve employee experience and support their mental health.

Promote mental health resources

43% of employees were not aware of the services and resources available to them through their employer and 38% did not know how to access these. Regular communication with employees on the services available, encouraging their use, and endorsing employee involvement in mental health training can positively impact access to these resources. Manager awareness of resources and the role of mental health champions to promote services and instigate mental health discussion can help to break down stigma and ensure that employees feel more comfortable to make use of both internal and public resources.

Conclusion

While the Thriving at Work Assessment found significant improvement among companies completing this survey, the areas that will help to address the concerns and issues found among employees include:

- **Internal communication:** ensuring all employees receive clear and regular information on the resources and services the company provides and how to access these
- **Mental health champions:** appoint and train employees and senior leaders to promote mental health in the workplace, initiate conversations on mental health and be available to offer support and signposting to their colleagues on how to access resources
- **Include all employees:** ensure mental health information and resources are available and accessible to all employees regardless of their position and role in the organisation and provide a way for all employees to voice their workplace mental health needs through employee reference groups and training for managers to create mentally healthy teams.

The *Thriving at Work Assessment* gives companies a tool to audit their business practices in regard to workplace mental health, set targets for further development, and identify support from CMHA HK in the resources and training that we offer. By collecting, analysing and providing a detailed report to companies undertaking the assessment, followed by a 1:1 briefing session to review the data and share evidence-based guidance, CMHA HK can support companies to focus their efforts on areas that will advance their workplace strategies and provide better support for their employee group.

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The City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong was established in 2017. During this time, CMHA HK members have shown strong advances in the implementation of employee mental health initiatives. A key strength is our Membership Alliance model; new members benefit from the experience and learning of our existing members, and collaborative opportunities are created by CMHA HK for companies to meet and share their knowledge and insights. Additionally, the resources we develop are shaped to meet the business needs of our member companies and, where appropriate, are also shared with the broader Hong Kong corporate community.



香港城市精神健康聯盟

**City Mental Health
Alliance** HK

The City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong (CMHA HK) is a not-for-profit membership organisation. We are an alliance of businesses, working together with mental health experts and partner organisations, to achieve our vision that every workplace will protect, support and create positive mental health for their people.

We provide training, events, resources, research and practical support for companies wishing to create mentally healthy workplaces.

CONTACT US

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