

On 24 November the Midlands Engine Health and Life Sciences Symposium was held, hosted by our partners - Midlands Innovation Health and Midlands Medilink. This full-day event was the first of its kind to showcase the outstanding research strengths and clinical expertise in the region - **a sector that is worth £26bn annually** to the Midlands economy, and which has huge growth potential.

The meeting attracted high-level participants, with keynote speeches from Sir John Peace, Dame Professor Anne Johnson, President of the Academy of Medical Science, Professor Andrew Morris, Director of HDR UK, and Dr Louise Wood, Director of Science, Research and Evidence, DHSC.



Our Midlands Engine Executive Director led a panel session on the role of innovation in the Place Agenda and how the Midlands can engage with Levelling Up. The panel comprised representatives of City REDI, NHS Confederation, NHTA, Research England and the University of Birmingham.

A later session focused on the sector's investable opportunities in the region, with a special focus on two case study locations, the National Rehabilitation Centre in Loughborough and the Birmingham Health Innovation Campus.



Our partner, Novo Nordisk, have completed their report, The Diabetes Blueprint: Transforming the Lives of People with Diabetes, which features a foreword from the Midlands Engine Chairman. Diabetes, which disproportionately affects people in the Midlands, is a major indicator -and driver- of health inequality. The report sets out key actions and principles that will support the implementation of new approaches to tackle this condition and its effects. We will be distributing this report and advocating its recommendations to key decision makers in 2022.

Looking ahead, we are planning to devote our energies to communicating our sector's strengths to key stakeholders and decision-makers in a targeted programme of advocacy. We will also prepare a full action plan for Midlands Engine Health to set measurable goals and provide a roadmap to greater success for health and life sciences in the region.

Mental Health and Productivity Pilot

We have commissioned Traverse Ltd to carry out an evaluation of the impact of the Midlands Engine Mental Health and Productivity Pilot. The full evaluation will be published in July, but initial indications are very encouraging.



After signing up to initiatives such as the Thrive at Work accreditation, the Mental Health at Work commitment, enrolling in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training, or pilot interventions such as INWORK and PROWORK, employers reported a range of outcomes for the organisation and for employees. These include reduced absences, increased employee resilience and increased productivity due to staff being more conscientious and wanting to support an employer who supports their mental health and wellbeing.

In terms of current delivery, our principal focus has been on our stigma-reduction campaign, 'Bridge the Gap, Start a Chat', which helped to increase coverage and deliver messages about mental ill-health prevention and early intervention to a wider audience. This wide-reaching approach was especially relevant in the context that everyone was being affected by the pandemic albeit in different ways and to a different extent.

The resources to support people working from home were widely disseminated to all local authorities, LEPs, universities and businesses in order to embed and normalise the offer of mental health support to employees navigating such change and uncertainty. The role of awareness campaigns as an important aspect of reducing mental health stigma may be an area for further research.



[Click here to see the latest MHPP film update](#)

The campaign has had a significant reach. A key finding reported was that the largest group engaging with the stigma reduction and awareness raising campaign through Facebook was men aged 30-50, who are notably those at increased risk of suicide and may be less likely to engage with more formal interventions.

The Covid pandemic had a significant impact on the ability of MHPP to fully reach its original goals. Covid resulted in a heightened demand for workplace mental wellbeing support but, paradoxically, saw a reduced take up of the existing workplace level interventions, as businesses focused on day-to-day delivery and/or simply maintaining viability. MHPP's ability to recruit employees to the research pilots proved difficult, following the onset of the pandemic. We have therefore agreed a no-cost extension of 15 months, allowing the pilot to fully complete its work.

Looking ahead, we have made a request to the Employers, Health, and Inclusive Employment (EHIE) Unit for additional funding within the CSR period 2022 to 2024 in order to continue the momentum of generating evidence and evaluating workplace mental wellbeing in the Midlands Engine region. The funding request - comprising three accumulative levels - is for an additional 15, 18 or 21 months from the scheduled end of the pilot.