

Employer guide · October 2026

October Wellbeing Guide

Five awareness campaigns, why they matter at work and practical ways to support your people this month.



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OVERVIEW

Why October matters for workplace wellbeing

October brings together five of the biggest health and wellbeing campaigns of the year. Together they give employers a natural opening to talk about topics that can feel hard to raise at other times, from mental health and menopause to cancer and quitting smoking.

The case for acting is strong. Absence has reached its highest level in more than 15 years, and mental ill health is now the leading cause of long-term sickness absence.²

22.1m

working days lost to work-related stress, depression or anxiety in Great Britain, 2024/25¹

9.4 days

average sickness absence per UK employee per year, the highest in over 15 years²

£51bn

estimated annual cost of poor mental health to UK employers³

October at a glance

● World Mental Health Day	Saturday 10 October
● Menopause Awareness Month	All month, World Menopause Day 18 October
● ADHD Awareness Month	All month
● Breast Cancer Awareness Month	All month
● Stoptober	17 September to 1 November

How to use this guide

You do not need to mark every campaign. Pick the themes that matter most to your people, use the practical ideas in each section, see where your employee benefits can help, and finish with the October checklist. Every statistic links to its original source.

1. HSE, Working days lost in Great Britain 2024/25. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/dayslost.htm>

2. CIPD, Health and wellbeing at work 2025. <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/reports/health-well-being-work/>

3. Deloitte, Poor mental health costs UK employers £51 billion a year (2024).

<https://www.deloitte.com/uk/en/about/press-room/poor-mental-health-costs-uk-employers-51-billion-a-year-for-employees.html>

BENEFITS

Where employee benefits fit

Awareness campaigns are a natural moment to remind people about the support they already have. Many employers offer benefits such as an employee assistance programme (EAP), a health cash plan or private medical insurance, but those benefits only make a difference if employees know about them and feel comfortable using them.

● World Mental Health Day	An EAP typically offers confidential counselling and practical advice. Remind people how to access it, and check whether your health cover includes mental health support.
● Menopause	Some private medical insurance policies, health cash plans and EAPs include menopause support, such as GP appointments or specialist advice. Cover varies, so check your policies.
● ADHD	Some EAPs and wellbeing platforms offer neurodiversity resources, coaching or advice for parents and carers.
● Breast cancer	Private medical insurance, critical illness cover and group income protection can support people during and after treatment, including their return to work.
● Stoptober	Some health cash plans and EAPs include stop-smoking support. Check your policy details and mention it in your Stoptober messages.

Our view

Awareness months work best when they point people towards support that already exists. A clear benefits portal, a short manager briefing and a reminder in each campaign message all help people find what they need, when they need it.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF THIS OCTOBER

- Do employees know what your EAP offers and how to access it?
- Would a manager know where to signpost someone who opened up about their mental health, menopause or a cancer diagnosis?
- When did you last check that your benefits still match what your people need?
- Which one or two themes matter most to your workforce this year?

Benefits and cover vary by provider and policy. Check your own policy documents before sharing details with employees.

10 OCTOBER

World Mental Health Day

Marked on 10 October. The 2026 theme is **Lived experiences heard: real voices, real change**, a reminder that listening to people with experience of mental ill health is where better support begins.¹ In 2024/25, 964,000 workers reported stress, depression or anxiety caused or made worse by work.² Employers also have a legal duty to assess the risk of work-related stress and act on it.³

What employers can do

- Run a short, anonymous pulse survey asking what would make work feel more supportive
- Check workload hotspots against the six HSE stress areas: demands, control, support, relationships, role and change
- Remind everyone where to find support, such as your EAP or mental health first aiders

Bring the theme to life

- Invite colleagues who are comfortable doing so to share their experiences
- Encourage managers to hold regular, informal check-ins

ALL MONTH

Menopause Awareness Month

World Menopause Day falls on 18 October, and this year's theme is **chronic pain at midlife**.⁴ One in ten women who worked during the menopause have left a job because of their symptoms.⁵ Treating someone unfavourably because of menopause symptoms could be discriminatory if it is connected to a protected characteristic such as age, sex or disability.⁶

Practical support

- Agree simple adjustments such as desk fans or a cooler workspace, flexible start times and extra breaks
- Include joint and muscle pain in workstation assessments, in line with this year's theme
- Review uniforms and dress codes for comfort

Build confidence

- Brief managers on how to start a supportive, private conversation
- Publish clear guidance so people know what help is available

1. WHO, World Mental Health Day 2026. <https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-mental-health-day/2026>

2. HSE, Annual workplace health and safety statistics, November 2025. <https://press.hse.gov.uk/2025/11/20/hse-publishes-annual-workplace-health-and-safety-statistics/>

3. HSE, Management Standards for work-related stress. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/overview.htm>

4. International Menopause Society, World Menopause Day 2026. <https://www.imsociety.org/education/world-menopause-day-2026/>

5. Fawcett Society, Menopause and the workplace. <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/menopauseandtheworkplace>

6. Acas, Menopause and the law. <https://www.acas.org.uk/menopause-at-work/menopause-and-the-law>

ALL MONTH

ADHD Awareness Month

NHS England estimates that around 2.5 million people in England may have ADHD, including many who may remain undiagnosed.¹ Many will be in your workforce, and many will not have shared it. Acas advises that people do not need a diagnosis to get support, and that offering some support to everyone, such as quiet spaces or noise-cancelling headphones, helps people get what they need without having to disclose.²

Everyday adjustments

- Written follow-ups after meetings and clear task priorities
- Quieter spaces to work, and fewer interruptions
- Flexible start times and regular short check-ins

Next steps

- Share simple, myth-busting information with all staff
- Signpost the government's Access to Work scheme³
- See our companion Neurodiversity at Work guide

ALL MONTH

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Around 55,000 women and 400 men are diagnosed with breast cancer in the UK each year.⁴ Women aged 50 up to their 71st birthday are invited for NHS breast screening every three years.⁵ Macmillan notes that the law treats cancer as a disability, so employees cannot be treated less favourably because of cancer or reasons connected to it.⁶

Encourage early detection

- Share guidance on knowing what is normal for you and checking regularly
- Make it easy to attend screening appointments
- Remind men that breast cancer can affect them too

Support people affected

- Review absence and return-to-work processes for long-term conditions
- Offer phased returns and flexibility during and after treatment
- Support colleagues who are caring for someone with cancer

1. NHS England Digital, ADHD Management Information, May 2025. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mi-adhd/may-2025>

2. Acas, Making your organisation neuroinclusive. <https://www.acas.org.uk/neurodiversity-at-work/making-your-organisation-neuroinclusive>

3. GOV.UK, Access to Work. <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

4. Breast Cancer Now, Breast cancer facts and statistics. <https://breastcancernow.org/about-us/our-impact/breast-cancer-facts-and-statistics>

5. NHS, Breast screening: when you will be invited.

<https://www.nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/breast-screening-mammogram/when-youll-be-invited-and-who-should-go/>

6. Macmillan Cancer Support, Work and cancer FAQs. <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/work-and-cancer/faqs>

17 SEPTEMBER TO 1 NOVEMBER

Stoptober

The national quit smoking campaign runs from 17 September to 1 November 2026.¹ About 10.6% of UK adults, around 5.3 million people, smoked in 2024, the lowest level since records began.² Smoking is estimated to cost the UK around £33 billion a year in lost productivity.³

- Share the free NHS Quit Smoking app and local stop smoking services⁴
- Celebrate quit milestones, such as 28 days smoke-free, if colleagues want to share them
- Make sure smoking break rules are clear and applied fairly
- Check whether your health cash plan or EAP includes stop-smoking support

Menopause action plans

Employers may choose to publish a menopause action plan alongside their gender pay gap reporting.⁵ Employers should continue to monitor future developments in this area. In the meantime, October is a good time to review your current support.

Your October checklist

- ✓ Choose one or two themes that are most relevant to your workforce
- ✓ Brief managers before any communications go out
- ✓ Signpost support clearly: EAP, occupational health, health benefits, NHS services and charities
- ✓ Check that employees know what their benefits include and how to access them
- ✓ Review the policies linked to each theme, such as menopause, absence and flexible working
- ✓ Ask employees what they would find most helpful next
- ✓ Plan how this month's focus will continue through 2027

1. DHSC Campaign Resource Centre, Stoptober 2026. <https://campaignresources.dhsc.gov.uk/campaigns/stoptober-2026/>

2. ONS, Adult smoking habits in the UK: 2024.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/bulletins/adultsmokinghabitsingreatbritain/2024/pdf>

3. ASH, Cost of smoking to productivity, June 2026. https://ash.org.uk/uploads/CBPF-model-June-2026_2026-06-01-102757_qkgc.pdf?v=1780309676

4. NHS Better Health, Quit smoking. <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/>

5. Acas, Supporting staff through the menopause. <https://www.acas.org.uk/menopause-at-work/supporting-staff-through-the-menopause>

LET'S TALK

Let's talk about supporting your people

Through our HR, Employee Benefits and International Payroll expertise, we help employers create practical wellbeing strategies that support employees throughout the year. Instead of juggling separate providers, you get joined-up support under one contract, with one point of contact.

1

One partner for HR, employee benefits and payroll

2

Benefits broking, benchmarking and an employee benefits portal

3

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