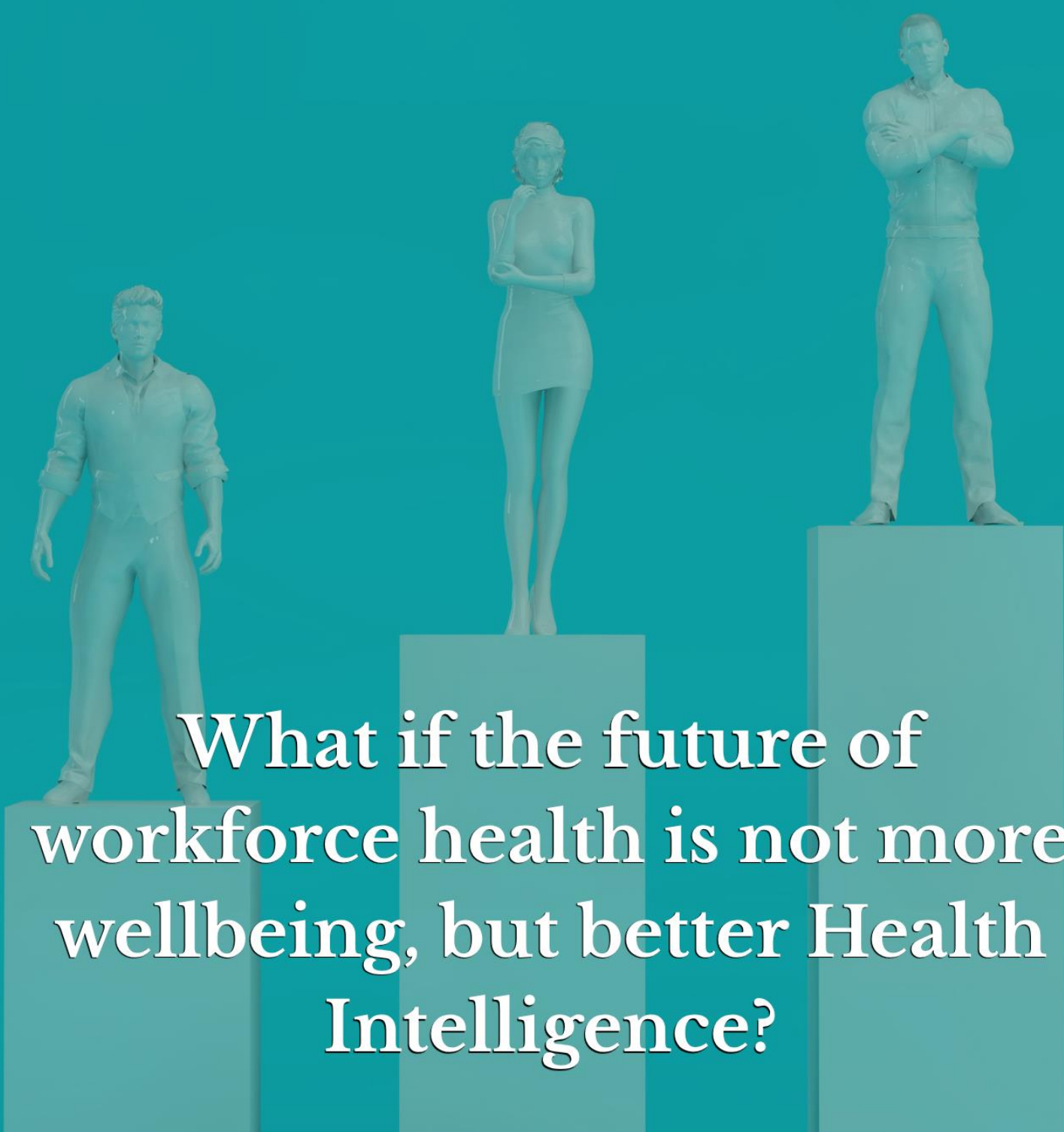




UK & INTERNATIONAL
HEALTH COACHING ASSOCIATION



What if the future of workforce health is not more wellbeing, but better Health Intelligence?

A UKIHCA Strategic Perspective

SP05 - September 2026

What if the future of workforce health is not more wellbeing, but better Health Intelligence?

By Izabella Natrins

A UKIHCA Strategic Perspective | SP05

Part 3 of 3

© UK & International Health Coaching Association

September 2026

UKIHCA Independence

UKIHCA is an independent, non-profit professional body operating in the third sector. Free from commercial influence, control or ties that could compromise our independence, we exist to advance the health and wellbeing coaching profession, protect the public and uphold high standards of ethical, evidence-informed practice.

In the first two articles in this series, I have explored what I believe is becoming an increasingly important workforce challenge.

First, that absence tells employers only part of the story. Many people are still at work while their health is affecting their energy, concentration, confidence or capacity to perform at their best.

Second, that although employers have invested heavily in health and wellbeing support, having a comprehensive range of benefits does not necessarily mean that people receive the right help early enough to prevent problems from escalating.

Both questions lead us to a rather more fundamental one.

What would it look like if, instead of continuing to add new services to the employee wellbeing offer, we became more interested in helping people understand, manage and actively create their own health?

This is the thinking behind what I have begun to describe as **Health Intelligence**.

I do not mean simply knowing more about health. We already live in a world in which information is abundant. Most people can access advice about nutrition, sleep, physical activity, stress and long-term health conditions within seconds. The difficulty is that information, however accurate, does not automatically translate into understanding and understanding does not necessarily lead to action.

Health Intelligence is concerned with something broader. It is about developing the ability to make sense of the factors that influence our health, to recognise when something may be changing, to understand what information is relevant to us and to make informed choices within the context of our own lives. It includes knowing when we can act for ourselves, when we need support and how we can develop the confidence and capability to manage our health over time.

For employers, I believe this could become an increasingly important part of the workforce health conversation.

The workforce of the future will be managing health, not waiting for perfect health

We need to move away from the idea that people at work can be divided neatly into those who are healthy and those who are ill.

The reality is much more complex.

Many people are already living with one or more long-term conditions while continuing to work successfully. Others may be at increased risk of developing conditions associated with lifestyle, work or wider social circumstances. Some will be moving in and out of periods of good and poor health over many years.

The challenge is therefore not simply to help people return to work after illness. Increasingly, it is to help people maintain the capacity to participate in work while managing their health over the course of a much longer working life.

This is well understood within personalised care. NHS England describes supported self-management as increasing people's knowledge, skills and confidence to manage their own health and care, and explicitly identifies health coaching, self-management education and peer support as important interventions. It estimates that around 15 million people in England living with multiple long-term conditions could potentially benefit from supported self-management.^[1]

What I find particularly important about this approach is the underlying principle. The individual is not regarded simply as the recipient of professional advice. They are recognised as an active participant in their own health, with their own knowledge, circumstances, priorities and goals.

That seems to me to have profound implications for the workplace.

Employers cannot, and should not, take responsibility for managing an employee's health. But they can create conditions in which people are better able to understand their health, recognise when they need support and develop the confidence to make changes that are meaningful and sustainable.

That is a very different proposition from simply offering a wellbeing benefit.

The gap between information and capability

We have spent many years giving people information about health.

The evidence suggests that information alone is not enough.

NHS England's approach to supported self-management recognises that people living with long-term conditions need more than information about their condition. They need knowledge, skills and confidence, alongside support that is personalised to what matters in their own lives. Its guidance is clear that good self-management recognises the whole person, including their relationships, interests and the challenges they face, rather than focusing solely on the clinical condition.^[1]

That whole-person perspective is particularly relevant to employers.

An employee who has been advised to become more physically active may also be living with persistent pain. Someone who understands the importance of sleep may be working irregular hours or managing significant caring responsibilities. A person trying to manage a metabolic health condition may also be dealing with financial pressure, workplace stress and the practical demands of family life.

In each case, the health issue cannot be separated entirely from the circumstances in which that person is living and working.

This is where I believe we need to become more ambitious in our thinking.

The future of workforce health cannot simply be about giving people better information, more apps or a larger menu of services. It has to include the capability to interpret, prioritise and act on what matters within the complexity of real life.

That, to me, is the essence of Health Intelligence.

Technology has an important role, but it is not the whole answer

Technology will undoubtedly become an increasingly important part of this landscape.

Digital systems can help people access information and support more easily. They can bring together services that might otherwise remain fragmented, identify patterns and increasingly offer more personalised insights. For employers, they may also provide a better understanding of where support is needed and whether investment is reaching the people for whom it is intended.

This is valuable infrastructure.

But there is an important distinction between providing insight and enabling change.

Someone may have access to detailed information about their sleep, activity, blood pressure or stress without knowing what the information means in the context of their wider health. They may understand that a change is needed while feeling unable to work out where to begin. They may even know exactly what they ought to do but find themselves repeatedly unable to sustain it.

The most recent international evidence on workplace health promotion reinforces the need for a more nuanced approach. A 2025 meta-analysis of 88 studies and 339 intervention estimates found that workplace interventions can produce measurable health benefits, particularly across areas including mental health, cardiometabolic health, health behaviours and musculoskeletal health. However, the effects varied considerably according to the nature of the intervention, and the strongest evidence was not for a single universal solution but for approaches that recognise the different pathways through which health is influenced.^[2]

15 million

people in England with multiple long-term conditions could benefit from supported self-management

Source: NHS England, Supported self-management

88 / 339

studies reviewed / intervention estimates — benefits found across mental, cardiometabolic, behavioural and musculoskeletal health

Source: Virtanen et al. (2025), The Lancet Public Health

That is an important reminder for employers.

There is unlikely to be one platform, one programme or one provider that solves the workforce health challenge.

The opportunity lies in thinking about how the different forms of support available to people can work together.

This is where the human relationship still matters

I believe this is also where we need to be careful about the current enthusiasm for artificial intelligence.

AI and digital technology will undoubtedly improve our ability to identify patterns and provide increasingly personalised support. They may help people find the right services more quickly and, in time, provide much more sophisticated guidance than is currently available.

But human health is not simply a data problem.

People do not make decisions about their health in a vacuum. They make them in the middle of demanding jobs, family responsibilities, financial pressures, relationships, habits, beliefs and previous experiences. They may understand what they need to do while feeling ambivalent about whether they are ready to do it. They may have tried repeatedly to make changes and lost confidence in their ability to succeed.

This is where professionally trained whole person health and wellbeing coaching has an important contribution to make.

NHS England describes health coaching as a supported self-management intervention that helps people make more informed and conscious choices about their health, while developing the knowledge, skills and confidence to become active participants in their own care. Its guidance identifies particular value for people who are living with, or at risk of, long-term conditions where lifestyle and behaviour are relevant factors.^[3]

The point is not that coaching replaces clinical expertise or medical care. It does not.

Nor is coaching simply another service to add to an employee benefits platform.

Its value lies in helping people make sense of their own situation and explore what might realistically change. It creates the space for someone to move beyond being told what they should do towards understanding what matters to them, what is getting in the way and what they are genuinely prepared to do next.

That human process of reflection, decision-making and change is, I believe, likely to become more important rather than less as technology becomes more sophisticated.

Towards a Health Creation Ecosystem

This brings me to the second idea I believe employers need to begin exploring: the **Health Creation Ecosystem**.

I use the term deliberately.

For too long, we have tended to think about employee health as something that is provided to people through a series of services. An employer offers benefits, healthcare providers deliver treatment and individuals are expected to make use of what is available.

A Health Creation Ecosystem starts from a different premise.

Health is created and sustained through the interaction between people, the environments in which they live and work, the information and support available to them and their own capacity to make decisions and take action.

The World Health Organization's current work on healthy workplaces reflects this broader perspective. It describes healthy, safe and resilient workplaces as environments in which people can perform their work without becoming ill or injured because of it, while also having opportunities to enhance their physical, mental and social wellbeing.^[4]

The International Labour Organization makes a similar argument, emphasising that workplace health promotion is most effective when it complements occupational safety and health measures and is integrated into the wider management of the working environment, rather than existing as a separate activity.^[5]

For me, these international frameworks provide an important foundation, but I believe there is an opportunity to take the thinking further.

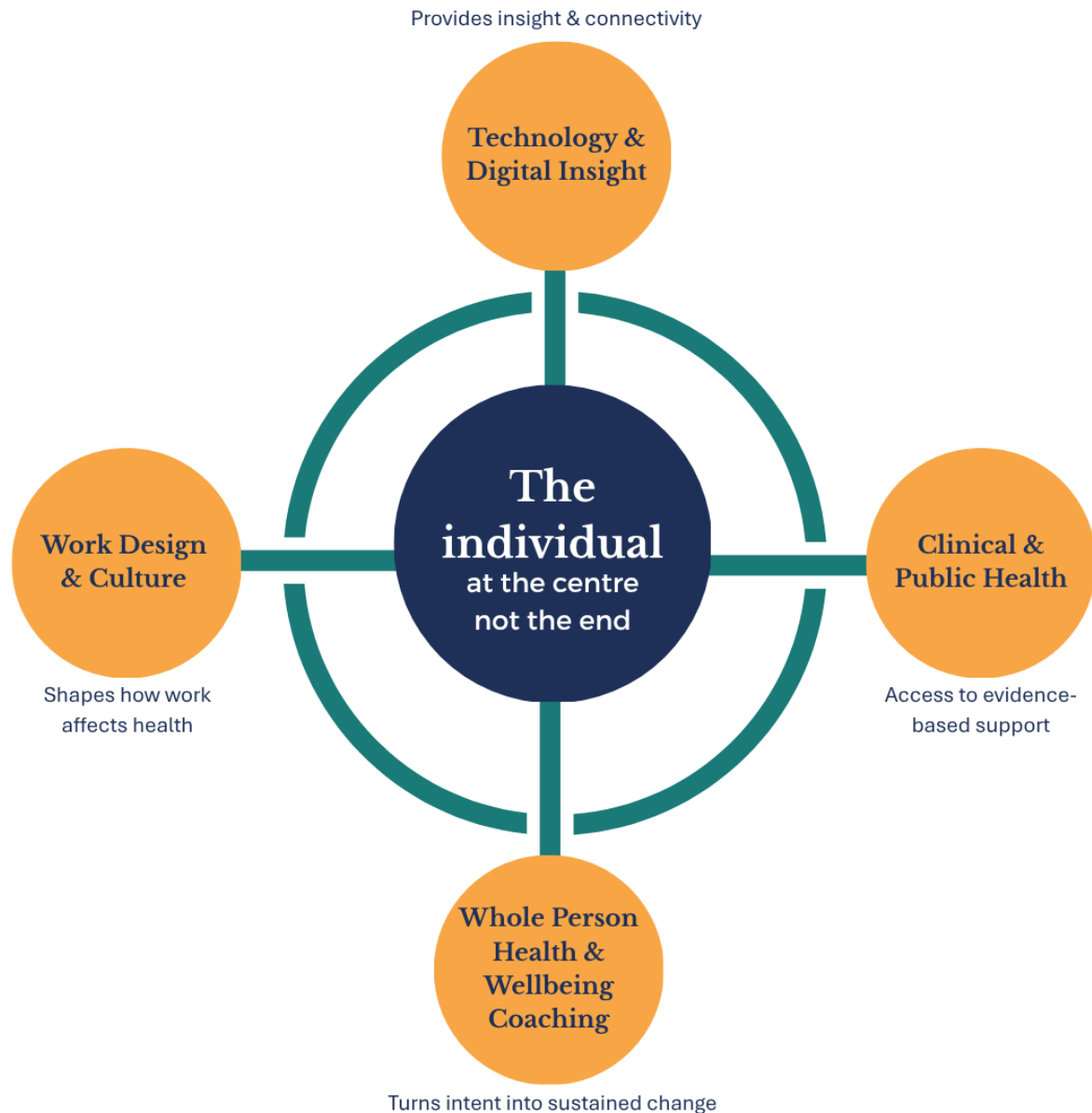
A genuine Health Creation Ecosystem would bring together the different forms of intelligence and support that influence health. Technology could provide insight and connectivity. Clinical and public health expertise could ensure that people have access to appropriate evidence-based support.

Employers could consider how the design and culture of work influence health. Skilled health and wellbeing coaches could help people translate knowledge and intention into meaningful lifestyle and health behaviour change.

Most importantly, the individual would not sit at the end of the system as a passive recipient of services. They would sit at its centre.

The Health Creation Ecosystem

Health is created through the interaction between people, their environment, the support available to them and their own capacity to act.



Concept: Izabella Natrins (UKIHCA) - *What if the future of workforce health is not more wellbeing, but better Health Intelligence?*



That is where Health Intelligence becomes important.

Because the purpose of a Health Creation Ecosystem is not to make people dependent on ever more services. It is to help them become better able to understand and navigate their own health, while ensuring that appropriate professional support is available when they need it.

I explore this in more depth in my own work on *Beyond Navigation: Professional Health Coaching for Future Health Systems*, currently in development. It sets out a Health Intelligence

Framework of five interdependent forms of intelligence — computational, clinical, relational, community and salutogenic — and the Health Creation Ecosystem described above is my attempt to translate that framework into a practical model employers can use, with professional coaching operationalising the relational intelligence that turns insight into sustained change.^[7]

Measuring something more meaningful

If employers begin to think about workforce health in this way, then measurement needs to evolve too.

We will still need to understand absence, healthcare utilisation and the cost of ill health. But those measures tell us relatively little about whether we are actually helping people become more capable of managing and sustaining their health.

The questions become more interesting.

Are people finding support earlier?

Are they developing greater confidence and capability to manage their health?

Are employees with long-term conditions being supported to remain in work where that is appropriate for them?

Are we seeing fewer problems escalate into long periods of absence?

Are people able to make and sustain changes that matter to their health?

And, ultimately, are we helping to create the conditions in which people can live and work well for longer?

NHS England's guidance on measuring supported self-management makes a similar point. It argues that measurement should not simply be about collecting information for reporting purposes, but about understanding people's needs, tailoring support and evaluating whether interventions are genuinely improving outcomes.^[6]

That seems to me to be a useful principle for employers too.

The future of workforce health should not be measured by how many services we have purchased, how many people have downloaded an app or how many webinars have been attended.

Those measures may tell us something about activity.

They tell us much less about whether we are creating health.

An emerging direction of travel

I do not believe employers yet have a finished model for this.

Nor do I think UK & International Health Coaching Association should pretend that we have all the answers.

But I do believe that the direction of travel is becoming clearer.

The workforce health challenges facing employers are becoming more complex, not less. People are living and working longer. Long-term conditions are increasingly part of working life. Technology is providing us with more information than ever before, while the challenge of turning that information into meaningful change remains profoundly human.

The future, therefore, is unlikely to be technology replacing people.

It is more likely to depend on how intelligently we connect digital insight, professional expertise, healthier working environments and human capability.

That is the thinking behind Health Intelligence and the emerging idea of a Health Creation Ecosystem.

They are not intended as another wellbeing programme or another model to sit alongside the many frameworks employers are already navigating.

They are an invitation to look at the problem differently.

Perhaps the question is no longer simply what employers can do for the health of their people.

Perhaps it is how employers, professionals, technology and individuals can work together to create the conditions in which people are better able to understand, manage and sustain their health throughout their working lives.

For me, that is where the next conversation about workforce health needs to begin.

Artificial Intelligence Assistance Statement

AI tools were used to support drafting, structuring, iterative development, and editorial refinement under human direction. All content was critically reviewed, revised, and approved by the authors, who retain full responsibility for the final output.

For UKIHCA's full *AI – Publications/Communications Assistance Policy*, please visit [HERE](#).

References

1. NHS England. *Supported self-management. Current guidance.*

NHS England defines supported self-management as increasing the knowledge, skills and confidence people need to manage their own health and care. It identifies health coaching,

self-management education and peer support as key interventions and estimates that around 15 million people in England living with multiple long-term conditions could potentially benefit from supported self-management.

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/supported-self-management/>

2. Virtanen, M. et al. (2025). *Effectiveness of workplace interventions for health promotion*. The Lancet Public Health.

A meta-analysis of 88 studies and 339 estimates published between 2011 and 2024 examining a wide range of workplace health interventions. The review found measurable benefits across mental health, cardiometabolic health, health behaviours and musculoskeletal health, while demonstrating substantial variation between intervention types and outcomes.

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(25\)00095-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(25)00095-7/fulltext)

3. NHS England. *Supported self-management: health coaching guide*. Current guidance.

NHS England describes health coaching as a supported self-management intervention that helps people make more informed and conscious choices about their health and develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to become active participants in their care. It identifies particular relevance for people living with, or at risk of, long-term conditions where lifestyle and behavioural factors are relevant.

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/health-coaching/>

4. World Health Organization. *Promoting healthy, safe and resilient workplaces for all*. Current programme guidance.

WHO defines healthy, safe and resilient workplaces as those in which people can work without becoming sick or injured because of their work, while having opportunities to enhance physical, mental and social wellbeing.

<https://www.who.int/activities/promoting-healthy-safe-and-resilient-workplaces-for-all>

5. International Labour Organization. *Workplace Health Promotion and Well-being*. Current guidance.

The ILO argues that workplace health promotion is most effective when it complements occupational safety and health measures and is integrated into wider management practices that protect and improve workers' health and wellbeing.

<https://www.ilo.org/workplace-health-promotion-and-well-being>

6. NHS England. *Measurement and evaluation in supported self-management*. Current guidance.

NHS England emphasises that measurement should support decision-making, tailoring of support and evaluation of whether interventions improve outcomes, rather than simply collecting information for reporting purposes.

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/supported-self-management/health-system-support-framework-for-supported-self-management/>

7. Natrins, I. *Beyond Navigation: Professional Health Coaching for Future Health Systems*. UKIHCA. Forthcoming.

A UKIHCA policy briefing setting out a Health Intelligence Framework of five interdependent intelligences — computational, clinical, relational, community and salutogenic — with professional health coaching identified as the primary means of operationalising relational intelligence. The Health Creation Ecosystem described above is a practical translation of this framework for employers. Manuscript in preparation; not yet published.

About UKIHCA



UK & INTERNATIONAL
HEALTH COACHING ASSOCIATION



Our Vision
Our **vision** is to see a self-empowered population, managing their health and wellbeing to thrive in life

Our Mission
Our **mission** is to see a Registered Health Coach in every public & private healthcare setting, in education, workplaces, physical activity settings and in communities

Contact UKIHCA

Please reach out to info@ukihca.com and one of our Team will be happy to help.