Northwest partnership achieves a 2025 Recognition Award for transforming manager capability and wellbeing culture across the NHS

Recognising that manager confidence and supportive workplace cultures are essential to workforce wellbeing, the Northwest Growing Occupational Health & Wellbeing (OHWB) Delivery Group has co-designed a region-wide resource to help managers create positive wellbeing environments and make high-quality Occupational Health (OH) referrals. The initiative brings together North West NHS England, three Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), 30 secondary care providers and colleagues across primary care, social care and the voluntary sector in a collaboration with a shared commitment: to improve wellbeing through better practice, clearer processes and stronger partnerships.

A collaborative approach

The Delivery Group, chaired by North West NHS England, comprises OH and wellbeing experts from across the region. Members played a dual role, shaping the resource with their specialist knowledge and engaging their wider networks to ensure frontline insight informed every stage. This collaborative way of working was critical to embedding the principles of the national Growing OHWB Strategy.

A discovery phase highlighted a significant barrier: many OH referrals lacked the necessary clarity or detail, with one organisation returning over 40% due to insufficient information. It also revealed that managers often reached for OH support before first considering the wellbeing culture within their own teams, or the early support they could provide. This created the need for a practical, accessible tool that could guide managers through both culture-building and referral decision-making.

Co-designing a practical toolkit

In response, NHS Greater Manchester ICB led the development of the Good Wellbeing Cultures & OH Guide, a flexible, step-by-step toolkit that helps managers assess concerns, understand their responsibilities, and make effective OH referrals. Designed using agile principles, the resource evolved through consultation with providers, ICBs and clinical specialists.

To support diverse use and maximise reach, the resources are accessed via a Flipbook which captures the collaborative journey and the principles behind the work.

The resources include:

- An editable interactive Line Manager Guide for local tailoring and use as a management support tool
- A concise training animation bringing the guidance to life
- A guide to making effective OH referrals
- A digital version of the Line Manager guide built within the OPAS-G2 platform, providing a structured digital flowchart

Overcoming complexity through system-wide partnership

This initiative has created relationships that did not previously exist at scale, bridging ICBs, providers, NHS England NW, OH teams and community-sector partners. The Delivery Group has created a shared learning environment, enabling better dialogue about workforce needs and embedding a culture of innovation across organisations.

The group's collaborative approach has delivered a resource that is cost-effective, scalable and freely available to all health and care organisations nationwide.

Building a healthier, more confident workforce

The project is already demonstrating the potential for lasting impact. The resource aims to:

- Improve managers' capability and confidence in supporting staff wellbeing
- Increase the quality and appropriateness of OH referrals
- Reduce administrative burden from returned or incomplete referrals
- Enable faster access to the right support for staff
- Strengthen workforce resilience, ultimately enhancing patient care.

Chris Cutts, Regional Director of Workforce, Training & Education at Northwest NHS England said of the initiative:

"The Northwest OHWB Delivery Group has demonstrated exceptional innovation and collaboration in developing a multi-platform resource to empower managers. Creating a single, agreed resource across the complex health & care landscape is no mean feat.

The region is committed to supporting providers and systems to maximise productivity, support wellbeing and embed the People Promise across health & social care. This project is a key part of this. This project will enhance managerial practices, streamline OH processes and ultimately support improved workforce wellbeing."

By supporting managers to foster compassionate, well-functioning teams, the initiative focuses on prevention as much as intervention, aligning with regional and national ambitions to build a healthier, more sustainable NHS workforce.