Sonder

Battling burnout

How to build resilience in high-performing teams

Over a third of UK adults experienced high or extreme levels of pressure and stress 'always or often' in the past year (35%).

That's according to a new annual report from Mental Health UK. This research also found that one in five working adults needed to take time off work in the past 12 months due to poor mental health directly linked with pressure, stress and burnout.

This report surveyed over 2,000 UK adults and points to the high levels of absenteeism caused by workplace stress and burnout.

Mental Health UK is calling this a 'mental health crisis' in the UK, with nearly half (49%) of employees revealing their employer doesn't have a strategy in place to actively prevent burnout in the workplace.

This guide digs into the data to explore the multifaceted nature of burnout, how it impacts teams and what employers can do to proactively manage the risk.

We'll also share how Sonder's early intervention approach to employee health and wellbeing safeguards against burnout with preventative measures and practical support for workers.

Contents

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Section 1

The widespread risk of burnout

What is burnout?

While closely linked, burnout is not simply stress. It's a syndrome that can result from chronic and unsuccessfully managed stress, among other factors.

> " The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes burnout as a workplace phenomena "resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed".

According to WHO it is characterised by the following:

Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion

Increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job

Reduced professional efficacy

While burnout is often linked to knowledge-based roles, with their long office hours and demanding deadlines, the risk of burnout is pervasive across industries. In skills-based roles that deal directly with customers or patients, there can still be a high risk of burnout.

As The National Library of Medicine explains: "Within such occupations, the prevailing norms are to be selfless and put others' needs first; to work long hours and do whatever it takes to help a client or patient or student; to go the extra mile and to give one's all" It also points out that as other roles have become more oriented to "high-touch" customer service, burnout has become relevant for these jobs as well.

Sonder data supports this view. Workers in the retail trade are the most likely to report feelings of stress, when reaching out to Sonder for support. They account for almost half (49%) of the tens of thousands of Sonder member cases recorded between January 2022 - February 2024.

A fifth of UK workers are at breaking point

One in five UK workers (20%) needed to take time off work due to poor mental health caused by stress or pressure, according to new research of over 2,000 UK adults by Mental Health UK.
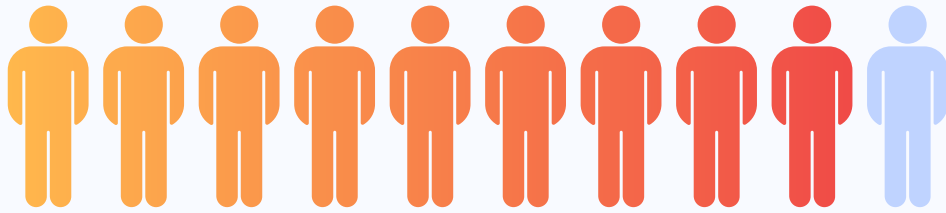
The same report found that nearly a quarter of UK adults felt unable to manage stress and pressure in their lives (24%), with 9 in 10 adults experiencing 'high' or 'extreme' stress in the past 12 months.

Concerningly,

35%

of working UK adults don't feel comfortable sharing their mental health struggles with their line manager or senior leaders.

With this in mind, it comes as no surprise that UK workers recorded the lowest level of company loyalty globally (68% vs 77%) according to a 2023 Unispace study. In fact, burnout was named as a key issue, with 64% of employees reporting having experienced this at some point in their careers.

> As a GP, roughly a third of my patients are presenting with a mental health problem. I only have 10 minutes to try and deal with that, which doesn't work very well. So this crisis is really putting pressure on the front lines

Dr Julian
GP and Founder, Dr Julian Online Healthcare

What's causing burnout?

Burnout is a complex, multifaceted issue, without a single cause. However the data captured for this report does suggest a couple of contributing factors.

Poor working relationships

One of the biggest contributing factors to burnout, flagged in the 2024 Mental Health UK report, was not feeling empowered to talk about mental health at work.

This study found that more than a third (35%) of workers do not feel comfortable raising their burnout concerns with their direct manager or senior leaders.

### How comfortable do you feel raising burnout concerns with your manager?
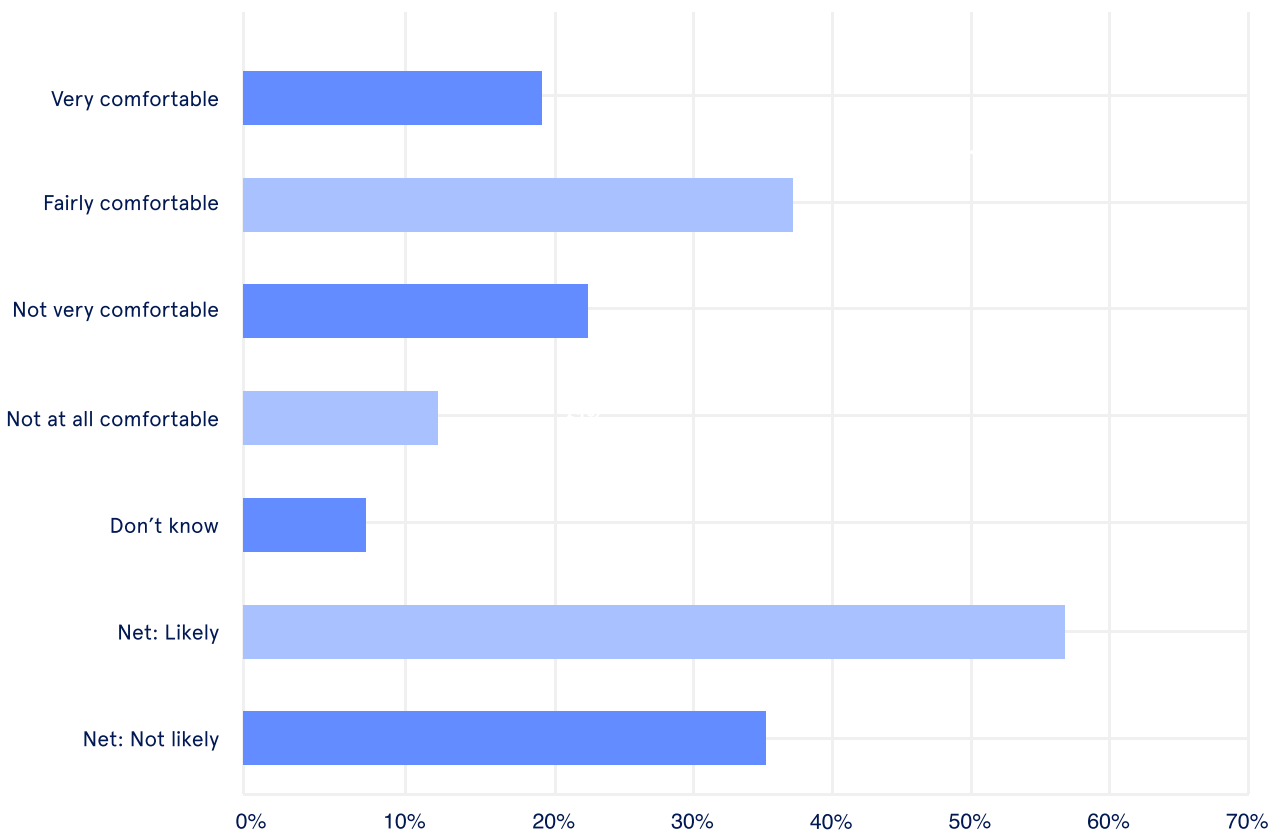
Lack of support from employers

Interestingly, this report also highlighted the growing need for improved employee mental health support. The stats reveal over two-thirds of UK workers (71%) may not be receiving adequate support from their employer.

From individual wellbeing action plans to organisation-wide stress prevention strategies, the majority of UK workers surveyed felt let down by their current employer.

Does your workplace have plans in place to help colleagues spot the signs of chronic stress and prevent burnout in employees?

Don't know
22%

No, it does not have any plans in place
49%

Yes, it has plans in place
29%
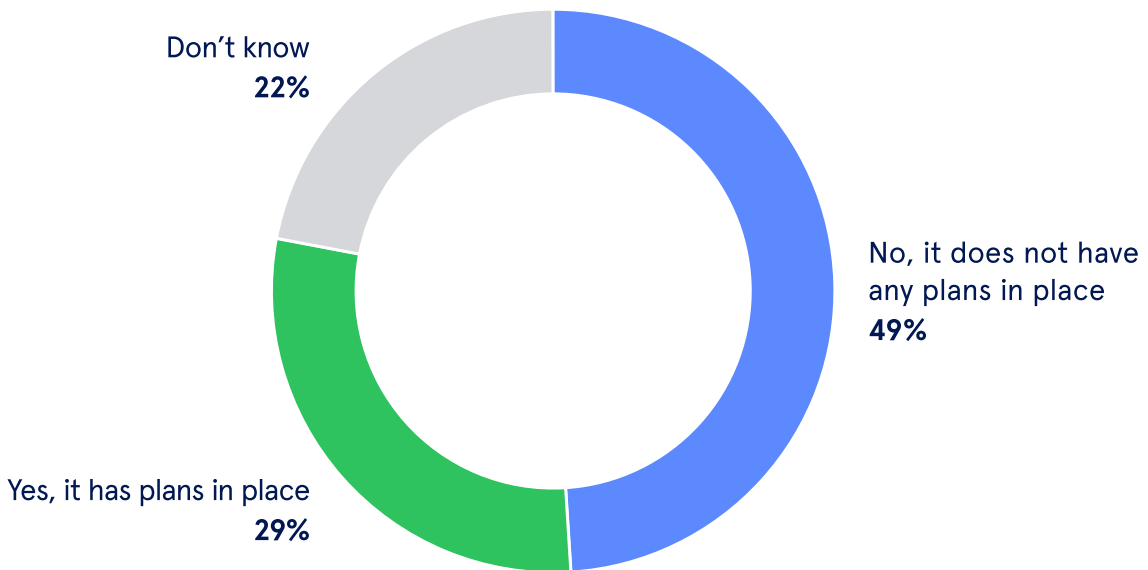
In one survey, 3 in 10 UK residents revealed their mental health takes a 'nosedive' over the Christmas period. Interestingly, the study also found a third struggle more with mental health concerns during the winter months due to living with SAD (seasonal affective disorder).

Number of Sonder member stress cases
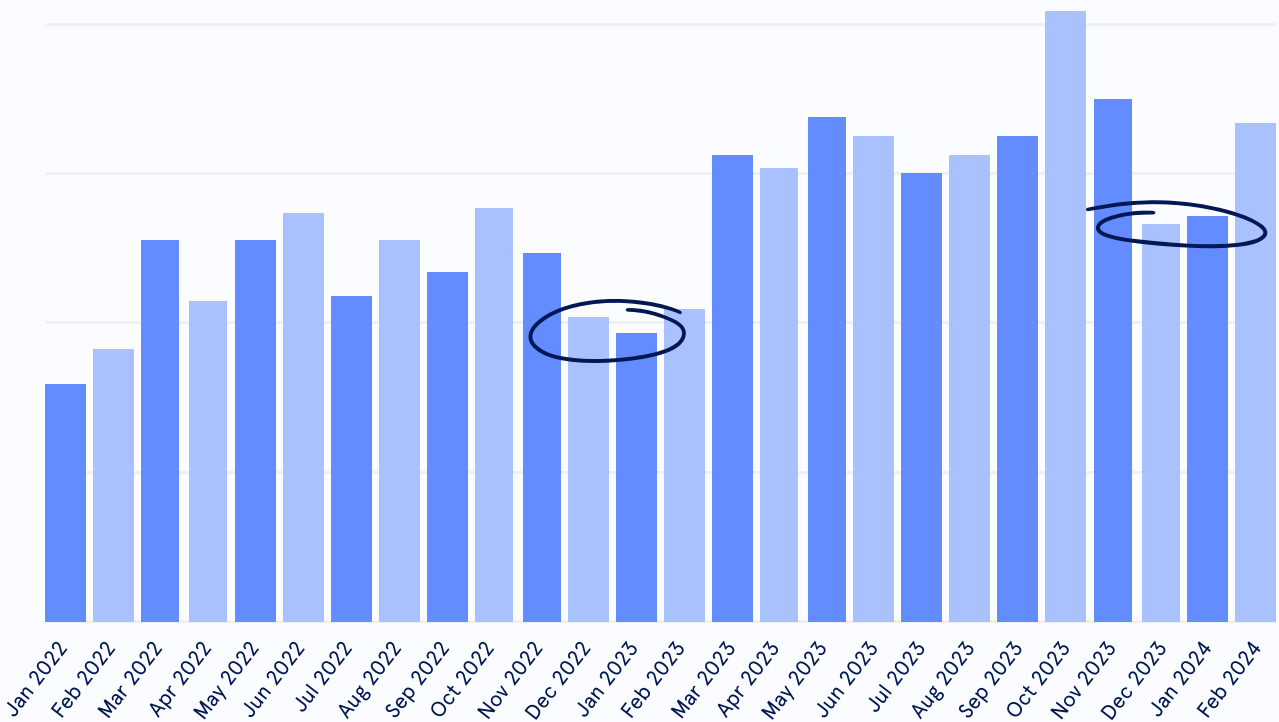
Data from thousands of Sonder 'member cases' over the past two years suggests there is a dip in stress-related cases (a precursor for burnout) around December and January, when many of our members will take time off for Christmas holidays, suggesting that it's an important part of stress management.

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Research has demonstrated the benefits of downtime and rest on overall health and mental capacity, and generous paid time off (PTO) offers are highly regarded by job seekers. And yet, our data suggests that employees might not be taking time off to rest, recuperate and take a break. Even if they're feeling exhausted. Deloitte wrote about this in their 'The disconnect disconnect' report suggesting "It may be time for organisations to fix a disconnect between their time-off policies and culture around using it."

However looking at burnout as an issue that can be fixed with a holiday alone is misleading.

Wellbeing is multifaceted: When stress is present, there are often other issues at play

We know that many Sonder members experience stress. One of our in-app self-assessments is the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21), designed to measure the emotional states of depression, anxiety and stress in our members.

40%

of our members, on average, across a range of different roles and industries, returned a 'concerning or very concerning' stress score between December 2022 and February 2024.

However, when looking at the thousands of Sonder member cases between January 2022 - February 2024, when a member reached out for support mentioning stress, only

11%

were noting stress alone.

![Sonder app screen showing a DASS-21 self-assessment question "I found it hard to wind down (eg, relax after stress or excitement)" with answer options Never, Sometimes, Often, Almost always]

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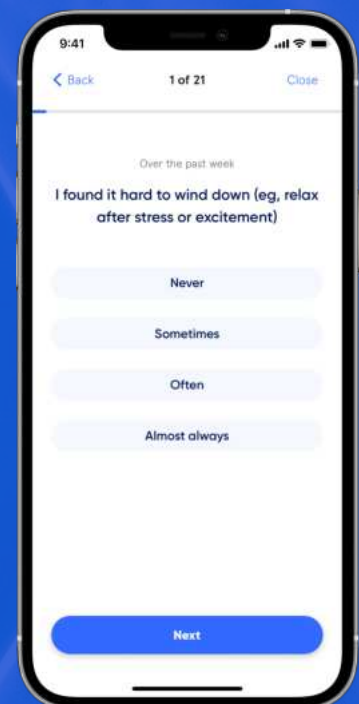
When stress is mentioned, what other factors are at play?
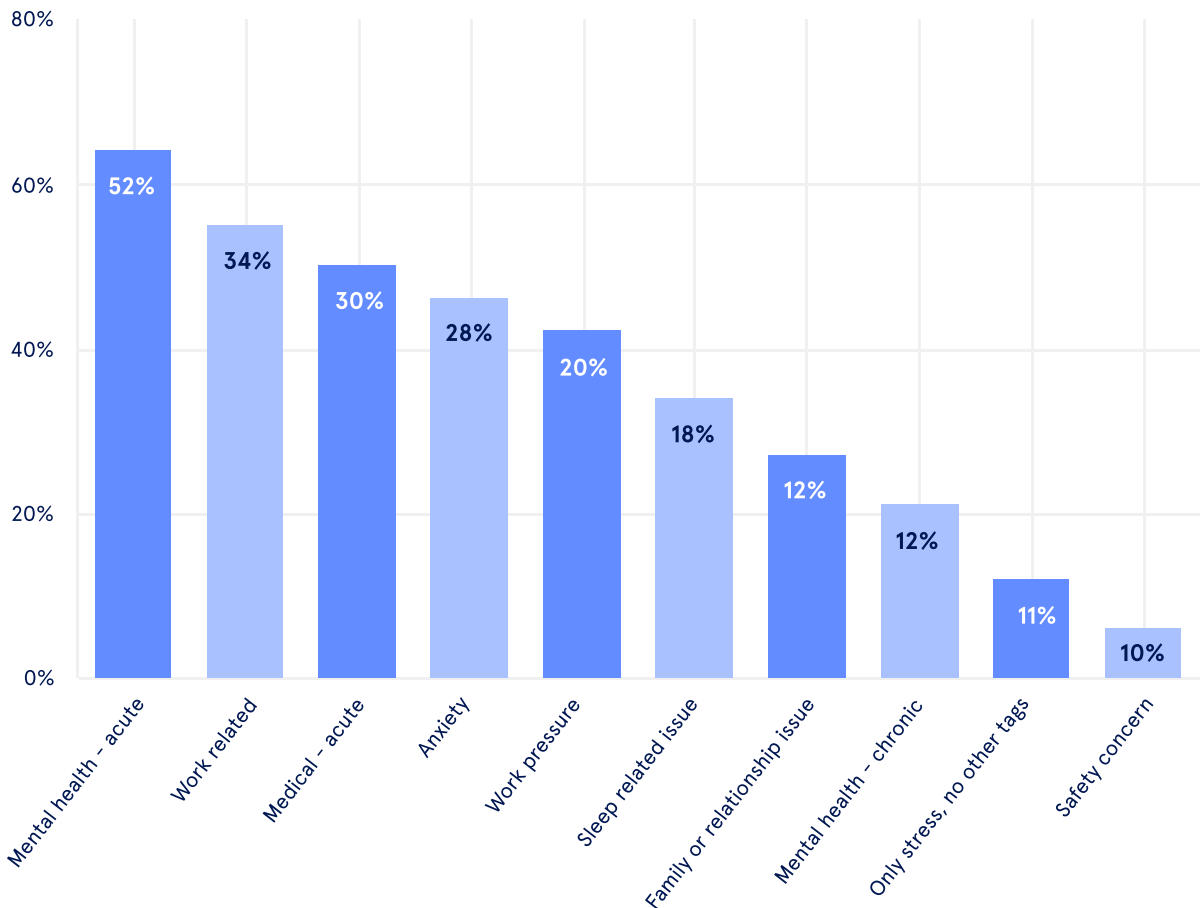### (Top ten most mentioned)

Factor	Percentage
Mental health - acute	52%
Work related	34%
Medical - acute	30%
Anxiety	28%
Work pressure	20%
Sleep related issue	18%
Family or relationship issue	12%
Mental health - chronic	12%
Only stress, no other tags	11%
Safety concern	10%

This complex interplay came through in other survey data too. While 35% of UK adults reported experiencing high or extreme levels of pressure and stress, respondents were also dealing with other issues.

- 64% agree that poor sleep caused them stress and may have contributed to burnout.
- 53% agree that money worries and financial uncertainty due to the cost-of-living crisis contributed to feelings of stress.
- 46% cited poor physical health as possibly contributing to burnout.
- Plus, 43% point to feelings of isolation as a stress-inducing factor.

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Psychosocial hazards

According to a report on Preventing and managing risks to work-related psychological health, psychosocial hazards and factors are anything in the design or management of work that increases the risk of work-related stress. These are also called psychological hazards, work-related stressors or organisational factors. Exposure to psychosocial hazards and factors can impact mental and physical health.

Psychosocial hazards and factors that may lead to burnout include:

· High and low job demands
· Low job control
· Poor support
· Poor workplace relationships (includes work-related bullying)
· Low role clarity
· Poor organisational change management
· Low reward and recognition
· Poor organisational justice
· Poor environmental conditions
· Remote and isolated work
· Violent or traumatic events.

In Mental Health UK's Burnout Report, the key factors and hazards contributing to stress at work include:

· 54% cited a high workload or large volume of tasks at work may have led to burnout.
· 45% agree that regularly working unpaid overtime contributed to stress.
· 43% agree that feeling isolated at work may have contributed to stress, pressure and overwhelm at work.
· 40% cited fear of redundancy and job securing as a key stress-inducing factor.
· 31% report being bullied or intimidated at work by managers or colleagues as a source of stress.

High job demands

Mark Oostergo is a psychologist with a keen interest in workplace psychological wellbeing and high performance. As Chief Executive at Australian Psychological Services, he shared his view on the psychosocial hazard of high job demands as a "common risk organisations face."

> High job demands are driven by a number of factors including consistent organisational change, increasing information overload, enhanced connectivity to the workplace, structure, and in some industries, macroeconomic factors.
>
> When considering high job demands, it's critical to consider the nature of the work. Is it the sheer volume of work that is impacting people? Or, has the intensity of the work increased, the nature of the work changed (e.g. higher emotional or cognitive loads), or could it be that low role clarity and poor support are driving the experience of high job demands?

Mark Oostergo
Chief Executive, Australian Psychological Services

Section 2

The impact of burnout on businesses

As a business, you have a moral obligation, and duty of care, to look after the wellbeing of your staff. But the health of your people also directly impacts your bottom line. When workers are experiencing burnout and exhaustion, your business suffers. Fatigue or a lack of attention may lead to workplace safety incidents. A lack of motivation and enthusiasm can cause customer service and satisfaction to suffer. And decreased creativity and productivity can stifle innovation. These can all be costly for a business.

Claims and reputational damage associated with psychosocial risk

The latest stats from the UK's Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) found at least 20,000 workers are making incapacity benefit claims for mental health problems—accounting for two-thirds of total benefit claims.

In fact, mental ill health was shown to cost £300 billion in 2022, double the NHS budget, according to new research from the UK's Centre for Mental Health.

Insurance brokerage firm Lockton said it was "increasingly observing events where the employee has accused their employer of not taking the necessary means to prevent or address burnout" and that "given its WHO classification, employees are well within their rights to make workers' compensation claims based on burnout."

As Raechel Gavin, Sonder's Chief People Officer explains, the risk appears to be widespread.

> The report found that the industries most at risk of serious complaints related to mental health were those with frontline workers in the healthcare and social assistance sectors, where people are more likely to be exposed to hazards such as high job demands, workplace bullying and work-related occupational violence. But anyone in a high-pressure environment or job function is at risk.
>
> **Raechel Gavin**
> Chief People Officer, Sonder

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Mental health conditions claims have a significant effect on workplace productivity and are likely to cost your business more than other conditions. A new analysis of the latest data from the UK Office for National Statistics found that an average of 18 million days in the UK are lost each year to mental health conditions—accounting for 12% of all work days lost.

In fact, over a quarter (27%) of the 900+ organisations surveyed reported average absence levels of 10 days or more–double the rates reported in 2020.

Presenteeism

It's fair to assume that if an employee is experiencing feelings of burnout and exhaustion, but continues to show up, they won't be doing their best work. However well intentioned they may be.

According to the 'Waking Up to Absence Report' from Lockton Australia 2022: "Presenteeism occurs when an individual is physically at work but is not focused on their work". Some contributing factors may be:

- Feeling unwell but not wanting to take time off work
- Feeling overwhelmed with work
- Feelings of unhappiness at work, feeling disengaged from the workplace
- Experiencing personal issues which are diverting attention away from work

The report points out that:

> Presenteeism not only impacts on productivity of a workforce, but may also contribute to increased accidents and injuries if not paying attention to the work at hand.

Absenteeism

If your employees don't stop and rest when they need to, they could end up needing to take extended periods of absence. This may result in absenteeism, which is when an employee habitually misses or skips work. This can be costly for your business, putting everything from project delivery to customer service at risk.

According to the CIPD's HR Practices in Ireland 2023 report, mental health was the second most common cause of work absenteeism after COVID-19. In fact, a 2023 survey of over six million employees by CIPD found that 76% had taken time off work due to stress.

It can also put additional pressure on other employees, potentially increasing their workloads, and broadening the risk of burnout.

Productivity

Making sound decisions, solving problems creatively, and coming up with new ideas all become more difficult when experiencing burnout. After all, it's tough to focus, stay on task, and complete work efficiently when you're feeling depleted. This can significantly slow down projects within an organisation and hinder innovation. In increasingly competitive markets, this can hinder your business' chance at success.

McKinsey research found that employee disengagement and attrition, more common among workers with lower wellbeing, could cost a median-size S&P 500 company between:

$228 million – $355 million

a year in lost productivity.

Employee turnover

When employees are experiencing burnout and fatigue, they're less likely to find their work fulfilling and this lack of satisfaction could see them looking for opportunities elsewhere. Particularly if they feel their employer isn't supporting them with the issues they're struggling with. They may seek a job with a healthier work-life balance, or go somewhere they think their work will be more valued.

Losing your people to burnout is undeniably bad for business. There's considerable financial and resource costs associated with replacing staff, not to mention the loss of knowledge from experienced employees, and the potential damage to an employer brand reputation. This damage could make it harder to attract and retain top talent in the future.

Strategies to mitigate burnout

With burnout being so widespread and multifaceted, it can be a difficult business challenge to solve. Leaders are often facing:

- **A lack of scalable solutions:** It's tough to find a one-size-fits-all approach to address the diverse needs and causes of burnout across different departments and positions.
- **Managerial burden:** Managers often end up shouldering the responsibility for preventing and addressing burnout. But without proper training and support, managers may feel ill-equipped to handle these sensitive situations.
- **Company culture shift:** Burnout often stems from deeper cultural issues within organisations, like long hours, unclear expectations, or lack of recognition. Addressing these issues can be a slow and difficult process.

Despite these challenges, there are still some steps your business can take to create a more burnout-resistant environment.

Good psychosocial practices

PTO can set the tone for a more balanced and healthier workplace, but it is a band-aid solution for burnout, not a cure. Burnout is a multifaceted, multidimensional issue that can rarely be solved with short bursts of time off work - employer-funded or otherwise.

> It's important to remember that by its very definition, burnout is a work-related phenomenon. I often see organisations go to solutions that require the individual to implement wellbeing practices outside of work or to enhance individual wellbeing practices at work, e.g. lunchtime yoga, mental health first aid training, healthy eating webinars, or some mindfulness training. Whilst these aren't bad, they do fail to address the root cause of what may be putting employee's mental health at risk.
>
> Mindfulness is not a solution for work overload, poor job design, or intense emotional and/or cognitive demands of roles. It's vital for organisations to have a strong psychosocial risk identification and management plan in place that considers appropriate controls to prevent harm, provide early intervention, and to support employees who experience compromised wellbeing whilst promoting the positive and protective factors of work.

Mark Oostergo
Chief Executive, Australian Psychological Services

How to drive high-performance while avoiding burnout

Raechel Gavin is Chief People Officer at Sonder. In a Sonder webinar, and other forums, she explained that balancing high performance and productivity with minimising psychosocial hazards demands a four stage approach.

1.

Be clear to be kind

"In times of uncertainty, role clarity becomes even more critical. Be clear in explaining what is expected, what needs to be done, how it needs to be done and what success looks like. If we don't create clarity, the risk is that people second guess themselves. They feel stretched and they can feel directionless. All of these things can start to lead to burnout, anxiety, overwhelm and stress. Once you create this clarity it's key to stay connected with regular dialogue and feedback."

2.

Cultivate empathetic leadership

"The leadership of yesterday is not enough to help us navigate the complexities of work and life today. We need to constantly refresh and add to our tool kit.

One example is, incorporating high empathy into your leadership. Understanding and working with the whole person, demonstrating authentic, genuine care."

3.

Create an open forum around psychosocial risks

"Psychological safety is not about lowering performance standards. It enables candour, openness and is fundamental to talking about psychosocial factors. Performance standards and psychological safety are equally important and need to be treated separately to allow employees to feel comfortable asking for help, and expressing concerns without fear of repercussions. Introduce measures that balance high performance and psychological safety to unlock those important conversations."

4.

Design productive workflows, that allow for rest

"We need a job design that enables reflection and rest.

Communicating expectations around responsiveness can help, so people know it's okay not to respond to that Slack message or email. There's no pressure to respond out of hours. It's a very simple thing to do, but often we forget the need to set that expectation clearly with others."

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> " Consider hindrance demands. E.g, those things that get in the way of us achieving our objectives. It could be poor systems, role ambiguity or conflict, low decision making latitude, or a culture of meetings and emails. Addressing high job demands doesn't need to equate to adding more FTE. Considering what we do at work and how we do it can have a substantial positive impact on problematic work and consequently mitigate psychosocial risk and reduce the likelihood that people may experience burnout.

Mark Oostergo
Chief Executive, Australian Psychological Services

Section 4

How Sonder can help

Unlike reactive solutions that focus on employee support when burnout reaches crisis point, <u>Sonder</u> intervenes earlier.

It enables leaders to prevent employee health, safety and wellbeing issues from escalating to costly outcomes for their business and their people.

Make preventative, healthy habits the new normal

Mental health may be where issues arise, but it's often not where the story starts. That's why Sonder's self-care resource hub empowers your people to consider their whole self. They can go from a financial wellbeing article, to a stress assessment, to a conversation with a registered nurse in a matter of minutes. The intuitive design encourages exploration, helping your people uncover and address their interconnected challenges before they become complex health crises.
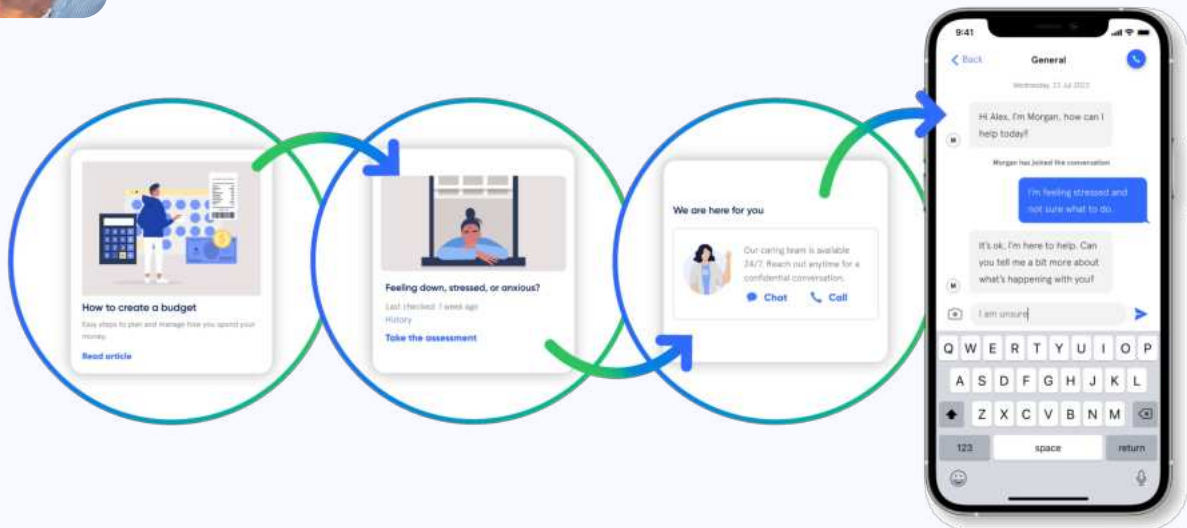
> We have a severe problem in the NHS with 9 to 12-month waiting lists for people seeking mental health support. There has to be a better way of receiving the right support quickly, which is where tech has an important role to play.

Dr Julian
GP and Founder, Dr Julian Online Healthcare

Our self-care resources are leading to more employees seeking help much sooner, before they reach crisis point, with over

18%

of self-assessments, and

26%

of article views leading to a conversation with a real health professional.

Sonder content consumption trends suggest that preventing burnout is front of mind for Sonder members – and they want to help themselves with resources.

- For members who had an anxiety risk outcome from the wellbeing assessment, the second most clicked on article was 'What is burnout?'. The fourth most clicked on article is 'How to get a better work/life balance'.

- The second most viewed content series in the app is called 'Work/life balance'.

- The most clicked topic in the app is 'Sleep', and the tenth most clicked topic is 'fatigue and burnout'.

- The sixth most viewed article is 'Three ways to improve your sleep'.

What is burnout?
Find out what the warning signs look like and learn how to prevent burn...
Article

How to get a better work-life balance
Creating good work-life balance is important for your wellbeing. Here...
Article

**3 ways to improve your sleep**
Dreamland awaits.
Article

> I've had access to Sonder for a few years now. I have gone through a few things in my life, and I tap into the wellbeing library often. It's helped me take the lead on my own wellbeing, and whilst I've never needed to talk to someone, just knowing it's there if I need it gives me a lot of peace of mind to know there's someone there.
>
> **Sonder member**

Use data-driven insights to make your proactive strategy a reality

Sonder's scale of employee adoption, engagement and support (on average, 40% of a workforce) provides business leaders with an aggregated and anonymous view of their people's health, safety and wellbeing needs.
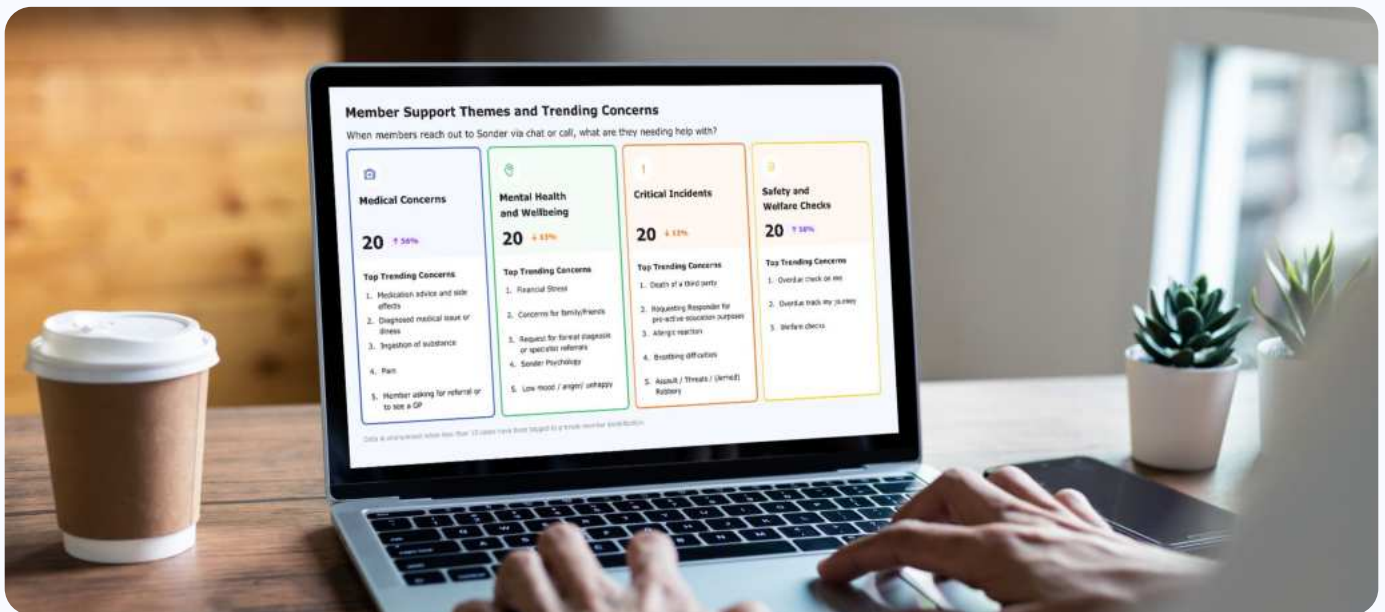
This information enables business leaders to understand what's going on with their people and get ahead of their employer's obligations of ensuring a healthy and safe workplace for their people by showing you where the smoke is, before the fire even starts. Armed with this information, P&C and HSC teams can confidently allocate time, effort and resources in more focused ways to drive a culture of prevention across teams, departments and the whole organisation.

> "
>
> We can see that the majority of our team are using Sonder for acute medical care, followed by acute mental health. For me, it's really important to know what the team is using Sonder for because then we can be quite strategic in the workplace posts that we put out.
>
> **Dan Stamp**
> Health and Wellbeing Manager, Woolworths NZ

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Access to immediate professional care around the clock

Burnout, and other mental health challenges, can strike at inconvenient times. That's why no matter what time of the day or night, you can count on Sonder to respond to all live chats and calls from your people in under 30 seconds.

> Our people don't want to ring a 1800 number and wait for someone to call them back to make an appointment, they want help right then and there. It needs to be instant.
>
> **Kate Mayers**
> Best & Less

No scripts or robots, Sonder's medically accredited team of registered health professionals such as nurses, doctors, psychologists are on staff and ready to support your people with confidential, practical support 24/7 via our support centre locations in Sydney, Auckland and London.

> I was going through issues with leadership and was making my anxiety and stress levels rise through the roof. I contacted the team at 1.30am in the morning as I was suffering from insomnia. I didn't expect anyone to be online, as it was the first time I've used your services. The Support Coordinator I connected with from Sonder was patient and listened, so that put me at ease straight away. It's not easy to share your problems with someone you do not know, but all I got back was compassion and empathy.
>
> **Sonder member**

Customer case study

probecx

Probe CX's employees often face difficult customer interactions, which can result in feelings of stress. Personal challenges such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, burnout and relationship conflict also impact some employees. Despite having support services in place, employees struggled with accessibility, as the existing services were only available during business hours and did not accommodate the variation in hours they work.

To address these issues, Probe CX engaged Sonder on a trial basis over a three month period:

There was

19.4x

more utilisation than previous provider

60%

of all support was delivered outside of business hours

75%

of support was for non-work-related issues

There was a

200%

Improvement in cost efficiency vs previous provider

> Having access to support is amazing. Most importantly is the confidence it gives me - to know that it's there.
>
> **Jo Brittle**
> Site Manager, Biggera Waters, QLD

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Reduced absenteeism and turnover

Through proactive digital services and responsive human support, Sonder customers have been able to reduce absenteeism and turnover within their organisation.

Absenteeism

Self-reported data from Sonder members indicates an average reduction in unplanned absences by up to 12.5% for those who engage with our platform.

Total Absences
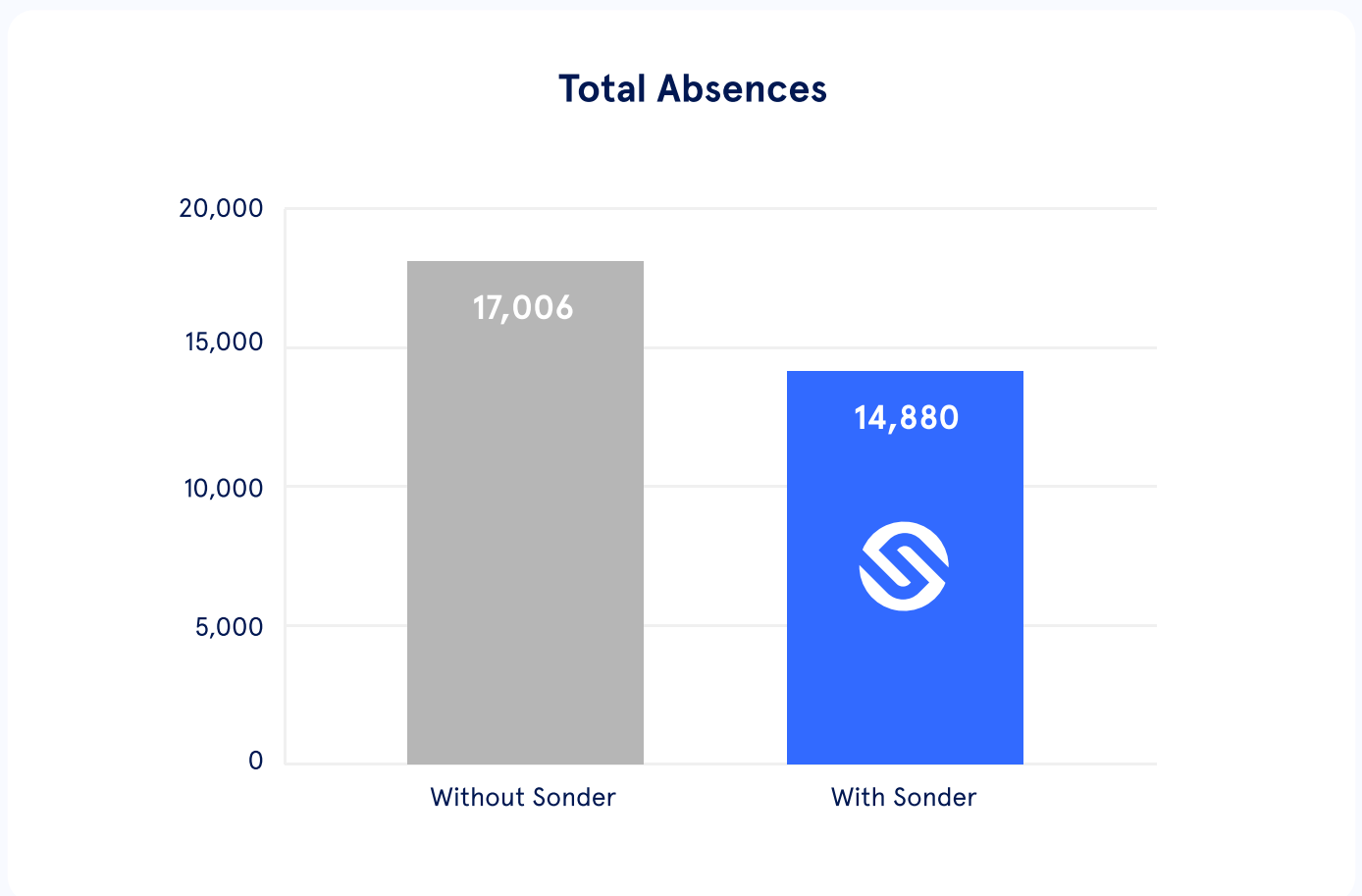
Turnover

Employee turnover can be costly. With recruitment fees, time spent interviewing and training, not to mention the knowledge loss, it's easy to see why an employee choosing to leave can impact a business' bottom line.

Usage of Sonder has shown to improve retention by 6%, delivering an ROI of around $3.50 - $4 for every dollar spent on Sonder per annum.

Labour Turnover Impact

	Without Sonder	With Sonder
Turnover	25%	19%
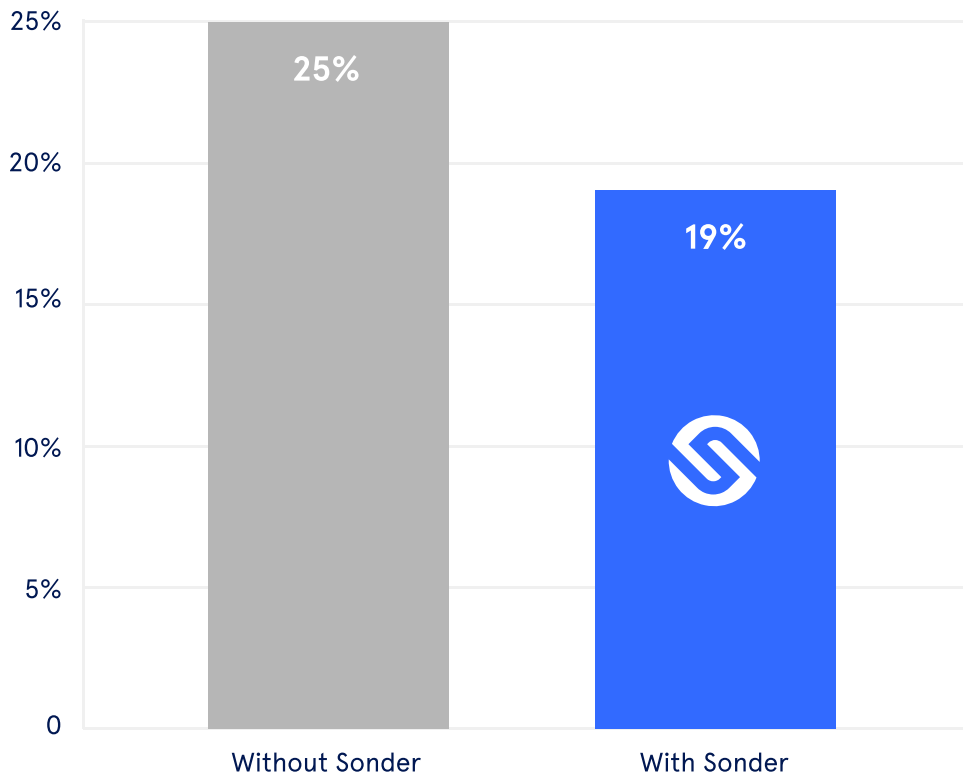
$1 spent on Sonder = $3.50–$4 saved
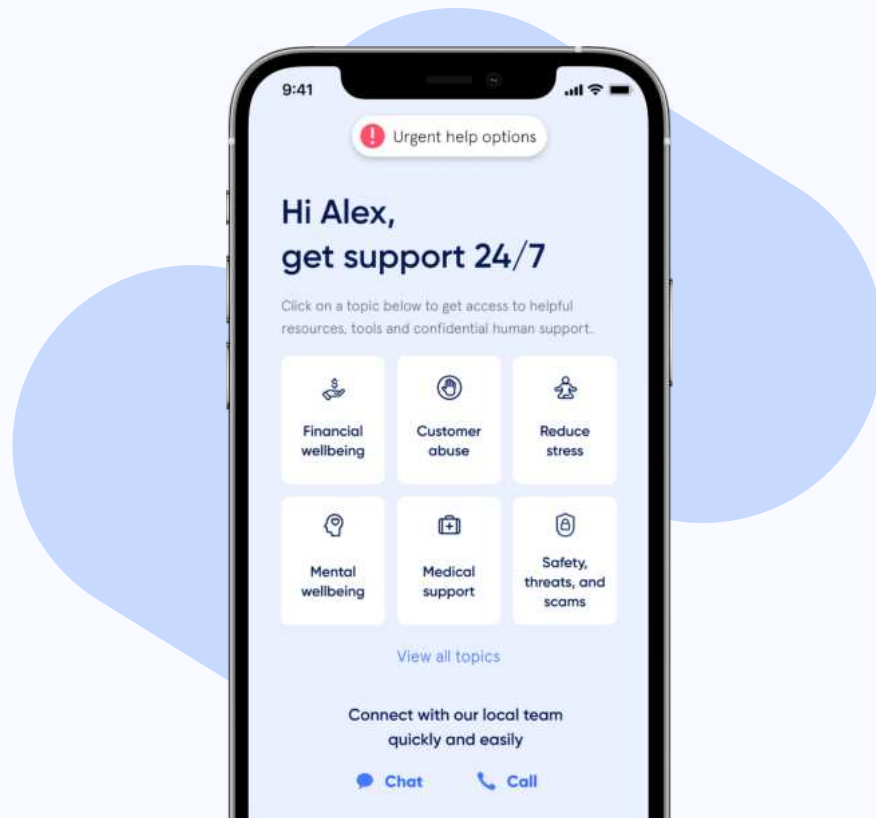
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Book a demo to see Sonder's features in action

Discover how Sonder's proactive digital services and responsive human support reduces harm, drives early intervention and restores the health and safety of employees.

Book a demo

Sonder

Trusted by

HAYS

Culture Amp

VOLVO

PUBLICIS GROUPE

Accreditations

nmc Nursing & Midwifery Council

United Kingdom

ACHS

Australia

Ahpra & National Boards

Australia

Te Kaunihera Tapuhi o Aotearoa
Nursing Council of New Zealand

New Zealand

Te Kaunihera Rata o Aotearoa | Medical Council of New Zealand

New Zealand

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