

Bupa Wellbeing Index 2022

Chapters 3 & 4



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Chapter 3

Health and wellbeing improves, despite challenges

As the UK approaches its third year of living with Covid-19 there is cautious optimism that the worst of the pandemic may now be behind us. Although new variants continue to emerge, and there was a small spike in infections in the UK in July,¹ the number of people dying from the virus continues to fall².

As we found in the inaugural Bupa Wellbeing Index in May 2022, there are still barriers to accessing healthcare, which the pandemic has only heightened. Treatment delays and lost appointments continue to be a concern, with the latest figures showing that more than 6.73 million people were waiting for treatment for a health condition in June — an all-time high³.

Worryingly, the British Medical Association warns that in addition to current wait times, there is an additional ‘hidden backlog’ of patients “who require care but have either not yet presented, or who have had referrals cancelled due to the impact of Covid-19; patients who, in normal times, would have been referred for treatment, received elective care and attended outpatient appointments, but who for a number of reasons relating to the pandemic have not yet found their way into the health system”.

Dr Robin Clark, Medical Director for Bupa Global and UK Insurance says, “There is consensus that delays in diagnosis and treatment will continue to be a challenge for some years to come.

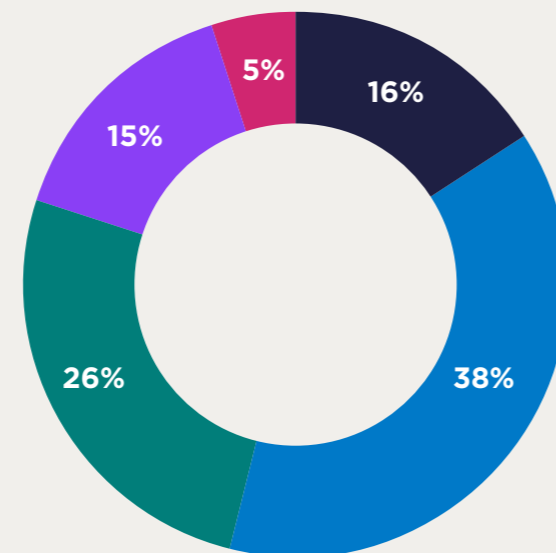
“However, it’s important that people aren’t put off from seeking help or a diagnosis if they feel unwell. Early diagnosis is key to improving survival rates in many diseases. Just a four-week delay in cancer treatment, for example, can significantly impact the patient’s outcome.”

And the spectre of seasonal influenza is also on the horizon. Infectious disease experts point out that herd immunity is significantly lower than usual, with children under two years of age having no exposure at all, and this is compounded by a fall in influenza vaccination rates.

Dr Petra Simic, Medical Director for Bupa Health Clinics says, “Getting your flu jab offers protection against the infection and your chances of becoming unwell and even hospitalised with it during the winter months. It also helps to protect those who are more vulnerable to the illnesses, such as the elderly or those with underlying health conditions and could become seriously poorly with flu.

“During the last couple of years, measures put in place to control the spread of Covid-19 have meant most of us have had less exposure to illnesses such as flu. This has meant that we have lower natural immunity, resulting in the increased likelihood of individuals becoming unwell with flu this winter, which is why making sure we get the jab this year is really important.”

How people view their physical health



- 1. Very good
- 2. Somewhat good
- 3. Neutral
- 4. Somewhat poor
- 5. Very poor

“Delays in diagnosis will continue to be a challenge for some years to come.”

Despite these concerns and uncertainties, the wider picture is much brighter, with the latest data from the Bupa Wellbeing Index showing multiple incremental improvements in the nation’s health and wellbeing since the baseline data we collected in March and April 2022.

There has been a rise in the number of respondents who rate their physical health positively, with 54% now describing their health as ‘very good’, or ‘somewhat good’ — up from 51%.

Younger adults are significantly more upbeat, with 26% describing their physical health as ‘very good’, compared to 18% previously.

Dr Robin Clark, Medical Director for Bupa Global and UK Insurance says, “A big factor is undoubtedly a return to normality. During the pandemic, lockdowns and general uncertainty made it difficult for many people to maintain a consistent exercise regime. We also know that working from home had impacted younger adults more severely and research by the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) identified a number of reasons for this⁵.

“This demographic is far more likely to be living in shared households without a dedicated workspace. The RSPH found that people with multiple housemates were far more likely to report that home-working was worse for their health and wellbeing [41%] compared to those on their own [29%] or who were living with a partner [24%]. A quarter were also working from a sofa or bedroom, which puts them at much greater risk of musculoskeletal problems.”

Damian McClelland,
Clinical Director for Musculoskeletal Services at Bupa UK Insurance

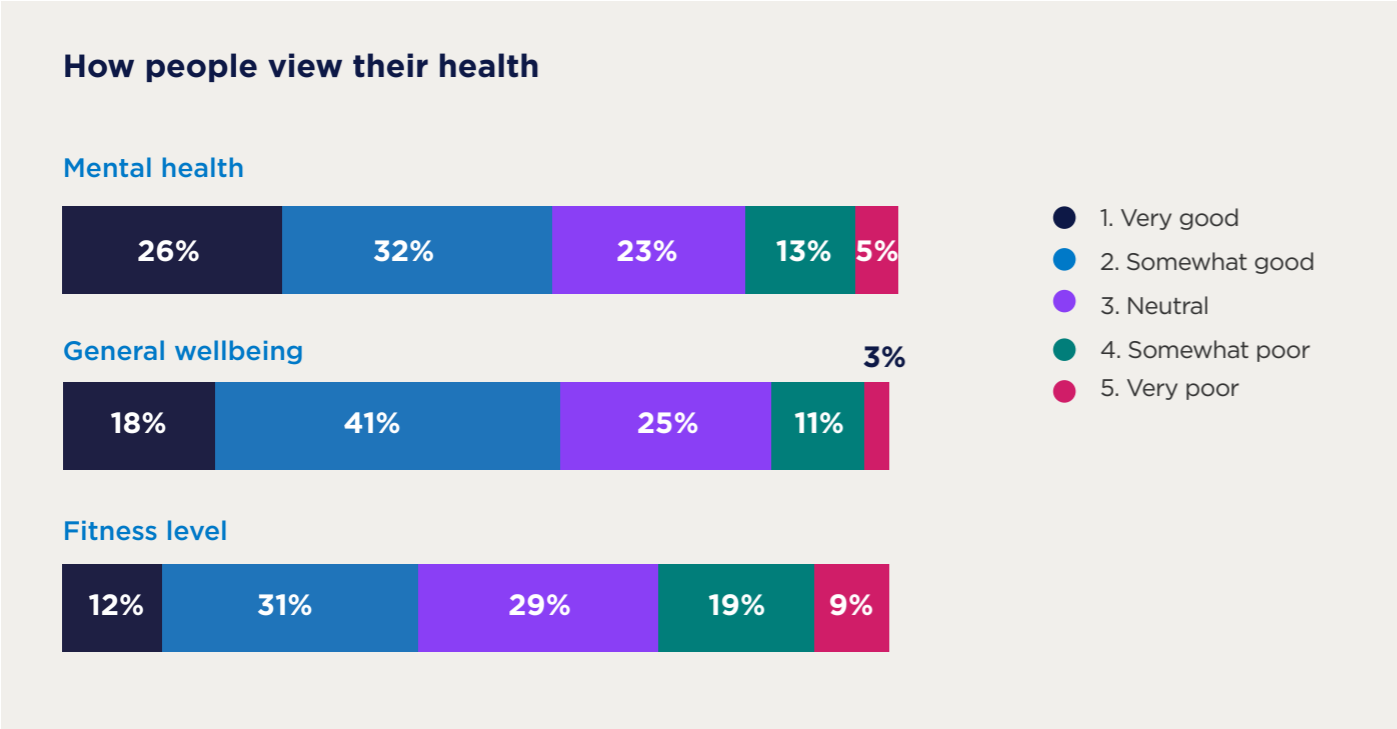
“With so many businesses implementing hybrid working for the long-term, it’s really important for employees to address any pain or discomfort they experience when working from home.

“Simple changes such not working from beds or beanbags, sitting up with feet planted on the floor, adopting handsfree sets for long phone calls, and making time to stretch can go a long way to preventing strain.”

This can be seen in the Bupa Wellbeing Index data, which shows a fall in the number of younger adults identifying back pain and other MSK problems as their primary health concern (compared with their weight, which is the no.1 health concern of that age group and the general population). Now one in 10 (11%) of 16- to 24-year-olds compared to one in eight (13%) previously, and 15% of 25- to 34-year-olds say MSK is a key concern, down from 17% at baseline.

Men are generally more positive about their physical health (55% compared to 51% previously) and one in five (19%) now describe their physical health as ‘very good’, compared to 16% previously⁴.

Improved picture on mental health



Whilst the “long-tail” mental health impact of the pandemic is still to be determined, improvements can be seen in the latest data for mental wellbeing, with just over a quarter (26%) of respondents reporting their mental health is ‘very good’ compared to 22% previously.

Overall, three in five (58%) now rate their mental health positively, compared to just over half (54%) at our barometer baseline and there has been a 10% uplift in the number reporting ‘very good’ mental health: 26%, up from 16% at baseline. Older adults are the most positive with 62% of 55- to 64-year-olds and 73% of over-65s now feeling good about their mental health.

Pablo Vandenabeele, Clinical Director for Mental Health at Bupa UK says, “Reduced anxiety around Covid-19 and a return to relative ‘normality’ are likely to be factors in this improvement in mental health, but it may also reflect the fact that more and more people are seeking support.

“In many ways, the pandemic turbo-charged the speed of innovation in digital health services, including mental health platforms. Access to online therapies and digital support from platforms such as Calm has allowed many more people to access evidence-based care for mental health challenges when they need it, and in a way which works for them.”



Bupa UK Insurance has seen claims for mental health conditions increase by 40% between 2019 and 2021

Bupa UK Insurance has seen claims for mental health conditions increase by 40% between 2019 and 2021. And this increase is reflective of the national picture; from April 2020 to May this year, the number of people in contact with public mental health services climbed from 1.31 million to 1.62 million⁵ and the number of new referrals has risen from 0.21million to 4.2 million.

The Bupa Wellbeing Index also confirms improvements in general wellbeing, with three in five (59%) respondents confirming this is ‘very good’ (18%) or ‘somewhat good’ (41%) — up from 56%, 16% and 40% respectively.

Fitness levels have risen by 13%, with two in five (43%) saying their general fitness is either very good (12%) or ‘somewhat good’ (31%). Men continue to rate their fitness more positively than women with twice the number of males having ‘very good’ levels as women: 16% versus 8% of women.

Dr Robin Clark, Medical Director for Bupa Global and UK Insurance said: “Whilst these latest figures show that overall health and wellbeing is on the up, it’s important to remember that there are a broad variety of factors impacting people’s physical and mental health. We shouldn’t be complacent about the findings whilst still finding ways to improve our health.”





“Supporting women’s health is essential to a resilient workforce.”

Evolving health needs

When it comes to specific concerns, weight continues to be the most common wellbeing worry with 31% confirming this is their number one concern, down slightly from the 33% reported in our baseline dataset.

Back pain and other musculoskeletal problems have now overtaken mental health and physical fitness to be the second most common health concern, with 19% of men and 24% of women identifying these pain problems as their biggest concern.

Damian McClelland, Clinical Director for Musculoskeletal Services at Bupa UK Insurance said: “Seeking help for long term and persistent pain remains essential. Early diagnosis and access to treatment can have a positive effect on the long-term prognosis of musculoskeletal conditions”.

Women’s health conditions such as menopause, menstrual health and endometriosis are still serious concerns in the baseline data, although these have fallen slightly since the last Index.

Alaana Woods,
Commercial Director for Bupa Health Clinics

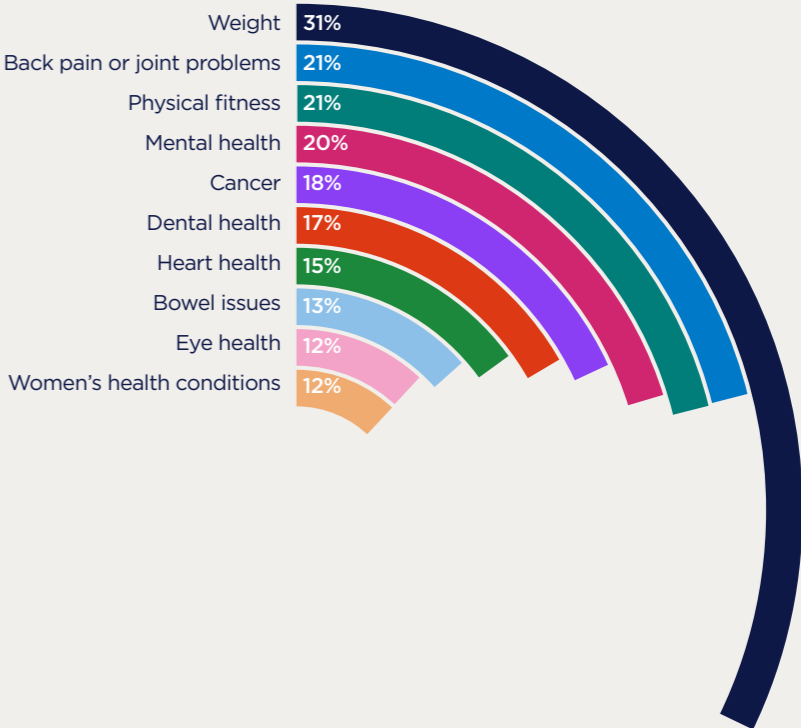
“Talent attraction, retention and diversity have never been more important for businesses and supporting women’s health is a keyway of recruiting and retaining employees. Women over the age of 50 are the fastest growing demographic in the workplace and this is around the time when women tend to experience menopause.”

“Menopause support has become something which businesses are becoming increasingly aware of, those who offer support for symptoms will see greater productivity and performance from their employees. Those who don’t offer support see women lose their confidence, take a long-term leave of absence, or leave the workplace altogether, meaning businesses are losing women who are likely at the top of their game.”

“As well as menopause, organisations are beginning to recognise the need for more support with menstrual health as women’s health continues to creep up the agenda. Supporting women’s health is essential to a resilient workforce during these uncertain times”.

Dr Robin Clark, Medical Director for Bupa Global and UK Insurance says, “One of the strengths of the Bupa Wellbeing Index is that as it grows with each new quarter of data, any seasonal trends, and long-terms patterns will become clear. These insights will ensure that all stakeholders can provide health and wellbeing support and resources where it is needed most.”

Biggest health worries





“Wellbeing packages are an increasingly important benefit to attract and retain talent.”

Chapter 4

The workplace frontline for healthcare and support

Most wanted workplace benefits

<div>53%</div> <div>Flexible working hours</div>	<div>46%</div> <div>Good workplace pension</div>	<div>39%</div> <div>Health insurance</div>	<div>36%</div> <div>Employee discounts</div>
<div>25%</div> <div>Free snacks/lunch</div>	<div></div>	<div>23%</div> <div>Hybrid work provision</div>	<div>20%</div> <div>Fitness facilities</div>
<div>16%</div> <div>Free subscriptions (e.g. Netflix, Spotify)</div>	<div>10%</div> <div>Massages</div>	<div>10%</div> <div>Loan for public transport season ticket costs</div>	<div></div>

In the context of an uncertain economic climate and the health legacy of the pandemic, the employer is increasingly where employees look for support with their health. Not only do employers have a duty of care towards their employees, but attractive wellbeing packages are an increasingly important benefit to attract and retain talent. And this trend is likely to continue.

The latest Bupa Wellbeing Index data shows that a third of employees (33%) believe their employers have a responsibility to support their health and wellbeing, and more than half (53%) say they are more likely to choose to work for an organisation which offers good health and wellbeing benefits. One in five has already changed jobs to secure better benefits.

Further evidence of the value of providing attractive health packages comes in the finding that two in five (42%) would be less likely to consider a move if their current employer offered good health and wellbeing benefits. Crucially, this is most likely to increase retention of skilled mid-career staff, with 45% of those aged 25 to 44 confirming health benefits are a key reason for them staying in post.

One in three believe their employers should help look after their health and wellbeing



Alex Perry, CEO, Bupa UK Insurance

“While the peak of the pandemic may be behind us, a perfect storm of fast-changing factors means that strong benefits like health insurance are more valuable and offer more reassurance to employees than ever before. As real wages fall at a record rate, pay rises and bonuses may not be on the immediate horizon. Knowing that high-quality healthcare is available in times of need takes the pressure away as people navigate a fluctuating external environment. Companies can make a really significant difference to their employees by demonstrating that they care and are invested in prioritising their people’s physical and mental health.”

The Bupa Wellbeing Index found that health insurance ranked in the top three most sought-after benefits for a third (39%) of employees. This was behind only flexible working (53%) and a company pension scheme (46%). The other core benefits employees prioritised were employee discounts (36%) and free lunches (25%), showing that as belts are tightened with the cost-of-living crisis, people are relying on their employers to support them in navigating economic uncertainty.

Given that women still tend to take the role of primary carer, it’s perhaps not surprising that they were slightly more likely to value a workplace crèche (6% versus 5% of men) — but this is likely to vary across different sectors.

This increased interest in benefits around health and wellbeing, and rising expectations of the role employers play in providing healthcare, aligns with recent research for the global professional services firm, Aon, which found that nine in ten UK employers (93%) believe employee expectations are changing. They reported much greater focus on mental wellbeing, with the number of employers who think their teams expect more support for mental health leaping by 44 percentage points in a year⁷.

Colin Barnes, head of advisory and specialities, at Aon says, “Over the past two years, employers have been reminded about the importance of looking after their people. Initially, this was a reactive response to safeguard their employees’ wellbeing, but quickly evolved into a realisation that a healthy and resilient workforce is more engaged and more productive.”

One of the few positives to come from the pandemic is that it has shone a spotlight on mental health for everyone, as both individuals and employees. Bupa data reflects this, with mental health claims increasing 40% between 2019 and 2021. And the latest data from the UK Wellbeing Index confirms significant need, and demand, for this sort of support, with a third (33%) of those with employer-provided health and wellbeing benefits reporting they had used some kind of mental health support service in the previous 12 months.

The most common reasons for seeking help were anxiety (11%) and depression (9%) and younger adults the most likely to seek help, with 55% of 16- to 24-year-olds having used workplace benefits to access a mental health service. This is likely down to an influx of digital mental health tools and apps now available on the marketplace and being promoted by healthcare providers and insurers.

Career decisions



would be more likely to choose an employer offering good health and wellbeing benefits



have moved jobs to access better perks



would choose good health and wellbeing perks over more pay



would be less likely to leave a job that has good mental health support



have considered quitting their job in the last 12 months because of mental health

35% say good workplace benefits are more important than ever

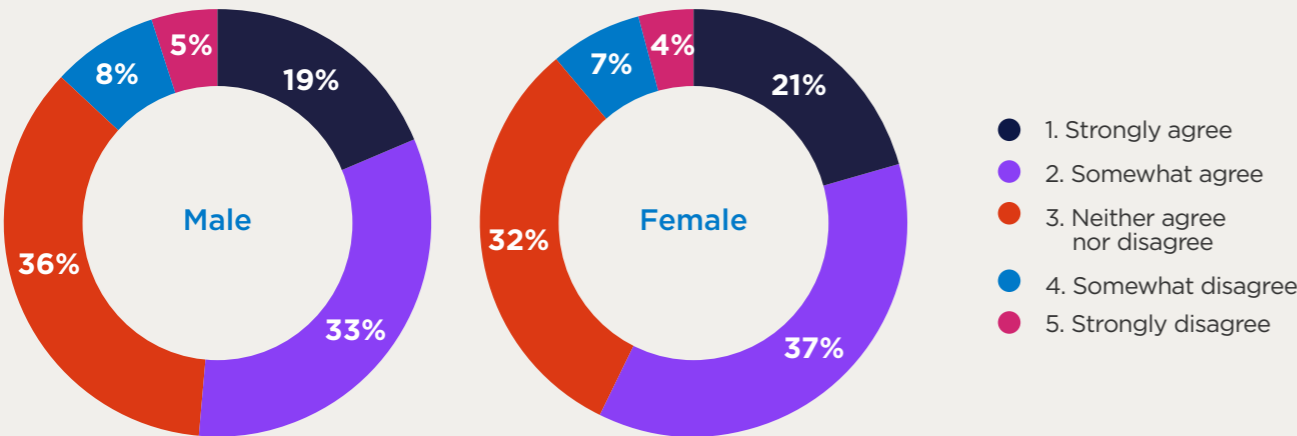


Alex Perry, CEO, Bupa UK Insurance says, “Our data suggests demand for health and wellbeing benefits is at an all-time high. Across the board at Bupa, we have seen significant growth, with over 150,000 new customers across private medical insurance, health trusts, dental and cash plan so far during 2022.”

The latest Bupa Wellbeing Index suggests this increased demand is part of a longer-term trend towards staff placing more focus on wellbeing. More than half of those surveyed (55%) said their health is now more important than ever, up one percentage point from the last dataset, and 41% say the pandemic has pushed health and wellbeing up their list of priorities.



My health is now more important to me than ever



This is even though fears around Covid-19 and the possibility of future pandemics are receding — the latest data shows that 40% of respondents are worried about future pandemics, a drop of one percentage point from our barometer baseline.

Dr Robin Clark, Medical Director for Bupa Global and UK Insurance says, “This is quite telling as our first dataset was captured in March and April, in the midst of the spike in Covid-19 infections and uncertainty around rising infection rates and the increased virulence of the Omicron variant⁸.”

The economy will continue to drive employee demand for attractive packages, with more than a third (35%) confirming that an uncertain economic landscape makes it more important than ever to have good workplace benefits. As you might expect, this rises steadily with age, with just under a third (30%) of the youngest demographic (16 to 24) saying this is a factor, compared to 38% of those approaching retirement (55 to 64).

Overall, 17% said they place the most importance on health and wellbeing benefits and 13% would like to see their employers invest more.

Health maintenance is particularly important for those entering the workforce, with 33% of 16- to 24-year-olds saying the pandemic has made them more motivated to look after their physical and mental wellbeing. This is higher than all demographic groups except the 55- to 64-year-olds who are approaching retirement and are likely to have become aware of the value of health and wellbeing benefits. (34%).

The data also highlights how providing good health and wellbeing packages can deliver for employers. Aside from Covid-19, the conditions most diagnosed as a result of workplace health and wellbeing benefits are mental health related: anxiety (11%), depression (9%), as well as back pain and other musculoskeletal (MSK) problems (6%).

Most used health and wellbeing benefits



Dr Robin Clark, Medical Director for Bupa Global and UK Insurance says, “We know that poor mental health is linked to ‘presenteeism’, reduced productivity and increased staff turnover⁹— which no business wants their staff to experience in the current climate.”

Given the current economic uncertainty and the ongoing challenges around recruitment, the latest Bupa Wellbeing Index shows that investing in employee health and wellbeing and maximising the value health and wellbeing packages can deliver, will be essential for business success and sustainability.

Alex Perry, CEO, Bupa UK Insurance

“In this competitive landscape, setting out strong commitments to employee wellbeing will help UK businesses attract and retain the brightest and best. Our data shows that looking after employees for the long-term by prioritising their health, and that of their families, will always win out.”



Footnotes

Chapter 3

1. <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/cases>
2. <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/deaths?areaType=nation&areaName=England>
3. <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/nhs-delivery-and-workforce/pressures/nhs-backlog-data-analysis>
4. <https://www.rsph.org.uk/about-us/news/survey-reveals-the-mental-and-physical-health-impacts-of-home-working-during-covid-19.html>
5. <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieZTc4YWVhY2ItNGE3NS00Yjk2LWE5MDEtN2MzNDExNWlyYzljIiwidCI6IjUwZjYwNzFmLWJiZmUtNDExYS04ODAzLTkzMDU2MjllMmI0OjE5>
6. <https://www.cipd.co.uk/about/media/press/menopause-at-work#gref>

Chapter 4

7. <https://www.aon.com/unitedkingdom/media-room/articles/employers-see-changes-in-employee-expectations.jsp>
8. <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/cases?areaType=nation&areaName=England>
9. <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/news/mental-health-problems-work-cost-uk-economy-ps349bn-last-year-says-centre-mental-health>

About the research: Bupa commissioned Censuswide to poll a nationally representative sample of 8,001 UK adults. The data was collected between 29.07.2022 - 09.08.2022. Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society and follows the MRS code of conduct which is based on the ESOMAR principles.

