



The First Step to Support: Mental Health First Aiders

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لبيه أعمال
Labayh Business



Labayh Medical Care Company

Why Labayh?

+1,000

Professionals

+3 Million

Active users

2017

Since

+89.7 Million

Minutes of appointments

+100

Employees

+2.69 Million

Minutes of social responsibility

+120

Countries

+498 Thousand

Rating Count in app

98%

Satisfaction rate

Worldwide toolset

Based in Madinah & Riyadh with delivery capability throughout the Kingdom and across the globe.

Qualified and experienced

Saudi MOH approved platform. Management and delivery team with a wealth of experience in the region and beyond.

Bilingual Capability

- Design, delivery and support in Arabic and English and in some cases other languages.
- Tools for assessment, design and delivery from some of the best in the world used by accredited practitioners.



Labayh has two main branches in the Kingdom one in Al Madinah AlMunawwara and the other one in Riyadh.

A Saudi Company

Tools for assessment, design and delivery from some of the best in the world used by accredited practitioners.

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Executive Summary

This report explores the role of Mental Health First Aiders (MHFAs) in workplace settings and examines how they can contribute to earlier support, healthier cultures, and more effective wellbeing systems when implemented responsibly. Drawing on evidence, real workplace case studies, and practice insights from Labayh Business, the report presents MHFAs as a supportive function that complements, rather than replaces, existing organizational roles and professional mental health services. We highlight why mental health support at work matters, noting the impact of job demands, pressure, and uncertainty on employee wellbeing and organizational outcomes such as absenteeism, engagement, and retention. In response, many organizations are shifting away from crisis-only approaches toward earlier, peer-based support models that reflect how employees seek help in real workplace contexts.

The report defines Mental Health First Aiders as trained employees who provide initial, non-clinical support through listening, reassurance, and signposting. Clear distinctions are made between the MHFA role and those of managers, HR, and clinicians, with strong emphasis on boundaries, trust, and ethical practice. When these boundaries are well defined and supported, MHFAs can act as an accessible entry point to help without creating role confusion or unintended risk.

Evidence reviewed shows consistent improvements in mental health literacy, confidence, and willingness to offer support following MHFA training. Case studies from Thames Water and Unilever demonstrate practical benefits, including earlier help-seeking, reduced stress-related referrals or absence, improved access to support services, and positive cultural change when MHFA programs are embedded within broader wellbeing strategies.

The report outlines key conditions for effective implementation, including organizational readiness, voluntary and thoughtful selection of first aiders, appropriate training, clear referral pathways, supervision, and regular review. MHFAs are most effective when positioned as part of a wider commitment to workplace wellbeing, supported by leadership, policy, and access to professional care.

Labayh Business works with organizations to assess readiness, design MHFA frameworks, strengthen integration with existing systems, and evaluate impact. This report invites organizations to consider Mental Health First Aiders as one component of a structured, ethical, and sustainable approach to workplace mental health support.

01

Introduction



Introduction

In our work at Labayh Business, we see how work conditions shape emotional wellbeing on a daily basis. Job demands, workload pressure, uncertainty, and limited recovery time affect how people think, relate to others, and perform their roles. When mental health needs remain unaddressed, organizations often experience higher absenteeism, reduced engagement, and increased turnover. For employees, these pressures may surface as stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, or withdrawal. Workplace mental health support plays a preventive role by reducing risk, supporting sustainability, and reinforcing care as part of everyday work life.

Growing interest in early response and peer support models

Recently we have observed a growing shift away from crisis-only responses toward earlier forms of support. Early response models focus on noticing signs of distress, offering timely support, and guiding employees to appropriate help before challenges escalate. Peer support approaches reflect a common workplace reality: employees often speak first to someone they trust rather than to formal services. These models rely on listening, presence, and practical guidance rather than clinical intervention. This direction reflects efforts to embed mental health support into everyday workplace interactions.

Positioning Mental Health First Aiders within organizational wellbeing systems

At Labayh Business, we position Mental Health First Aiders as one element within a broader workplace wellbeing system. Their role complements leadership practices, HR policies, and access to professional mental health services. Mental Health First Aiders offer an accessible entry point for initial support and signposting. Their contribution works best when supported by clear policies, leadership commitment, referral pathways, and external care options. Placing this role within a wider system helps set realistic expectations and supports safe, ethical practice for both employees and Mental Health First Aiders.

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What Are Mental Health First Aiders (MHFAs)?

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We describe Mental Health First Aiders as employees who receive structured training to provide initial, non-clinical support to colleagues experiencing mental health distress. Their role centers on listening with care, offering reassurance, and helping colleagues identify appropriate support options. Mental Health First Aiders do not diagnose conditions or provide therapy. Their value lies in early presence and guidance during moments where support is needed but formal care may not yet be accessed.

How does the MHFA role differ from HR, managers, and clinicians?

We distinguish the MHFA role clearly from other workplace functions. Mental Health First Aiders do not hold managerial authority, make performance decisions, or manage workload arrangements. They do not carry HR responsibilities such as investigations, documentation, or policy enforcement. They are not clinicians and do not deliver treatment or ongoing care. This separation helps preserve trust and allows Mental Health First Aiders to operate as an informal, supportive contact without power or clinical dynamics influencing the interaction.

Scope and boundaries of responsibility

At Labayh Business, we emphasize defined boundaries as a core condition for effective MHFA programs. Mental Health First Aiders support colleagues by recognizing signs of distress, providing a safe space for conversation, and encouraging appropriate next steps such as professional support or internal referral channels. Their role concludes once guidance and signposting are provided. Clear boundaries protect both the individual seeking support and the Mental Health First Aider. Effective implementation relies on written role definitions, access to supervision or peer support, and integration within broader organizational wellbeing structures.

03

The Role of MHFAs in the Workplace

The Role of MHFAs in the Workplace

At Labayh Business, we view Mental Health First Aiders as a practical, early support resource embedded within everyday working environments. Their role focuses on response rather than resolution and on support rather than intervention. Mental Health First Aiders contribute to safer, more supportive workplaces by addressing concerns at an early stage and helping employees access appropriate help. **Their role includes the following:**

Providing an accessible point of contact

Serving as a trusted and approachable colleague for employees who may be experiencing stress, emotional distress, or changes in wellbeing.

Offering initial emotional support

Listening without judgment, responding with care, and creating a safe space for conversation without attempting to diagnose or treat.

Identifying early signs of distress

Recognizing common indicators such as withdrawal, changes in behavior or mood, reduced engagement, or difficulty managing work demands.

Encouraging help-seeking and next steps

Supporting colleagues to consider appropriate options such as speaking with a manager, HR, occupational health services, or accessing external professional support.

Supporting signposting and referral pathways

Helping employees understand available internal and external support resources and how to access them.



Reinforcing boundaries and ethical practice

Operating within defined limits, respecting confidentiality, and avoiding role overlap with managers, HR, or clinicians.

Contributing to a supportive workplace culture

Increasing visibility of mental health support, reducing stigma, and reinforcing that wellbeing is part of everyday working life.

Working within wider wellbeing systems

Aligning their role with organizational policies, leadership practices, and professional mental health services rather than acting as a standalone solution.

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Evidence of Impact

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Common training and certification models

Licensed national programs (global model)

MHFA is commonly delivered through licensed national partners under the MHFA International network, with standardized curricula adapted to local context and delivered by accredited instructors.

Course formats

Programs typically use a structured action plan, scenario-based practice, and guidance on how to respond, listen, and connect people to care. Evidence comparing formats suggests blended learning can improve the quality of helping behaviors relative to online-only training.

KSA availability (national program)

In Saudi Arabia, the National Center for Mental Health Promotion (NCMHP) presents "Mental Health First Aid" as an evidence-based, locally and internationally accredited training program.

02

Effects on employee wellbeing

What the strongest evidence supports (most consistent outcomes)

Systematic reviews and meta-analyses consistently show improvements in mental health literacy, knowledge, recognition of symptoms, attitudes, and intentions to provide support after MHFA training.



Case Study 1: Thames Water (United Kingdom)

Context and implementation

- Thames Water integrated MHFA training as part of its broader mental health strategy called Time to Talk. Over 500 employees were trained as Mental Health First Aiders to improve awareness and provide frontline support for colleagues.

Outcomes and benefits

- The company reported a 75% reduction in referrals to its Occupational Health Team for work-related stress, anxiety, and depression over five years, indicating earlier identification and support for employees.
- Mental Health First Aiders became a catalyst for engagement, encouraging staff to talk and seek help early rather than letting issues escalate. This shift contributed towards a healthier workplace culture.
- Company leadership highlighted that the training not only reduced absenteeism and support costs but also promoted a happier and healthier workforce.



Key takeaway for workplace practice

- Embedding MHFA within a strategic framework significantly supports early help-seeking and cultural change across large operational teams.

Case Study 2: Unilever

Context and implementation

Unilever incorporated MHFA training into its comprehensive employee wellbeing strategy. **This included:**

- A tailored MHFA training program for line managers (around 1,600 trained) and a two-day MHFA training for about 250 employees.

Outcomes and benefits

- **Shorter patterns of absence** were reported as line managers became better at noticing and addressing early signs of mental health difficulty.
- Increased awareness allowed employees to **access available support services more efficiently**, facilitating faster and more positive recoveries rather than prolonged absence.
- Unilever's approach combined MHFA with a broader mental health and resilience support system, reinforcing **parity between mental and physical health**.



Key takeaway for workplace practice

- A holistic wellbeing strategy with MHFA as an embedded component can improve early support uptake, reduce absenteeism, and strengthen resilience and recovery.

Summary of Benefits Demonstrated

Across both case studies,
the documented benefits include:

- Improved early identification of distress and better support pathways
- Reduced stress-related referrals or absence when training is supported by systems
- Greater awareness and improved access to support among employees
- Stronger workplace culture around talking about mental health



These real examples show how MHFA can support both individual wellbeing and organizational outcomes when integrated thoughtfully into broader health and safety or wellbeing frameworks.

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Implementing Mental Health First Aiders Effectively

Implementing Mental Health First Aiders Effectively

At Labayh Business, we approach the implementation of Mental Health First Aiders as an organizational practice that requires clarity, structure, and ongoing support. Based on practice insights and evidence, effective implementation includes the following elements:

Assess organizational readiness

Clarify why the organization is introducing Mental Health First Aiders, what gaps they are meant to address, and how the role fits existing wellbeing efforts. Readiness includes leadership buy-in, openness to mental health conversations, and access to follow-up support services.



Define the role clearly from the outset

Set out what Mental Health First Aiders are expected to do and what falls outside their role. Written role descriptions help manage expectations and reduce the risk of role confusion with HR, managers, or clinical services.



Select first aiders thoughtfully

Participation should be voluntary. Suitable candidates tend to be trusted, respected by peers, and comfortable listening without judgment. Diversity in gender, seniority, and departments increases accessibility across the workforce.



Choose training that fits the context

Training should be evidence-informed, culturally relevant, and appropriate for the workplace setting. Refresher sessions and practical scenarios help maintain confidence and skill over time.



Create clear referral and escalation pathways

Mental Health First Aiders need simple, well-communicated pathways for internal and external support. This includes knowing when and how to suggest professional help, and what to do if someone may be at risk.



Provide supervision and support for first aiders

Regular check-ins, peer support sessions, or access to professional supervision help reduce emotional strain and prevent burnout among Mental Health First Aiders themselves.



Integrate the role into workplace systems

Mental Health First Aiders work best when linked to HR policies, wellbeing strategies, health and safety processes, and leadership practices rather than operating in isolation.



Communicate the role clearly to employees

Staff should know who the Mental Health First Aiders are, how to contact them, and what kind of support they can expect. Clear communication builds trust and appropriate use of the role.



Monitor use and review regularly

Track uptake, feedback, and challenges through anonymous feedback, qualitative insights, or simple indicators. Periodic review helps refine the role and adjust support as organizational needs change.



Position the role as part of a broader commitment

Mental Health First Aiders should be presented as one element within a wider approach to workplace wellbeing, alongside leadership behavior, policy, and access to care.



06

Working With Labayh Business

Working With Labayh Business








At Labayh Business,

- we work with organizations that want to move beyond intention and build practical, responsible mental health support at work. Mental Health First Aiders can play a meaningful role when they are introduced with clarity, supported by the right systems, and aligned with wider wellbeing efforts.
- We support organizations at different stages, from exploring whether Mental Health First Aiders are the right fit, to designing implementation frameworks, training pathways, referral systems, and impact measurement approaches. Our work focuses on realistic role design, ethical practice, and alignment with organizational culture and capacity.
- Organizations interested in strengthening early mental health support, reviewing existing MHFA initiatives, or building an integrated workplace wellbeing approach are invited to reach out to Labayh Business to discuss how we can support their goals through research-informed, practice-led guidance.

07

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