# UK startup founders lead the way in prioritising mental health amid rising stress levels



Mental Health Awareness Month, observed in May, serves as a crucial platform for collective dialogue surrounding mental wellbeing. This year, it is particularly poignant as alarming data reveals that 24% of the UK population experiences stress more frequently than not. Furthermore, a growing number of start-up founders report struggling with mental health challenges, with over half experiencing burnout and one in five noting a deterioration in their mental well-being within the past six months.

The impacts of stress are profound and multi-faceted. Chronic stress can lead to a myriad of health problems, including hypertension, heart disease, and psychological issues such as anxiety and depression. These health challenges contribute to what is increasingly recognised as a systemic issue affecting productivity and workplace culture. The consensus is clear: workplaces must cultivate environments that prioritise mental wellbeing, as employee happiness is correlated directly with enhanced performance.

Founders across various sectors have begun to take proactive steps toward embedding mental wellness into their organisational cultures. Clare Martin, Coaching Psychologist and Founder at Goldcrest Training, emphasises the need for a shift from superficial wellbeing initiatives to more profound, evidence-based strategies. She advocates for leaders to model sustainable practices such as setting boundaries and investing time in rest and reflection. This foundational approach stresses that organisational health begins with individual well-being.

Riannon Palmer, Founder and Managing Director at Lem-uhn, shares her journey from experiencing severe burnout in a traditional PR agency to establishing a company that prioritises employee wellbeing. Implementing policies like menstrual leave and flexible hours, she believes that while policies are essential, cultivating a supportive culture is critical. Regular team check-ins are integral to ensuring that employees feel valued and supported, illustrating how work can positively influence mental health.

Kelly Tucker, founder of HR Star Consulting, echoes this sentiment, insisting that wellbeing should be a shared responsibility. By fostering open communication and manageable workloads, she highlights that when team members feel valued, they are more likely to thrive. Tucker's approach underscores the importance of leaders modelling healthy behaviours, creating a ripple effect throughout the organisation.

Indeed, the importance of boundaries has been a common theme among founders. Jenni Donato of Altitude learned this the hard way during the COVID-19 pandemic. She established strict boundaries around working hours to protect her mental health, a strategy she now teaches to other female founders. This proactive stance on mental health not only fosters personal resilience but has also shown to enhance business outcomes.

Sammy Rubin, CEO of YuLife, connects personal wellbeing with organisational success. His approach centres on creating a workplace culture where wellbeing is woven into everyday decisions and interactions. By recognising that a supportive environment is essential for productive work, Rubin champions a philosophy where every leader becomes a Chief Wellbeing Officer, demonstrating the importance of mental health in the business strategy.

This holistic approach aligns with broader trends reflecting a shift in workplace culture towards prioritising mental wellness, also highlighted in research by McKinsey which indicates that companies focused on mental health enjoy significant boosts in retention and innovation. As employers increasingly recognise their ethical and legal obligations to ensure safe, healthy workplaces, strategies for enhancing mental health are becoming integral to organisational success.

Simultaneously, initiatives beyond individual organisations are emerging. A coalition has proposed the first Tuesday in December as 'Wellbeing at Work Day' to spotlight mental health awareness across industries notoriously characterised by high-pressure cultures. This initiative, among others, seeks to create a tangible shift towards prioritising mental wellness within the corporate landscape.

In conclusion, as awareness continues to grow, the onus remains on leaders across all industries to take meaningful action. Prioritising mental health is not merely a trend but a necessity for sustainable business success. As founders share their experiences, it becomes clear that prioritising mental wellbeing can lead to profound benefits—not only for individuals but for the organisations that foster such an environment. As we navigate this landscape, the message is unequivocal: promoting mental health is a shared responsibility and, ultimately, a pathway to greater success for all.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://techround.co.uk/startups/mental-health-awareness-month-founders-prioritise-wellbeing/), [[4]](https://www.wionews.com/entertainment/lifestyle/news-why-mental-wellness-should-be-a-priority-in-the-workplace--mental-health-awareness-month-2023-591590), [[7]](https://extensishr.com/resource/blogs/mental-health-month/)
* Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://techround.co.uk/startups/mental-health-awareness-month-founders-prioritise-wellbeing/), [[3]](https://www.forbes.com/sites/nazbeheshti/2025/05/01/mental-health-awareness-month-demands-more-than-talk---mindful-leadership-is-the-new-corporate-advantage/), [[6]](https://www.advantagehealth.com/post/prioritizing-mental-health-how-companies-can-support-mental-health-month)
* Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://techround.co.uk/startups/mental-health-awareness-month-founders-prioritise-wellbeing/), [[4]](https://www.wionews.com/entertainment/lifestyle/news-why-mental-wellness-should-be-a-priority-in-the-workplace--mental-health-awareness-month-2023-591590), [[5]](https://www.koahealth.com/blog-post/mental-health-awareness-month-creating-a-culture-of-mental-health-in-the-workplace-)
* Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://techround.co.uk/startups/mental-health-awareness-month-founders-prioritise-wellbeing/), [[3]](https://www.forbes.com/sites/nazbeheshti/2025/05/01/mental-health-awareness-month-demands-more-than-talk---mindful-leadership-is-the-new-corporate-advantage/), [[6]](https://www.advantagehealth.com/post/prioritizing-mental-health-how-companies-can-support-mental-health-month)
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* Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://techround.co.uk/startups/mental-health-awareness-month-founders-prioritise-wellbeing/), [[2]](https://www.axios.com/2023/12/06/mental-health-work-day), [[3]](https://www.forbes.com/sites/nazbeheshti/2025/05/01/mental-health-awareness-month-demands-more-than-talk---mindful-leadership-is-the-new-corporate-advantage/)
* Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://techround.co.uk/startups/mental-health-awareness-month-founders-prioritise-wellbeing/), [[2]](https://www.axios.com/2023/12/06/mental-health-work-day), [[4]](https://www.wionews.com/entertainment/lifestyle/news-why-mental-wellness-should-be-a-priority-in-the-workplace--mental-health-awareness-month-2023-591590)
* Paragraph 8: [[1]](https://techround.co.uk/startups/mental-health-awareness-month-founders-prioritise-wellbeing/), [[2]](https://www.axios.com/2023/12/06/mental-health-work-day), [[3]](https://www.forbes.com/sites/nazbeheshti/2025/05/01/mental-health-awareness-month-demands-more-than-talk---mindful-leadership-is-the-new-corporate-advantage/)
* Paragraph 9: [[1]](https://techround.co.uk/startups/mental-health-awareness-month-founders-prioritise-wellbeing/), [[3]](https://www.forbes.com/sites/nazbeheshti/2025/05/01/mental-health-awareness-month-demands-more-than-talk---mindful-leadership-is-the-new-corporate-advantage/), [[5]](https://www.koahealth.com/blog-post/mental-health-awareness-month-creating-a-culture-of-mental-health-in-the-workplace-)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://techround.co.uk/startups/mental-health-awareness-month-founders-prioritise-wellbeing/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.axios.com/2023/12/06/mental-health-work-day> - A coalition of companies and nonprofits is advocating for the first Tuesday in December to be recognized as 'Wellbeing at Work Day' to address mental health in the workplace. This initiative aims to shift the cultural approach towards mental wellness among employees, given the significant impact of mental illness on economic productivity. Spearheaded by the Mental Health Coalition, the launch event featured prominent speakers and a meditation session led by Deepak Chopra. Industries traditionally characterized by intense work cultures are beginning to adopt measures to mitigate employee burnout.
3. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nazbeheshti/2025/05/01/mental-health-awareness-month-demands-more-than-talk---mindful-leadership-is-the-new-corporate-advantage/> - As Mental Health Awareness Month begins, the message to executives is clear: it is no longer enough to talk about mental health — it is time to lead it. In a competitive, uncertain economy, companies that embed mental health into their leadership culture build stronger teams, higher retention, and real business resilience. Research backs this up. According to McKinsey's 2024 Health Institute study, companies that prioritize mental health see four times higher retention, increased productivity, and stronger innovation pipelines.
4. <https://www.wionews.com/entertainment/lifestyle/news-why-mental-wellness-should-be-a-priority-in-the-workplace--mental-health-awareness-month-2023-591590> - Mental wellness should be a priority in the workplace for several reasons. Improved productivity: When employees are mentally well, they are more likely to be productive and focused at work. Reduced healthcare costs: Mental health issues can increase healthcare costs for both employees and employers. Enhanced employee engagement: When employees feel supported and valued, they are more likely to be engaged and committed to their work. Improved workplace culture: Prioritizing mental wellness can help to create a positive workplace culture that prioritizes the well-being of employees. Legal and ethical obligations: Employers have a legal and ethical obligation to provide a safe and healthy workplace for their employees.
5. <https://www.koahealth.com/blog-post/mental-health-awareness-month-creating-a-culture-of-mental-health-in-the-workplace-> - Mental health awareness is just the beginning. In a 2022 survey of 500 business leaders in the UK and US conducted by Koa Health, 75% expect employees' mental wellbeing to improve in 2023 and plan to take action, yet more than half (58%) do not plan to increase spending. To be truly useful in protecting and prioritizing mental wellbeing for an entire workforce, raising awareness must be part of a larger strategy to build a lasting culture of mental health in your workplace.
6. <https://www.advantagehealth.com/post/prioritizing-mental-health-how-companies-can-support-mental-health-month> - May is Mental Health Month, a time to raise awareness and promote mental wellbeing. In today's fast-paced and often demanding work environments, prioritizing mental health is more crucial than ever. Companies play a pivotal role in fostering a culture of support and understanding around mental health issues. Here are some strategies that businesses can implement to promote mental health not just in May, but throughout the year.
7. <https://extensishr.com/resource/blogs/mental-health-month/> - Employees’ mental well-being has a direct impact on the health of the overall organization. Employees with self-reported fair or poor mental health have approximately 12 unplanned absences per year (compared to 2.5 for all other workers), amounting to roughly $48 billion in lost productivity. And it’s not a small amount of staff feeling burdened: Gallup’s State of the Global Workplace Report 2023 found that employee stress continues to reach record levels, with 44% of employees worldwide claiming they experienced a lot of stress the previous day.