

International SOS  
**Foundation**

**CHIEF  
HEALTH  
OFFICER  
2030**

ADDRESSING THE EMPLOYEE  
HEALTH NEEDS OF THE FUTURE



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# KEY POINTS

**COVID-19 was a wake-up call – for everyone**

**Health and wellness is a broad issue that goes beyond COVID-19 – all aspects must be addressed**

**Addressing health and wellness meaningfully requires C-Suite leadership**

**The Chief Health Officer is best placed – and highly trusted – to deliver on health and wellness commitments**

**Global organisations need to be able to tap into regional health expertise seamlessly, especially in times of crisis**

**Chief Health Officers can be internal appointments, external providers, or a combination of the two**

## **World Economic Forum**

“Workforce wellbeing is a key component to ensuring a resilient and sustainable business. The COVID-19 pandemic has made this a priority for executives. The role of the Chief Health Officer within the C-Suite will be increasingly crucial for all corporations and across industries.”

**Genya Dana**

Head, Platform for Shaping the Future of Health & Healthcare  
World Economic Forum

# FOREWORD

As part of our commitment to thought leadership, the International SOS Foundation decided to take a closer look at the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for organisations.

We began with a survey to measure how organisations saw their responsibility for employee health and wellness developing over the next ten years. We also sought expert opinion to complete the picture.

The concept of employee health and wellness is no longer a matter simply of avoiding accidents. Today it is much broader, encompassing employees' mental health and more. Increased activity is anticipated in future years to meet these growing needs. An organisation's Duty of Care also extends beyond employees to the wider community. Indeed, larger organisations are increasingly part of the global discussion on delivery of health to all.

We also looked at health solutions and, in particular, the role of the Chief Health Officer. Many organisations already appreciate the huge value a CHO can bring. This too reflects the growing involvement of the C-suite in dealing with health and wellness, and other pressing issues. The CHO is ideally suited to deliver the high level of health solutions and support now expected within organisations. We consider the skills required for this vital role and different ways of fulfilling this need.

Organisations face many challenges in delivering health and wellness in the years ahead. We hope this paper acts as a prompt. The International SOS Foundation will also continue to provide training and support to assist CHOs and others as this journey continues.

## **Pascal Rey-Herme**

Co-Founder and Group Medical Director  
International SOS



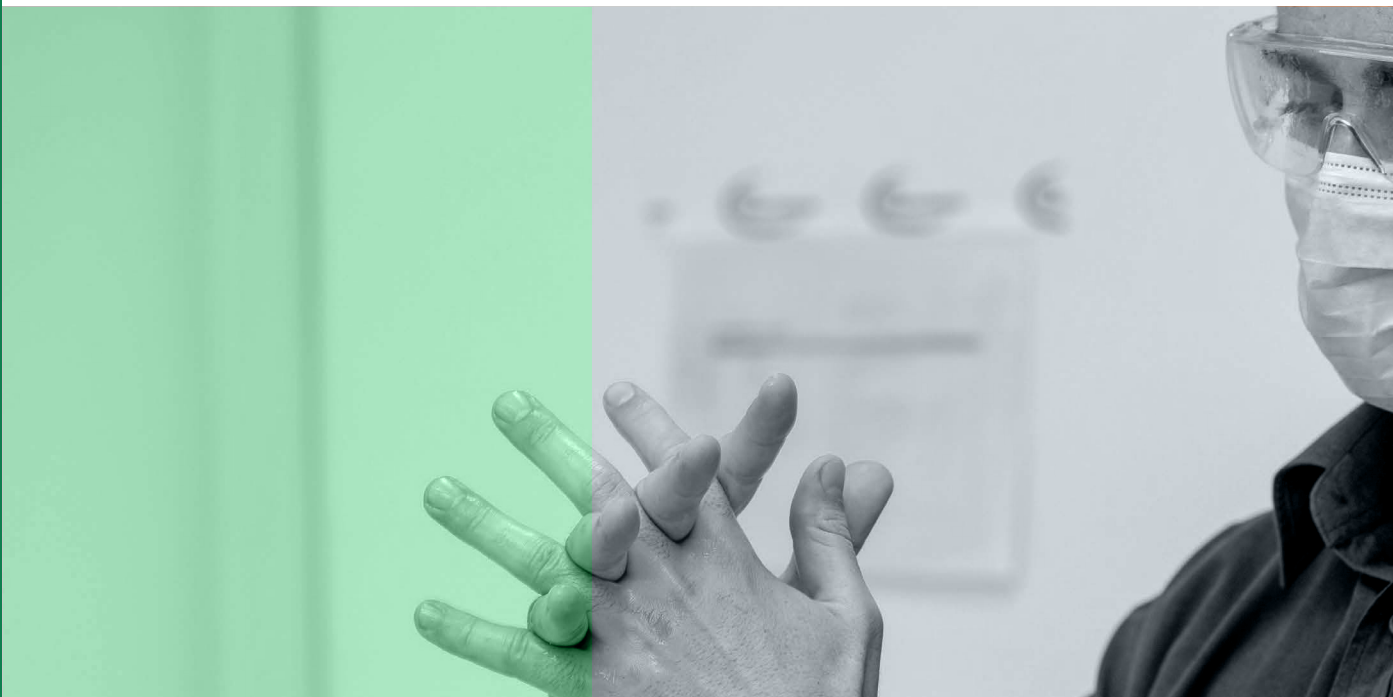
# INTRODUCTION

This paper captures the thinking surrounding the response to COVID-19 and how best to prepare for the long journey towards healthier employees and communities.

This paper captures current thinking surrounding the response to COVID-19 and how best to prepare for the long journey towards healthier employees and communities.

This thinking was captured in a survey conducted by the International SOS Foundation. It looked at the likely impact of the pandemic on health and wellness within organisations, both now and over the next decade. The survey was targeted at those who organise, influence, or are responsible for, their organisation's health management, policies and procedures. We refer to these respondents as 'employer health professionals'.

We also consulted experts around the world to obtain their in-depth views and reactions to these constantly changing events; this included a selection of International SOS Global Health Advisors working across



multiple jurisdictions – consulting in both large multinationals and small-medium size enterprises. In addition, we reference a number of published studies from trusted authorities on employee health.

The COVID-19 pandemic was clearly a huge wake up call. Decision makers in both the public and private sector saw that whatever preparations might have been in place, many went out of the window as unknown challenges could quickly arise with significant consequences. A more flexible and agile approach to health risk management was needed.

Preparedness is needed beyond the immediacy of the pandemic. Many health matters, including mental health awareness, are calling for pressing attention. Chronic diseases like diabetes and cancers require a strategic approach towards health prevention.

Other global issues that impact profoundly upon health – such as climate change – require urgent action too.

Many leaders had already started on this journey: the pandemic has simply magnified their speed and level of response. Others have begun to radically rethink how to deal with health issues with a more ‘clinical’ eye. As part of this, a Chief Health Officer (CHO) is now seen as a critical part of an organisation’s leadership team. We look at the holistic benefits a CHO can bring to any organisation – no matter the size – and how this value can be delivered.

As welcome as it is, the COVID-19 vaccine is not the end of the current crisis. There is still much to do. This paper aims to help all organisations – large or small, global or local – plan their next steps.



## THE CHO 2030 SURVEY

Our survey findings represent responses from more than 100 professionals who are responsible for employee health across the world: with representation from those working in the Americas, Asia Pacific, Middle East, Africa and Europe. More than one third of respondents hold Health, Medical, HSE or Chief Health Officer roles. The survey took place during the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2020.

# THE COVID-19 WAKE UP CALL

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a longstanding and widespread global impact. Its speed and extent of transmission were a shock to all. What began as worrying reports of a potential new virus affecting a few countries, has gradually developed into a global pandemic that touched us all. Our streets were soon empty, everything changed, lives altered course.

The pandemic became the absolute priority within governments, health authorities and the media. It still is. The possibility of repeated waves of COVID-19 remains. Emergence of new variants in some parts of the world, coupled with continuing identification of other

zoonotic illnesses of concern, reminds us that infectious diseases are constantly evolving. Never has the primacy of sound public health measures been more apparent. This has led to urgent calls to action on many fronts.

Businesses and other organisations have been equally affected. Many have faced major interruptions to business continuity, with disrupted supply chains and limited access to consumers. There has also been an unprecedented human element to address: employees, families and communities have all been affected. Offices and project sites, once bastions of safety, are now potential sites of infectious disease transmission.

## Health requirements that have increased most in complexity in last 12 months



The need to act was recognised by employer health professionals very early on, as our survey shows. Unsurprisingly 'Infectious Disease Control' topped the list of health requirements deemed to have increased in complexity, with 'Mental Health Support' in second place. 'Business Continuity' and 'Regulatory Compliance' shared third place.

## Ready for Action

Organisations had to respond to the pandemic quickly and on numerous fronts, across functions and across geographies. Some procedures were already in place – a plan, for example, to deal with an outbreak of avian flu, or generalised systems to address a threat to business continuity. These, when present, were a helpful starting point for dealing with COVID-19. But this was not enough. The behaviour of the virus was hard to fathom, the size and speed of information made it profoundly difficult to navigate. And there was tremendous debate in the scientific community: many answers were as yet unknown.

Slowly, devoid of many national or international guidelines to follow, organisations adopted procedures to remove or reduce the risk of infection in the workplace through sanitation, cleaning, social distancing and other measures. As evidence evolved, many adopted their own approach to assess risk. Some took clinical advice early and adopted mask usage. They advised on shielding, working from home, commuting and other types of travel. Once the initial wave had hit, they evolved strategies for reoccupation of premises, and some found

space to address the wide range of physical and mental health issues predicted to arise from the changed circumstances.

There was much to deal with in a short space of time. A common challenge faced by organisations related to employee testing and vaccinations. A comprehensive business survey, conducted by Arizona State University's College of Health Solutions, found that nearly 70% of employers in the United States and UK were performing COVID-19 testing for their employees. Furthermore, nearly 9 out of 10 planned to encourage or require vaccination for their employees.<sup>1</sup>

Take a major UK retailer with 300 food stores. In the early part of its outbreak there was a severe lack of access to testing, coupled with limited capacity for contact tracing, and little government guidance geared to business. The retailer needed to keep its stores open in accordance with government restrictions yet adapt to massively increased online ordering following the announcement of lockdown measures. While ensuring its internet delivery warehouses remained fully operational, it had to ensure all employees remained safe.

As the health system became quickly stretched, the company very quickly put in place several steps. It arranged clinical briefings to the Board, safety messaging videos for employees, advice on face coverings, and risk assessments of the head office and main online delivery warehouse. This was supplemented by further control measures at the warehouse. These included temperature screening, rapid COVID-19 antigen screening for suspected cases, and access to in-house PCR testing. The stores

and warehouses continued to operate, and all were confident that their work environment was safe and secure.

Different organisations faced very different challenges. Some had to offer information and reassurance to employees across the world. In another company, this involved preparing educational webinars in different languages. These explained the latest research, government directives and essential advice, using credible experts with wide-ranging experience in global health to guide the discussion. Subtitles were provided for the hearing impaired, and recordings were available on the company's intranet for ease of access. As COVID-19 vaccinations became available, these sessions evolved, providing frank and transparent independent advice to employees who needed reassurance and support in making their own health decisions. Alongside the individual and community benefit, this has had a profound impact on employee morale and willingness to go to work.



## Local Community Outreach

Yet more challenges faced those with operations in developing countries. Where government guidance in the developed world was slim in the early phases, there was almost nothing to guide companies in the developing world. However, many businesses had an advantage, due to a longstanding presence in the country which often included supporting health. Many organisations were able to harness local community health programmes they had established and build on these in response to the pandemic.

## Help Provided

Given the amount of action needed in response to the pandemic, many organisations called upon external service providers. The scope of work involved can be illustrated by looking at the services delivered by one such provider in 2020.

### International SOS:



Assisted over **73,000 COVID-19 related cases.**



Expanded its global TeleConsultation network to **32 countries.**



Augmented its assistance network with **1,108 COVID-19 testing facilities across 135 countries.**



Spanning across **153 countries**, performed **246 air ambulance movements for COVID-19 patients** and **631 for other patients**, totalling **9,690 flight hours**, and operated **32 charters with 2,000 passengers.**

## Case Study

Freeport-McMoRan is a leading international mining company. In Indonesia, where it has significant operations, Freeport has undertaken an extensive sustainable health programme, both in industrial areas and peri-mining local communities. Working with the local Community Health Development department, NGOs, and its external medical services provider, it has developed a comprehensive programme addressing Malaria, HIV/AIDS, TB, mother and child health, and clean water.

With the arrival of COVID 19, Freeport was able to build on these foundations and initiate a comprehensive COVID 19 programme to protect the workforce and surrounding community. Expanded medical services and public health measures were established promptly at the start of the pandemic and have adapted to changes along the way. Mass screening of employees started in early 2020 and has continued in a consistent and thorough manner throughout the pandemic. Freeport and International SOS have worked closely together to run a government-approved testing centre with two PCR machines. These have assisted not only those on the Freeport site but also the medical facilities in the surrounding areas. By May 2021, 152,000 antigen tests, 70,000 antibody tests and 48,000 PCR tests have been performed at the Freeport Screening Centres. Daily reviews of the positive cases and any epidemiological clusters are actioned immediately for containment of the virus and to avoid further spread. This has led to a comprehensive contact tracing and isolation programme.

The inpatient healthcare services have been expanded to accommodate the potential increased need for isolation beds, specialist care, oxygen and ventilators. A new inpatient facility has been established in the lowlands of a mining site to respond to an increase need for isolation, acute hospital admissions and avoid unnecessary movement of infectious patients. The highlands previously established healthcare facilities have been expanded to accommodate increased need for isolation cases. The treatment of COVID 19 patients has been a great success with Freeport and International SOS supply chains supporting access to the latest evidence-based medication.

Public health awareness campaigns have been extensive using educational video conferences, television, radio and written material. Furthermore, identification and management of high-risk workforce based on annual medical check-up and Non-Communicable Diseases surveillance, help Freeport in reducing mortality and utilization of hospital beds.

Beginning in 2021, Freeport and International SOS are working together to support a large-scale vaccination programme of those affiliated with Freeport-McMoran within Indonesia. It is predicted that approximately 30,000 people will receive two vaccinations from the International SOS medical services affiliated with Freeport-McMoran. Public Health teams are working diligently with the community to alleviate vaccine hesitancy, improve understanding and compliance of the vaccination programme.

## Reacting to the Unknowns

### Scope

COVID-19 is not the only infectious disease to have struck in recent years. Outbreaks of SARS, MERS-CoV and Ebola caused significant regional and international disturbance and economic loss in regional pockets. But COVID-19 has long-lasting effects, due to the sheer scope and magnitude of the economic and societal disturbance it has caused. The speed and extent of the disease came as a shock to many.

Many organisations are aware of the potential damage a major industrial accident could cause. Some in certain industries had specifically prepared for pandemic threats. Few, if any, had however considered the likelihood of an infectious disease outbreak on this scale, lasting for so long.

For many it was the first time that the business continuity was so profoundly affected by an ongoing health issue. The risk of rapid spread among employees became a reality. Procurement, food supplies and

transportation all posed challenges on a scale not seen before. Many organisations scrambled to respond.

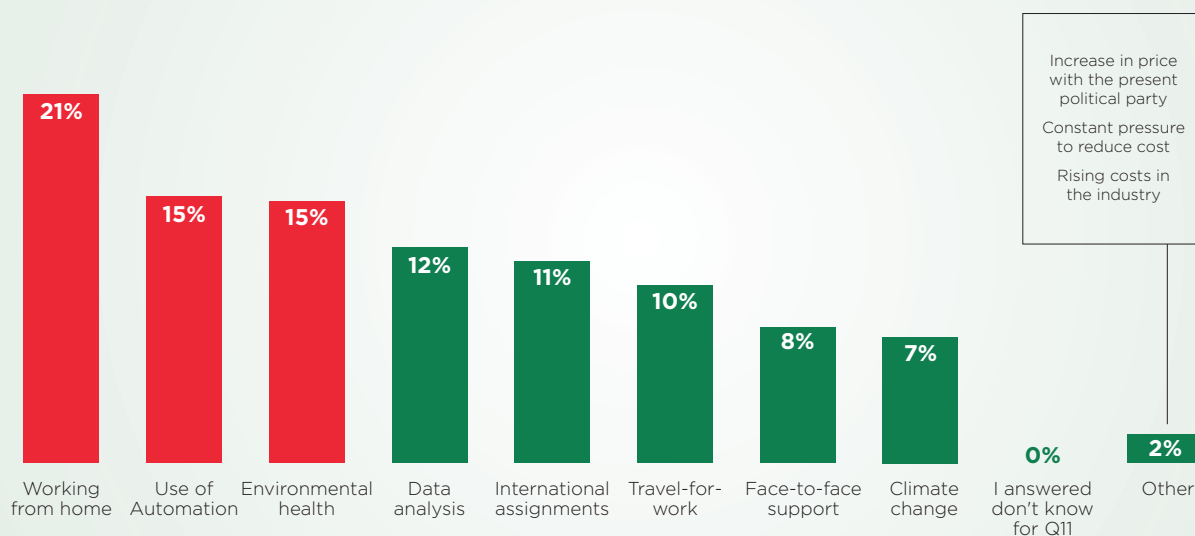
### Working from Home

Many new and unknown challenges appeared. One of these, seen in our survey, related to working from home. Respondents were asked, 'which of a list of factors did they think would influence their future investment in health?'

Working from home was selected by the most (21%) respondents. This is likely to be due to a combination of factors which impact both physical and mental wellbeing.

Many missed the presence of work colleagues. While people are now used to connecting via Zoom and other digital pathways, these can limit the opportunity for informal conversations and spontaneity. People are also spending far longer in front of their screens and taking fewer breaks. This isolation and lack of support can be stressful. The absence of input can be particularly challenging for those at the beginning of their careers.

### The factors perceived to influence an increase in employer health complexity over the next 10 years



The absence of a journey to and from work removes the natural break between work and home life, and that ability to 'switch off' at the end of the working day. Having to share homes with partners also working from home, plus home-schooling children, can add further tension. This is exacerbated where households are living in confined spaces. It has been widely reported that domestic turbulence and relationship difficulties have increased during the pandemic. Disruption to sleep patterns, lack of exercise and changed eating habits have taken a physical toll too. While for some, this new way of working allowed for more flexibility and family time, for many employees this led to longer work hours. This connects to recent studies showing that working 55 or more hours per week is associated with an estimated 35% higher risk of a stroke, and a 17% higher risk of dying from ischemic heart disease<sup>2</sup>.

### The Only Certainty is Uncertainty

The ramifications of 'long COVID', and knock-on effects such as mental ill health, have yet to fully unfold. With animal viruses entering the human ecosystem, the risk of a novel pathogen gaining traction in future remains. The global community may discuss adjusting

its approach to global health security, however much uncertainty remains for businesses in particular. Organisations must now prepare for the inevitable outbreaks, or even pandemics. Meanwhile there remain unanswered questions around many aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as individual vaccine efficacy, likely sequelae from variants of concern, and the potential introduction of vaccine passports.

Some people have found the pandemic particularly difficult. Many have faced uncertainty about the future, income reduction or job insecurity. Some socio-economic groups have been particularly affected. Those who have had COVID-19, or lost a loved one to it, have had even more to cope with. Many businesses, both large and small, are unsure if they will survive if the economic downturn continues. The threat of a future wave remains in many countries.

For many, the impact of COVID-19 has been extreme, both on a personal and societal level. However, our survey shows that the disruption cause by COVID has changed mindsets. Leaders of organisations know this could happen again, at any time.



Covid was  
a wake-up  
call – for  
everyone

# BEYOND COVID

## A Wider View

Understandably, for many businesses pandemic preparedness is now high in the list of priorities. But COVID-19 was not an isolated incident. Organisations across the world face a variety of different interconnected challenges to future-proof against.



## Health and Wellness Redefined

At one time, addressing 'health' within many organisations tended to focus on avoiding accidents, ensuring a safe working environment, and preventing occupational illness. It is true that in recent years safety standards have increased in organisations across the world. Today, the modern organisation faces different challenges. The economic transition in many countries has led to rises in levels of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity and other conditions caused by changes in lifestyle, lack of physical activity, and access to unhealthy food. Mental health has been gaining attention too. Wellness is not merely the absence of disease: it is about having a balanced state of physical and mental harmony.

For many organisations, this broader definition of health and wellness has evolved beyond the individual to encapsulate the wider community. Just as businesses have evolved a collective responsibility towards environmental sustainability in recent years, so health is increasingly becoming a business responsibility. This is entwined in the concepts of Duty of Care and the various targets within the Sustainable Development Goals that touch upon health. These now underpin many organisations' values.

While this journey had already begun in many organisations, COVID-19 has accelerated the need to do more. The fact that people with chronic conditions such as obesity, heart disease and diabetes were far more at risk of death from COVID-19 has focused the mind for many. Organisations have faced an increased duty to help people address such issues and adopt healthier lifestyles. Nowhere has this been seen more starkly during the pandemic than in India, where the increasing

rates of non-communicable disease has been known for many years. The large numbers of employee hospitalisations and deaths reported in high-risk groups, many of whom are young, has shaken companies. Many leaders are starting to wonder if they could do more to prevent these conditions.

This awareness of the inter-relationship of health issues is here to stay.

### Aligning with Public Health Initiatives

The pandemic has placed a tremendous burden on healthcare systems and on economic and social structures. Rebuilding public health infrastructure is regarded as a priority across the world. Many increasingly see an emerging role for business in these efforts. In many countries, they are a key part of the solution.

Many businesses have already responded. In the US a number of companies are offering the government assistance in dealing with the pandemic. Microsoft is opening up its largely empty office campus in the State of Washington as a vaccination centre; Starbucks is assigning workers from its operations and analytics departments to help design vaccination sites; and Amazon is offering to assist with communication and technology<sup>3</sup>. Countries like Indonesia have opened up vaccination availability to businesses who can assist in the roll-out. A great many companies are now participating actively in the important health communication and education task that lies ahead.

The need for such collaboration on health has in recent years led to the development of programmes to facilitate business buy-in. The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health has set up an online forum and curriculum

to help business leaders better understand the foundation of public health<sup>4</sup>. This 'Culture of Health for Business' approach focuses on improving health for an organisation's consumers, community, environment and employees. A recent report by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the de Beaumont Foundation has further developed this, highlighting the need for businesses to align with public health provision, stating:

'The [US] nation has learned that a robust and effective public health infrastructure is no longer a "nice-to-have" but rather a "must-have" component of a healthy and sustainable American economy. The moment has arrived for leaders in business and public health to seize this opportunity to come together in support of a stronger public health infrastructure for America'. It proposed 'seven practical steps that businesses can take to strengthen partnerships and improve the health of their employees, communities, and the nation'. These include improving the health and well-being of employees and promoting healthy communities<sup>5</sup>.

### Global Co-Operation Called For

COVID-19 has highlighted the need for the international community to address a wide range of issues. The findings in the report of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response are stark:

'COVID-19 exposed the extent to which pandemic preparedness was limited and disjointed, leaving health systems overwhelmed when actually confronted by a fast-moving and exponentially spreading virus<sup>6</sup>.

COVID-19 has highlighted the need to address a wide range of issues, across the globe. The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2021<sup>7</sup> states:

'The immediate human and economic cost of COVID-19 is severe. It threatens to scale back years of progress on reducing poverty and inequality and to further weaken social cohesion and global cooperation. Job losses, a widening digital divide, disrupted social interactions, and abrupt shifts in markets could lead to dire consequences and lost opportunities for large parts of the global population.'

The WEF report further points out that the world has faced many threats in the

past which must continue to be managed. These include cyberattacks, weapons of mass destruction and climate change. It is prescient that infectious disease risk was top on the list in 2021 – yet hardly featured in the previous five reports. Clearly perceptions of risk on global health security matters ebbs and flows.

Similarly, in response to COVID, the WHO has stated: 'The world cannot afford repeated disasters on the scale of COVID-19, whether they are triggered by the next pandemic, or from mounting environmental damage and climate change. Going back to "normal" is not good enough.' WHO seeks to create 'a healthier, fairer and greener world....by shaping the way we live, work and consume<sup>8</sup>.'



The WHO diagram illustrates the interrelationship it sees between SDG3 and the other goals

<https://www.who.int/health-topics/sustainable-development-goals>

The International SOS Risk Outlook Report 2021 likewise notes the potential risk of security and geopolitical threats. It further warns that, 'The singular focus on COVID-19 will create risk blind spots' including, 'wider environmental issues: extreme weather events, natural disasters and climatic changes such as extreme temperatures and pollution.' The risk of missing non-COVID related health issues is another potential blind spot noted in the report<sup>9</sup>.

## Addressing these issues as a whole may avoid blind spots and maximise on any health co-benefits that exist.

These risks viewed as a collective have been known about for some time. Clearly the pandemic has radically increased awareness that these risks can very quickly turn into reality. It is also increasingly recognised that all these issues are interrelated.

In 2015 the United Nations set out its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 17 goals included alleviating poverty, hunger and inequalities, promoting health and wellbeing, economic growth and climate change. It is now recognised that these goals are very much interconnected. For example, many actions have a clear impact on health: Climate change can cause drought or flooding; that in turn can impact workers and the workplace. The WHO states, with reference to health and wellbeing (SDG3), 'Almost all of the other 16 goals are related to health or their achievement will contribute to health indirectly.'

Addressing these as a whole may avoid blind spots and maximise on any health co-benefits that exist.

As well as these global issues being interconnected, the pressure for change is coming from many other internal and external sources – from citizens through

to governments. The part businesses have to play is being increasingly recognised by employees, consumers and investors. Business leaders themselves are facing up to this new reality.

According to a KPMG CEO Outlook 2020 Special Edition on COVID-19, around two-thirds (65%) of CEOs say that the public is looking to businesses to fill the void on societal challenges. At the same time, 76 % said they had a personal responsibility to be a 'leader for change on societal issues.' For example, following the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, 81% either publicly announced new anti-racism measures or planned to do so<sup>10</sup>.

Pressure is also emerging from investors. In 2019, the Harvard Business Review (HBR) looked at whether investors were taking account of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues. An analysis of interviews with 70 executives in 43 global institutional investing firms, included the world's three biggest asset managers (BlackRock, Vanguard, and State Street). It found that 'ESG was almost universally top of mind for these executives.' Black Rock's CEO, Larry Fink in his annual letter to CEOs in 2018 had pre-empted this view when he wrote, 'To prosper over time, every company must not only deliver financial performance, but also show how it makes a positive contribution to society<sup>11</sup>.'

Despite the economic downturn caused by the pandemic, these broad issues will move up the corporate agenda. Due to the pandemic a focus on health has certainly emerged too. Health in the workplace work is no longer simply about safety. It is part of a much wider approach, encompassing health and wellness in the world at large. There is clearly a growing need for organisations to take a wider approach and put in place risk management, business continuity and sustainability strategies to address human capital risks more effectively, both inside and outside the workplace.

## Rethinking and Reimagining the Sustainability Report

A great many organisations already report their progress towards the SDGs: to positively showcase the efforts they have made, to enhance brand and reputation, or in some cases to allay criticism. Increasingly incentives to adopt – and report – sustainability initiatives come from stakeholders. Investors, customers, suppliers, and local communities are adding to the pressure for companies to act responsibly and report progress. The ‘purpose’ of a company is moving away from simply producing profits to creating long term value for society. We feel health will increasingly form a part of this value creation.

The 2019 HBR report mentioned earlier further concluded that Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) issues are becoming ‘top of mind’ for the executives of global institutional investing firms. As those corporate leaders ‘will soon be held accountable by shareholders for ESG performance’ there is a growing need to ‘provide investors with integrated financial and ESG reports.’

The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) adds a further incentive to report. GRI is an independent, international organisation that has developed standards for sustainability reporting. GRI 403 now specifically deals with occupational health and safety. It recognises that ‘Healthy and safe work conditions involve both prevention of physical and mental harm, and promotion of workers’ health.’ It sets out detailed parameters on how this can be measured and reported<sup>12</sup>.

Many tools and training facilities are available to support these activities. For example, The International SOS Foundation offers a programme on “Sustainability Management & Reporting for the Occupational Health & Safety Practitioner.”<sup>13</sup> Designed for occupational health and safety practitioners and sustainability specialists. It aims to help them align and embed their workforce health and safety management and monitoring activities within their organisations’ sustainability strategies.



Health and  
wellness  
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## COVAX COOPERATION

An excellent example of the need for global collaboration is COVAX. This is an initiative led by the WHO that aims to secure 6 billion doses of vaccine for poorer countries. Not only is that vital for the well-being of those who live in those countries, it is vital for everyone else. As is so often said, until we are all safe, no one is safe. Achieving these aims will require cooperation between countries and across the supply chain. Again, this is both a challenge and an opportunity for businesses.

**“We used to say every business will be a digital business, but today we say every business will be a health business.”**

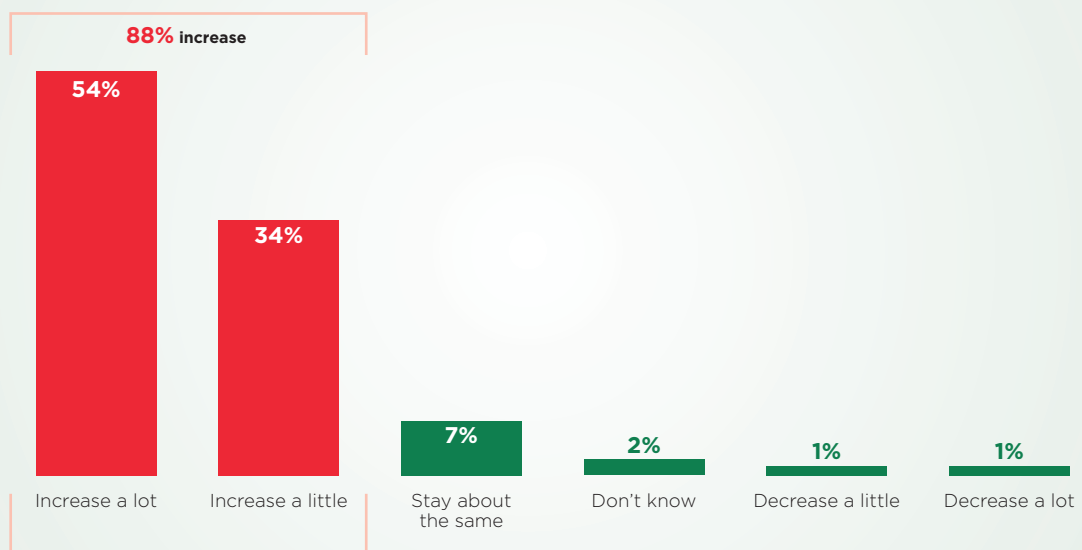
**Gianfranco Casati**  
Chief executive for Growth Markets, Accenture<sup>14</sup>

## A Longer View

The range of issues facing organisations today not only requires a wider perspective, it also requires a long-term approach. Many commentators are now referring to the ‘COVID Decade’.

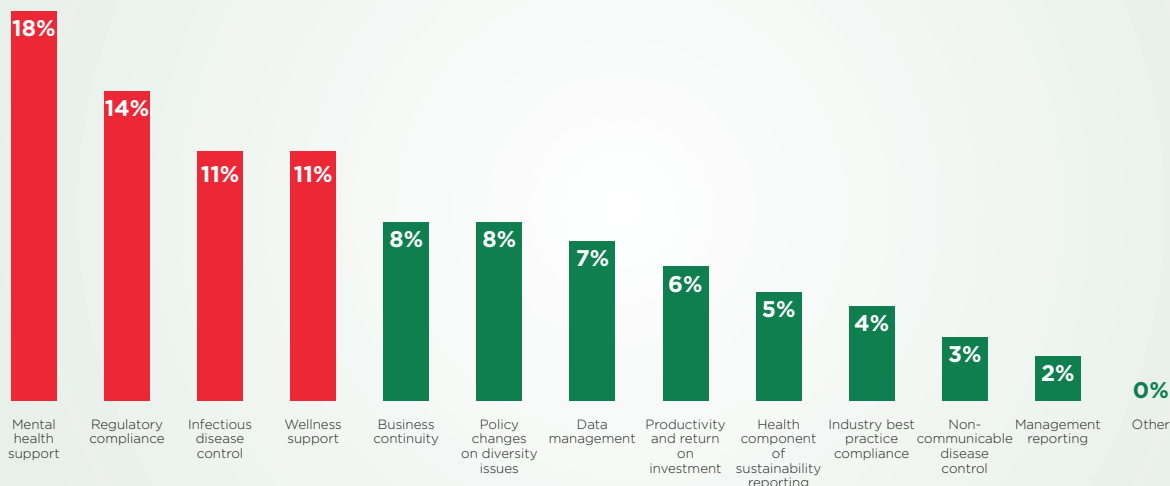
Our survey shed an interesting light on how organisations view infectious diseases - and other health issues - evolving over the next 10 years. The vast majority (88%) see the health requirements of their organisations continuing to increase in complexity, with just over half (54%) viewing them as increasing a lot.

### Anticipated change in complexity of health requirements over the next 10 years



Respondents were also asked to select the three specific requirements they saw increasing.

## Health requirements expected to increase most in complexity in the next 10 years

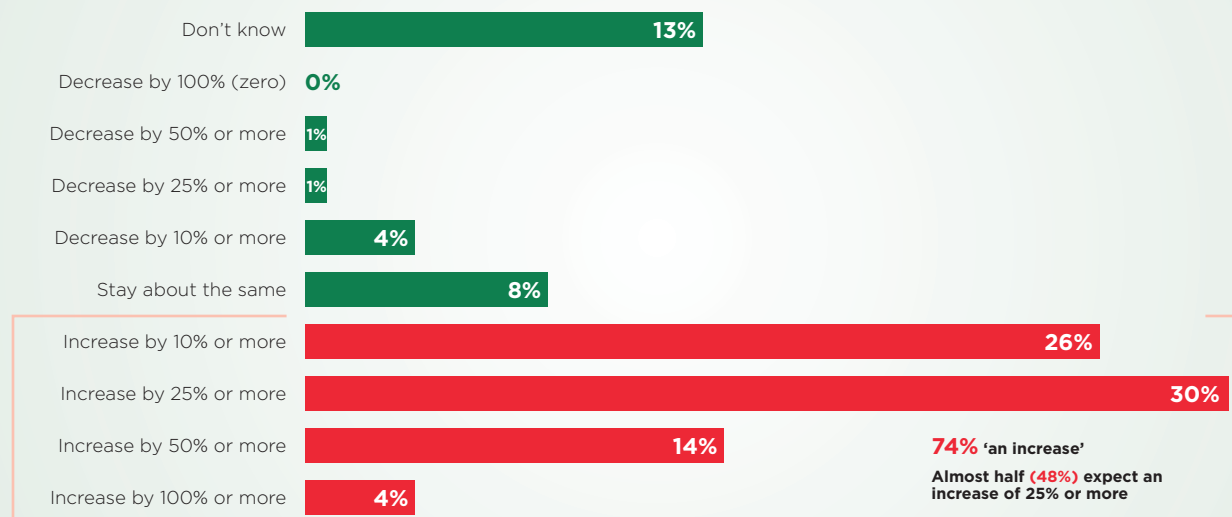


The high scores for infection control, health and wellness no doubt reflect the pandemic's impact on the public perception of the importance of public health, and an acceptance that much remains to be done. It is interesting that mental health support was in top position with 18%, coinciding with research findings that the mental health impact of the pandemic has been severe and long lasting. Of course, these issues have existed long before the pandemic. However, the pandemic has clearly added further impetus for action.

## Increased investment

In turn all these activities will require a significant increase in investment. Nearly three quarters of respondents believe their organisation's investment in health will increase over the next 10 years, with nearly half seeing this at a level of 25% or more. These are significant sums, reinforcing the clear message that serious and long-lasting change is anticipated in the way organisations feel a responsibility for, and start to embrace, health and wellness as a strategic investment.

## Expected change in investment in organisational health over next 10 years



## Agreeing the Rules

How societies will operate post COVID is the subject of much debate. How will people travel? How will they gather? Will there be international agreements, national regulations, or simply sets of guidelines in place? Will health certifications become the norm in international travel? Will they enter the workplace as an agreeable return to operations strategy? Many, including those who responded to our survey, anticipate an increase in regulatory compliance. Certain industries are used to high levels of regulation, others might find the prospect less welcome. Some might see the issue as one for governments to deal with, something they can ignore. Whatever their viewpoint, organisations recognise that these issues are going to start to directly affect their employees, and very quickly.

## Health Certificates and Vaccines

There is currently much debate around 'health certificates' which will facilitate travel. Here passengers will voluntarily upload their COVID-19 test results from a validated laboratory before departure, onto a digital health pass such as the AOKPass<sup>15</sup>. Airlines and border officials will be able to scan the digital data to confirm that passengers are free of the virus, or vaccinated, allowing them to reduce or adjust quarantine time. Efforts are underway to standardise this verification system. How this will be regulated in practice remains to be seen. And how quickly can this all be achieved? Rules affecting international border movements can take years to agree, but these systems need to be introduced within a very short time frame.

Vaccines raise many questions too.

Which vaccines will be authorised? By which organisations? Will vaccinations be mandatory? Will there be exclusions? Will all people be eligible? What about foreign nationals? Are certain occupations going to be eligible once high-risk groups are vaccinated? Once vaccinated, can a person then travel to another country where that vaccine is not recognised? These questions continue.

## Contact Tracing

Contact tracing is another complex area that has confused organisations. When the pandemic hit, in some countries companies were faced with gaps in the local public health response; they had to supplement their local health authorities' capacities in contact tracing. This required a level of health expertise many companies had never previously appreciated. More recently, with the development of digital apps in some countries, citizens can voluntarily sign up to a service that tracks their movements via their phone, alerting them if they had been close to known infected people or disease hot spots. This type of advanced digital contact tracing could become a requirement to enter large venues, buildings, airports, or public transport hubs. The various ethical and medical confidentiality issues inherent with such a technology have required thoughtful analysis.

Prior to 9/11, airport screening was very lax and inconsistent. Post 9/11 we quickly adjusted to presenting our IDs, taking off our shoes and minimising liquids taken onto flights. Similarly, we can expect further significant changes in the way we travel post COVID. Agreeing the details could be quite a challenge. Organisations will need to be aware of these rules as they emerge and be able to advise their people accordingly. Again, this is a theme becoming highly topical for the C-Suite.

## Focus on Mental Health

Mental health awareness has been gaining attention for many years prior to the pandemic. In recent years, the impact of mental health issues within workplaces has noticeably increased. With work firmly established a key risk factor, across industries employers have increasingly realised that their Duty of Care extends to the mental wellbeing of employees.

Prior to COVID-19 it was estimated that at any one time in the European workforce as many as 20% of people had a mental health condition. One study put this at a cost of €617b per annum. This is a combination of the costs of absenteeism, reduced productivity and treatment<sup>16</sup>.

Mental health can affect productivity in several ways: It can affect concentration, cause difficulty in reasoning and prioritising. It can take longer to do a task or that task might be put off altogether. Mental health issues can also have an indirect impact on staff motivation and morale, job satisfaction and staff turnover.

And then came the pandemic. As we have noted, many pressures added to the mental health burden. These include the impact of long COVID, longer hours, the blurring of work-life balance, and the pressures of working from home. The stress on the health system also made it more difficult to access support services.

According to the International SOS Risk Outlook Predictions for 2021, almost one in three risk professionals saw mental health

issues as likely to cause a decrease in employee productivity. Experts also predicted that organisations could be faced with more employees on sick leave due to mental health issues than COVID-19 symptoms over the course of 2021.

The good news is that organisations are responding. There is better understanding of the issue and more honest conversations are being had. The stigma associated with mental health has decreased and people are more willing to seek treatment. Dr Rodrigo Rodriguez-Fernandez, Global Medical Director of Non-communicable Disease and Workplace Wellness at International SOS makes this observation: “Organisations used to say, ‘We’re not in the business of health’ and healthcare was left to the state or government. Now, because we work in our homes and there are blurred lines, they clearly understand you can’t separate an employee’s private life from their work life. The Duty of Care has changed in employers’ eyes and they’re recognising the workplace is a place that can be conducive to good health.”

This is confirmed by our survey. It found that mental health was top of the list of services respondents would like their healthcare provider to expand into. The need for input to support those working from home was specifically mentioned. However, mental health is a complex subject and many managers often feel ill-equipped to respond. This is one area where many increasingly seek the expertise of internal experts and/ or external service providers.

### Tips for Overcoming ‘Pandemic Fatigue’

1

Take steps to check in individually with every employee.

2

Make sure people have and are aware of secure routes for reporting their mental health issues.

3

Allow and encourage employees to take breaks.

4

Consider the information employees are receiving.

5

Provide employees with the tools to help them, understanding the level of personal responsibility which must be encouraged.

## Case Study

A consultancy firm was going through a merger. Senior managers noticed that morale and motivation among some employees was decreasing and this was reflected in higher turnover rates. They decided to embark on a programme to improve mental health and wellbeing.

Those embarking on the design of the programme realised the importance of having a robust planning phase before they launched any activities. Part of this planning phase was to understand what their employees both needed and wanted within a mental health and wellbeing programme. This was done by conducting an employee survey and a series of focus groups with key stakeholders. These stakeholders were involved very early on in the process to gain from their inputs; it also helped them feel ownership towards the programme. This led to a 12-month programme with the following components:

- Six weekly sessions led by mental health experts, with 20 minutes at the end for dialogue and discussion that associates could attend live, by Skype, or by phone.
- Videos of the presentations, available for remote viewing from the company's intranet
- Weekly educational e-mails with supplemental information.
- Additional topics, including kindness, happiness, purpose, mindfulness, depression and anxiety, social support, how to talk to kids about mental health, and preparing for stressors of the upcoming holiday season.
- Quiet rooms, available for meditation and reflection at the company's main offices.

Critically, the firm's leadership was actively involved. The CEO was even willing to share his own mental health story.

The programme was a success. The company's Wellness Manager and her HR colleagues noted how positive employees were about the programme and how many open conversations it stimulated. For example, one employee shared how much he struggled after a family member's suicide. Another talked about his own suicidal thoughts. Some of the employees spontaneously developed support groups of their own.

As a result, there was a clear improvement in employee retention and engagement rates.

# PLANNING AHEAD

## A Task for the C-Suite

Engaging the organisation to address this wide range of global risks requires commitment at senior management level, particularly in the C-Suite. As the KPMG Special report on COVID-19 says: 'Corporate leaders have had to recalibrate their priorities, and many have focused on what matters most – the health and wellbeing of their people and the societies their businesses serve.'

The personal experience of CEOs is often behind this recalibration. However, of the CEOs personally affected by the health implications of the crisis, 55% changed their strategic response, either completely or to some degree.

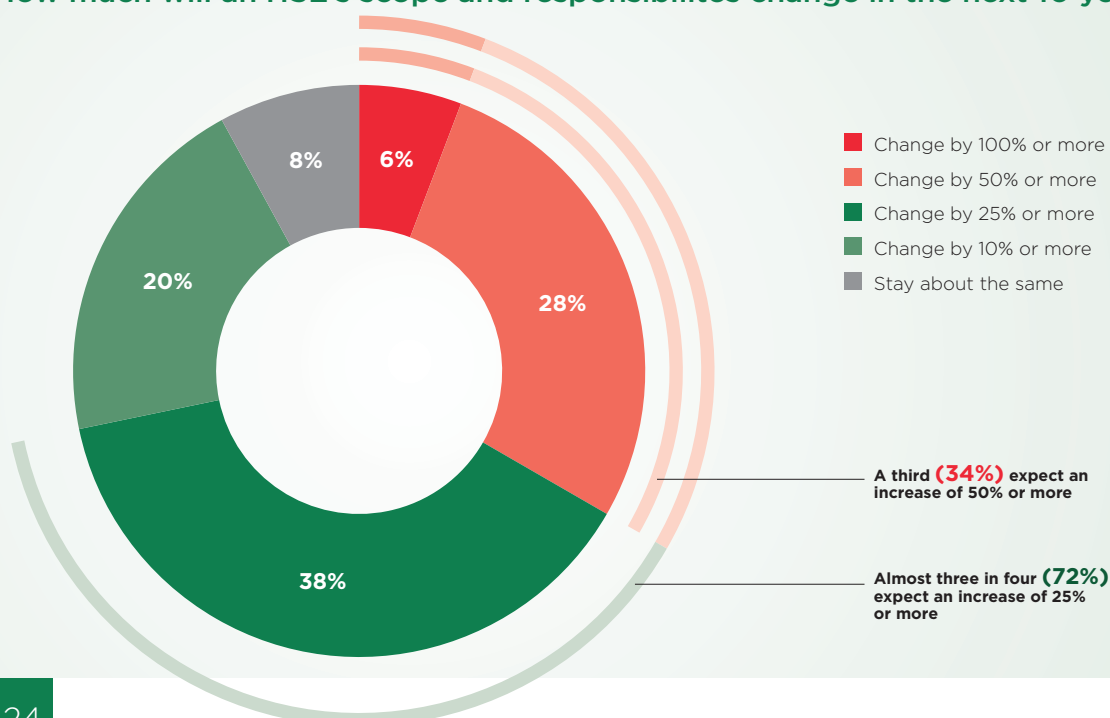
This change in attitude did not stop at the CEO. The pandemic made health and security a regular board-level discussion in every organisation. For example, International

SOS has seen the number of C-suite level contacts per client double. This now includes contacts from CEOs, COOs, CFOs as well as the traditional owners of health such as HR Directors and HSE Directors.

There is no sign that this level of interest is tailing off. Our survey noted the expectation that the scope and responsibilities of those in HSE roles will further increase over the next 10 years. One-third thought the increase would be 50% or more and nearly three-quarters thought it would be 25% or more. Some even thought it would double.

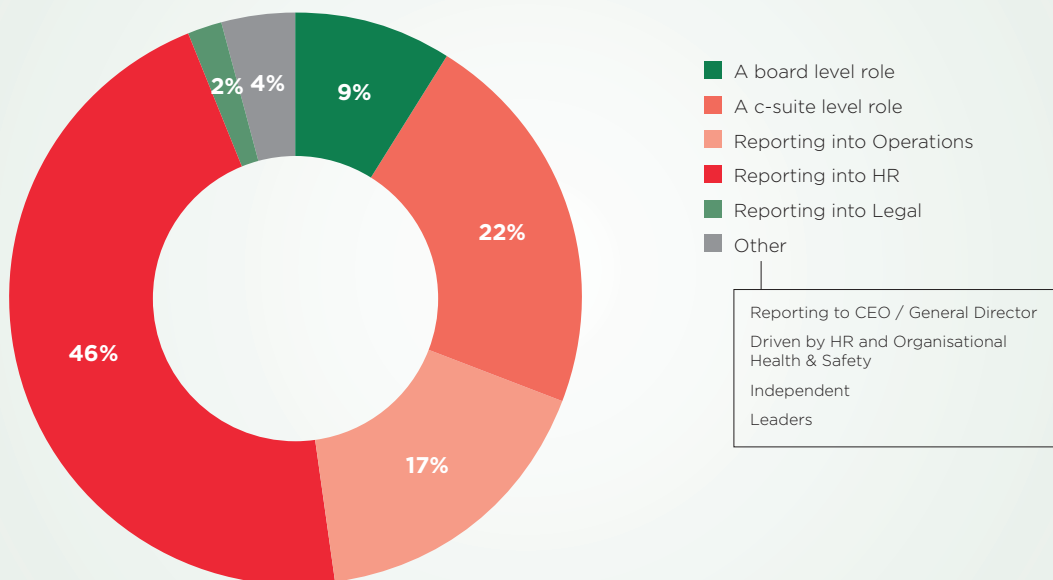
Currently, health and wellness support and strategy within organisations is owned and delivered by different departments: traditionally Health, Safety and Environment (HSE), Occupational Health (OH), and in some companies by HR. A few organisations also have a Chief Health Officer (CHO).

### How much will an HSE's scope and responsibilities change in the next 10 years?



## Addressing health and wellness meaningfully requires leadership at C-Suite level

### Where will health's role sit within an organisation in the next 10 years?



When respondents were asked where they thought the role of health would sit in their organisation in the next 10 years nearly one-quarter see the future role as being part of C-Suite. The leadership required to deal with the challenges ahead is being recognised.

Just as organisations rely on legal and financial experts, health experts have an increasingly important role to play too. Numerous organisations already have a CHO in place around the C-Suite table to lead on health issues.

The CHO has in the past typically been found in larger organisations, often in industries with strict workplace health regulations, or where occupational risk is high. In more recent years this has expanded to other industries, into smaller companies, into companies with more white-collar employees, or in industries where occupational hazards are less apparent.

Many commentators and experts have observed that the CHO's time has come<sup>17</sup>. Many leading organisations now advocate including a Medical Advisor role as part of any organisation's response leadership team<sup>18</sup>.

So, let us now look at the CHO role in more detail. Can the CHO deliver the breadth of health and wellness challenges that organisations now face?

### HEALTH OR MEDICAL?

The term 'medical' is often perceived as dealing with specific treatments or ailments. So, we have elected to use the term Chief Health Officer (CHO) instead of the Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) in this paper. As we are seeing, 'Health' has a far broader connotation.

## The CHO Role

The CHO role goes beyond day-to-day HR and HSE activities. It is a long-term, strategic role able to address a wide range of issues and opportunities.

The ACOEM Guidance Statement on the Role & Value of the Corporate Medical Director sets out a useful description of the role. They articulate how this person has overall medical responsibility for the company, including ‘all issues related to health (emergency response, critical event management, medical leaves, occupational and environmental health programs, community health interface, and leadership and management of the medical organisation).’ Working with other departments, the scope can further extend to product stewardship (toxicology), global security (proactive disaster planning), human resources (HR), health care benefits design and more.

Many companies already have CHOs working along these lines, to a greater or lesser extent. Some work solo, some are aligned with a network of clinicians who can provide support with specific knowledge or regional insights as required.

## Skill Sets Required

The CHO role goes beyond being a clinician. It requires not just experience and expertise, but diplomacy and common-sense. CHOs must understand the business and the world around it. They are the bridge between health issues and business needs - able to understand the scientific technicalities of a health question and the social and geopolitical considerations that influence management decisions.

CHOs must have leadership skills so they can create an appropriate culture and sense of common purpose within the organisation. They need to work closely with HSE and HR, at times assisting them in their activities. But overall, their focus should be on a holistic view of health rather than hands-on help.

## Knowledge and Trust

Another vital aspect of the CHO role is to be a trusted source of information. This is particularly important at a time when official announcements are losing credibility, and an overwhelming amount of conflicting information is readily available online and elsewhere.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic we saw a lack of official guidance on the steps to take, especially in the earliest months. Both national governments and international health organisations and their advisors often took some time to agree advice on social distancing, mask wearing, travel restrictions and other key steps. Advice was often tinged with economic and political undertones. Advice issued by these organisations and governments was often inconsistent. The International SOS Risk Outlook 2021 report found that trust in advice from local governments and health bodies was seen as a key challenge for a third of risk professionals.

In the absence of reliable, consistent guidance, organisations with health leadership set up their own procedures. They established cleaning protocols, testing regimes, mask mandates and other forms of protection for their employees. They answered detailed questions concerning quarantine and dealt with doubts about the vaccine. They relied on internal CHOs and external experts to ensure these actions were fully evidence-based.

A Johns Hopkins report recommends: ‘To fight misinformation and the “noise” surrounding COVID-19 communications, businesses can identify one non-political spokesperson as the “go-to” voice of science and evidence regarding this pandemic.’ It suggests that a CHO is the ‘ideal’ person to do this.



CHOs are best placed – and highly trusted – to deliver on health and wellness needs



## Finding the Right CHO

There are different ways of fulfilling this essential role: as an internal appointment, using external service providers, or a combination of the two.

### Internal Appointment

Having a permanent resource with in-depth knowledge of the company can bring many benefits, including deep understanding of their business. However, the very broad remit can be a lot to expect one person to deliver. Here, access to a reliable peer network can be a valuable source of support and facilitate benchmarking and sharing of ideas.

### External Providers

Our survey found that ‘partnering with specialist healthcare providers’ was the factor predicted to bring the most positive impact on an organisation’s health and safety performance in the next ten years.

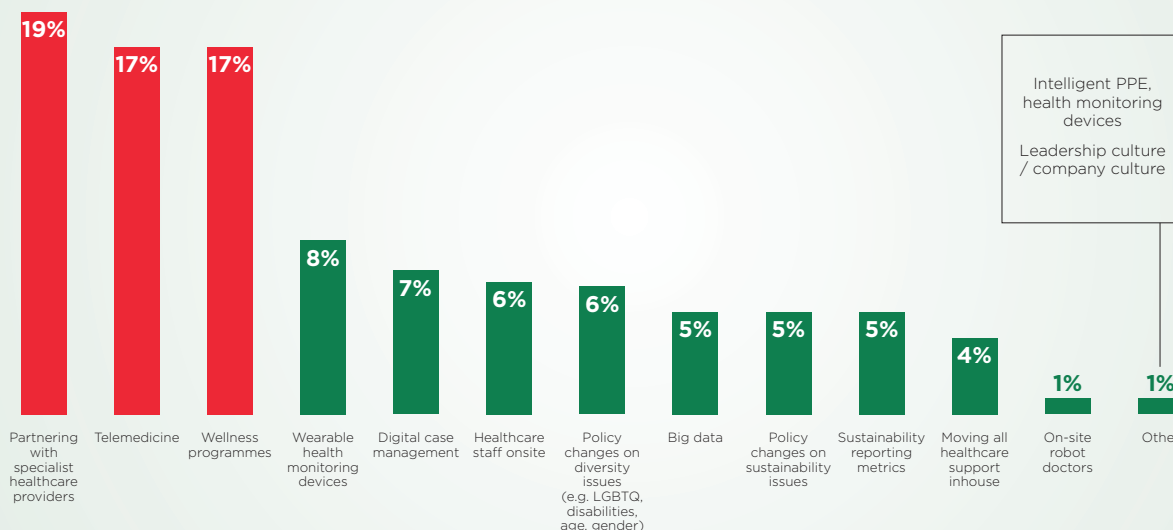
## World Economic Forum

“Workforce wellbeing is a key component to ensuring a resilient and sustainable business. The COVID-19 pandemic has made this a priority for executives. The role of the Chief Health Officer within the C-Suite will be increasingly crucial for all corporations and across industries.”

**Genya Dana**

Head, Platform for Shaping the Future of Health & Healthcare  
World Economic Forum

## The factors believed to have the biggest positive impact on an organisation's health & safety performance in the next 10 years



TeleMedicine – delivered by external providers – came second at 17%. Here, medical support to employees is delivered remotely. For example, an employee in a distant location can discuss symptoms online with a GP in their home country. During the pandemic, reliance on telehealth solutions has massively increased. Telehealth has extended from remote locations to mainstream. For many this is now the norm and this is likely to continue, across more jurisdictions.

Using external providers can be cheaper for organisations that do not need full-time support. It also brings a degree of flexibility, as the type of support required, and the speed or scope of its delivery can be altered to suit changing needs. The greatest benefit of seeking external support is perhaps the breadth and extent of service it can provide.

### Advice + extensive operational expertise at the ready:

External providers should have access to a wide range of experts, in healthcare and beyond. Between them they can cover a vast array of subjects and be called upon to provide in-depth advice. To quote an existing service provider, this can be anything

from providing an up-to-date analysis of the latest hot spot, to delivering a detailed review on Gender Dysphoria.

### ANZ Bank

“Today’s CHOs need to be able to provide a broad range of skills and advice. This can be on many different aspects of employee health and wellbeing. It’s hard to expect one person to provide all that. By having an external CHO you have the benefit of someone senior to turn to who has a network of experts in multiple geographies that they can call on as needed.”

**Marita Quirk**

Head of Wellbeing & Safety  
ANZ Bank

# Global organisations need to be able to tap into regional health expertise seamlessly, especially in times of crisis.

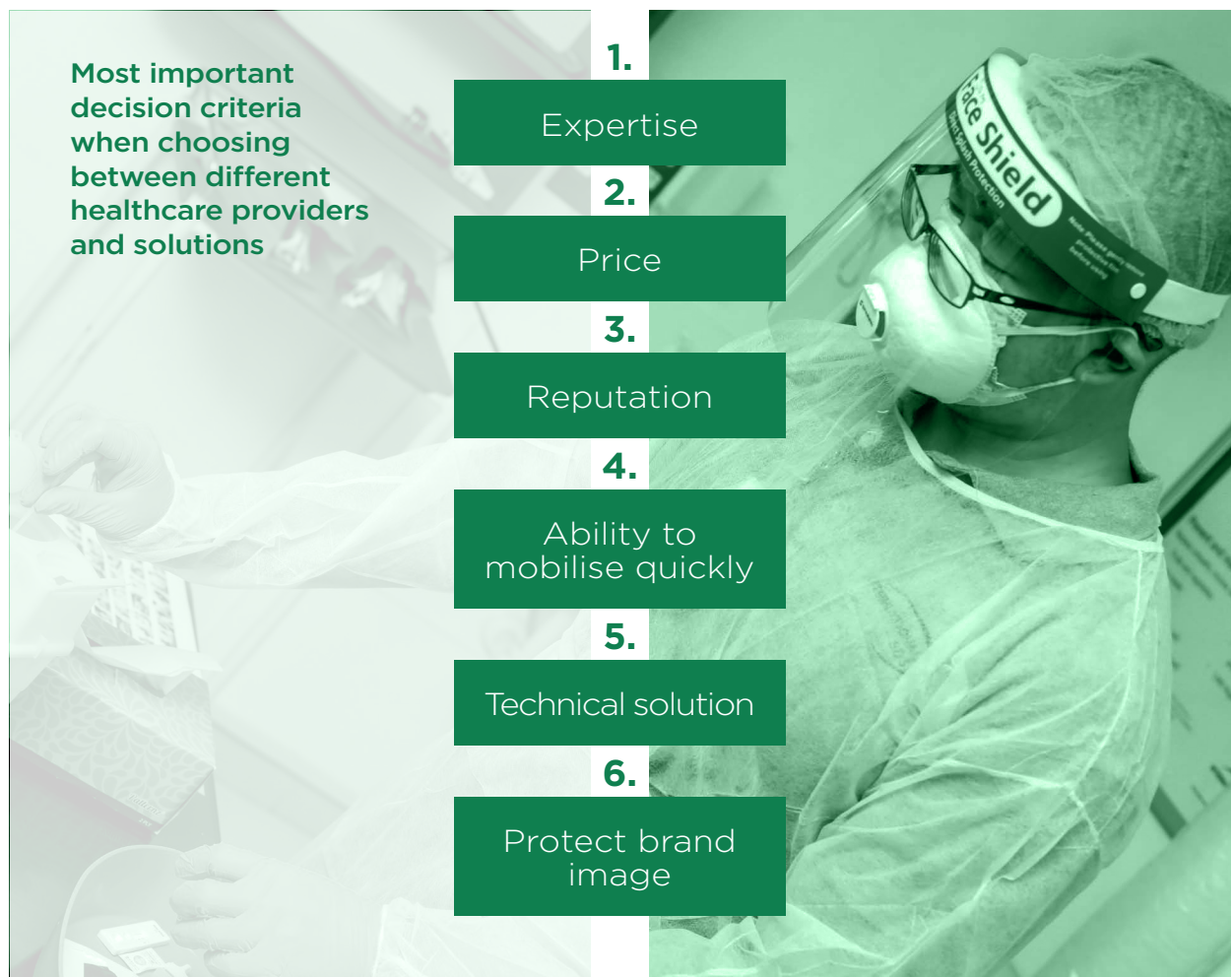
Mental health is a further area where expert external advice is often sought.

ANZ Bank has opted to have an external CMO.

The need for detailed advice in the absence of government guidance, in response to COVID-19, is an excellent example of how beneficial it can be to have access to a range of multi-jurisdictional external experts. Given their wide experience, external providers

are also best able to advise on what other organisations are doing. They can offer insights into the latest trends within a specific industry, or beyond, to help set benchmarks.

This expectation of significant layers of expertise is fundamental in health provision. In our survey respondents were asked to rank in importance their decision criteria when choosing between different healthcare providers. Expertise came in at Number One.



## Access to a Global Network

Having this in-depth advice and expertise available at country level is one thing. The right external providers can however repeat this in many countries. By tuning into a global network, businesses can access granular regional levels of clinical advice needed, anywhere, at any time.

## A Combination of Internal and External Support

Combining the internal knowledge and culture of an internal CHO with the range of expertise and advice available from external service providers can offer an alternative model and is followed by many companies with established medical supports in place. They might have an internal Medical Officer to deliver immediate health and wellness needs, supported by external advisors to carry out specific tasks, or to facilitate specific regional engagements.

Irrespective, it is advisable to bring external advisors on board sooner rather than later. Just as businesses have learned the benefits of having crisis management teams pre-positioned and at the ready, having advisors in place is key too. As Erin L Wilk, Head of Global Security at Facebook's Centre of Excellence said:

## Facebook

“The worst time to make a new friend is during a crisis! Our pre-established relationships with external health experts have helped us enormously during the COVID-19 pandemic because they've allowed us to urgently respond with intention and advice we trust. This impactful support bolsters our confidence that we are doing all we can to best serve our people during this extraordinary – and prolonged – global experience.”

**Erin L Wilk**

Head of Global Security Center of Excellence, Facebook



CHOs can be  
internal appointments,  
external providers,  
or a combination  
of the two

## Opportunities and Benefits

This paper has mentioned many of the challenges faced by organisations, both now and in the future. With these challenges however come tremendous opportunities. We have seen how organisations are pivoting towards improving the health and wellness of their employees, and increasingly of the wider communities around their projects. This benefits us all.

The investments being made on health and wellness cannot of course be limitless. The good news is that health and wellness

programmes that are well designed and elegantly implemented can bring substantial return on investments.

If public and private organisations rise to all the risks and challenges mentioned in this paper, the broader benefits will be felt across the globe: better and more accessible healthcare, less social inequality, facilitating development, economic productivity and much more. As so many have said, post-COVID this an opportunity to reset all around.

### World Economic Forum establishes new CHO Community

“Recognising the evolving paradigm of the role of the CHO within organisations, the World Economic Forum is launching a new C-Suite community of Chief Health Officers in September 2021.

The peer-to-peer community is a cross-industry and trusted platform to facilitate open and transparent decision-making to help CHOs succeed in their roles. It provides access to C-Suite leaders from wide-ranging multinational corporations that form some of the largest employers globally. It also enables exchanges with world renowned experts on issues ranging from health equity to vaccine confidence.

The Forum’s CHO community will work towards shaping a common leadership vision to support best-in-class responses to the pandemic, and overall care and wellbeing of workforces, as the future of work continues to change. The community is also working to understand how workforce health contributes to better business performance, operational resiliency and sustainability.”

**Nivedita Sen**

Health & Healthcare Specialist  
World Economic Forum

To learn more, contact [nivedita.sen@weforum.org](mailto:nivedita.sen@weforum.org)

# CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst for many organisations realising the need to address the health and wellness of their employees. The awareness was already there, whether it be through traditional occupational health or mental health and wellbeing provision: now it has become a priority for the C-Suite. Most businesses' costs come from staffing, so keeping employees healthy is vital. Irrespective of local public health systems, employers can and must play an increasing role in the health of their employees. Not just to mitigate the impact of a future pandemic but also to address other sustainability issues: such as climate change as well as the myriad other factors affecting employee health. To deal with this you need strategic advice, vision and long-term plans.

## Organisational recommendations:



### Recruit an internal/external CHO that has:

- Management experience from working with multinationals, across industries, and can confidently speak to this at C-Suite and board level
- Industry knowledge of best practices and benchmarking in your sector
- Early visibility of emerging health trends affecting various industries
- Guidelines, tools and templates used to measure employee health and define ways to improve it

- Proactively manage escalating employee health costs and sickness absence



### Ask your CHO to prioritise:

#### C-SUITE / BOARD MEETINGS & BRIEFINGS ON EMERGING HEALTH ISSUES:

This allows your boards, crisis and other executive teams to be briefed on topical fast-moving health issues, so you can make decisions using the most relevant and evidence-based information.

#### ACCESS TO ACCURATE AND REAL TIME DATA:

Ensures decision-making is based on global/local data that is regularly monitored and maintained.

#### MANAGER INFORMATION:

Your managers are key to your business. They need to understand what is affecting their teams and get support for that: whether it be how to identify and manage mental health issues in their teams or any of the other health topics they may be faced with.



### Use your CHO to help manage all business-critical health issues. For example:

- How much of your company strategy is affected by health issues? Assess and develop plans to manage it
- Implement a workplace wellbeing programme to improve employee productivity
- Use health as a lever for recruitment, retention and competitive advantage



### CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR EMPLOYEES:

Give an opportunity to employees and their families to connect with an expert whose main job is to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of your workforce, whether they work on site or from home. Linking your strategy to current health topics.

Develop tools and high-level reports to support discussions with boards, crisis teams and other executive teams.

### YOUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT:

Review your current policy and develop a strategy based on the latest evidence that is aligned to your business goals. Helps optimise returns and improve employee health and wellbeing.

### Employer health professional checklist:

- ❑ Identify expert sources of advice to assist in decision-making in the absence of national/international governmental support; to cover all issues and territories.
- ❑ Consider appointing a CHO to ensure these issues are addressed at an appropriate level. (CHO to have extensive experience of health and wellness, leadership skills, and a clear understanding of the needs of the business).
- ❑ Closely involve the C-Suite in all activities.
- ❑ Ensure sustainability policies and programmes cover broader health needs and other societal issues, including climate change and environmental protection. All activities to be included in sustainability reporting.
- ❑ Ensure employee health and wellness programmes address broader health issues, including mental health.
- ❑ Regularly review policies and action plans at local, national, regional and global level to check preparedness for all risks and issues identified.
- ❑ Address needs of the new working environment-including working from home options.
- ❑ Review travel policies and ensure systems are in place to protect employees when travelling, at home or abroad.
- ❑ Review local community programmes to address emerging needs arising from recent events.
- ❑ Establish how all these initiatives can best be delivered – possibly by a combination of internal and external providers.
- ❑ Revise business continuity plans in light of the COVID-19 experience; prepare for a wide range of potential disruptions, on a global scale.
- ❑ Agree and implement policies for vaccinations and testing for COVID-19 and other infectious diseases; keep employees up to date on all rules and requirements.
- ❑ Keep social distancing, mask wearing, sanitation and other procedures under constant review and maintain adequate supplies of protective equipment.

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## About the International SOS Foundation

The International SOS Foundation is dedicated to improving the health, safety and security of mobile workers around the world. Started with a grant from International SOS in 2011, it is an independent, not-for-profit organisation.

[internationalsosfoundation.org](http://internationalsosfoundation.org)