



## Policy brief: Supporting the well-being of **ethnic minority** NHS staff

### Executive summary

This policy brief provides evidence-based recommendations for NHS management to support the well-being of ethnic minority staff in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ethnic minority employees, constituting around 20% of NHS staff and often serving in frontline roles, have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. This has resulted in higher death rates and increased anxiety during the pandemic, as well as ongoing concerns about mental health and well-being.

This brief presents actionable steps to create an inclusive and equitable work environment. By implementing cultural intelligence training, improving communication channels, enhancing leadership representation, establishing individualised support, tailored HR initiatives, mentoring programmes, and promoting staff participation in support networks, the NHS can enhance the welfare, professional development, and retention of ethnic minority staff.

### Key findings

- When surveyed, the majority of ethnic minority workers gave the level of care and support received from their organisation a rating of 4 out of 7.
- Staff also rated their own well-being at 4 out of 7. These results suggest that there is a significant room for improvement in organisational support and a need for additional policies to support well-being.
- Many ethnic minority employees reported having negative experiences with line managers who were perceived as unwilling to engage in dialogue around race or bias.
- Some ethnic minority employees also reported being uncomfortable and unlikely to report racist experiences (such as harassment from patients or colleagues) to their line manager, citing lack of follow-up action as the most likely outcome.
- Many ethnic minority employees reported being unaware of the role of HR and were unsure of their employment rights (for example, carer's leave, phased return to work after illness).
- Analysis of the quantitative survey results indicated that many ethnic minority employees experienced barriers to progression, including a lack of opportunities, demotions or restructuring impacting roles and salary and a lack of mentoring.
- Many ethnic minority employees perceived the appraisal and recruitment processes as unfair, including poor experiences with recruitment panels due to cultural differences.
- Many ethnic minority employees experienced barriers in seeking help or advice, with limited visibility of staff support networks.
- Ethnic minority staff reported unequal access to information on IT systems, with non-desk-based staff missing out on training opportunities and support.

## Context

Ethnic minority workers are crucial to the NHS and are over-represented in lower-paid, public-facing roles, which put them at greater risk during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the start of the pandemic, ethnic minorities constituted 20% of nursing and midwifery staff in the NHS workforce and made up 44% of doctors and dentists. In the early stages of the pandemic, it became evident that many of the healthcare workers who were dying were from ethnic minority backgrounds. NHS analysis of deaths in healthcare workers in the early months of the pandemic found that 71% of nurses and midwives and 94% of doctors and dentists who had died were from ethnic minority backgrounds. This situation exacerbated existing concerns around the workplace culture in the NHS and the pressures facing frontline workers. Because issues with mental health and unsupportive managers are among the top five reasons workers leave the NHS, there is an urgent need to address these problems to ensure staff retention.

## New research and evidence

Research conducted by Leeds University Business School, in collaboration with five NHS trusts and funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), gathered insights from ethnic minority employees. Researchers conducted interviews with 60 NHS staff members and surveyed 524 employees, gathering substantial qualitative and quantitative data. Findings revealed concerns about workplace culture, including reluctance to report racist incidents, lack of awareness of HR practices, unequal access to information, and barriers to career progression. These findings underscore the need for evidence-based interventions to support ethnic minority staff.

## Policy recommendations

Cultural Intelligence Training: Provide training for line managers to enhance their awareness of cultural differences, empathy, and leadership skills for leading in a culturally diverse work environment. Encourage reflection on racial inequalities within the organisation.

Communication Enhancement: Improve communication by organising career development workshops, events, and support initiatives. Ensure accessible information channels to empower ethnic minority staff.

Leadership: Promote ethnic minority representation in leadership roles through professional development and overcoming barriers to promotion. Showcase successful role models.

Individualised Support: Establish dedicated ambassador roles to provide continuous support during entry, induction, transitions, and disciplinary actions.

Tailored HR Initiatives: Management should collect feedback from workers to establish measurable data around staff satisfaction, allowing progress to be tracked over time. Regular surveys can guide HR practices that address the specific needs of ethnic minority employees.

Mentoring Programmes: Introduce ethnic minority mentoring programmes for career development, open to all staff bands and non-clinical roles, to provide guidance and feedback.

Support Network Participation: Increase awareness of existing support networks and allocate dedicated time for staff participation.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, addressing the well-being of ethnic minority NHS staff is an imperative priority, given their significant contribution to the healthcare system and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on their health and mental well-being. Implementing these evidence-based recommendations not only fosters a more inclusive and equitable work environment but also directly benefits the NHS by enhancing staff retention, job satisfaction, and overall organisational resilience. The urgency of taking action cannot be overstated, as the well-being of these staff members is integral to the NHS's ability to provide quality healthcare services and ensure a diverse and thriving workforce for the future. This transformation will enhance job satisfaction, staff retention, and organisational effectiveness, while positioning the NHS as a leader in promoting staff well-being, equity, and resilience.

## Questions?

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