



Global healthcare

Eradicating stigma around mental health

Case study
Mind health support services and activities

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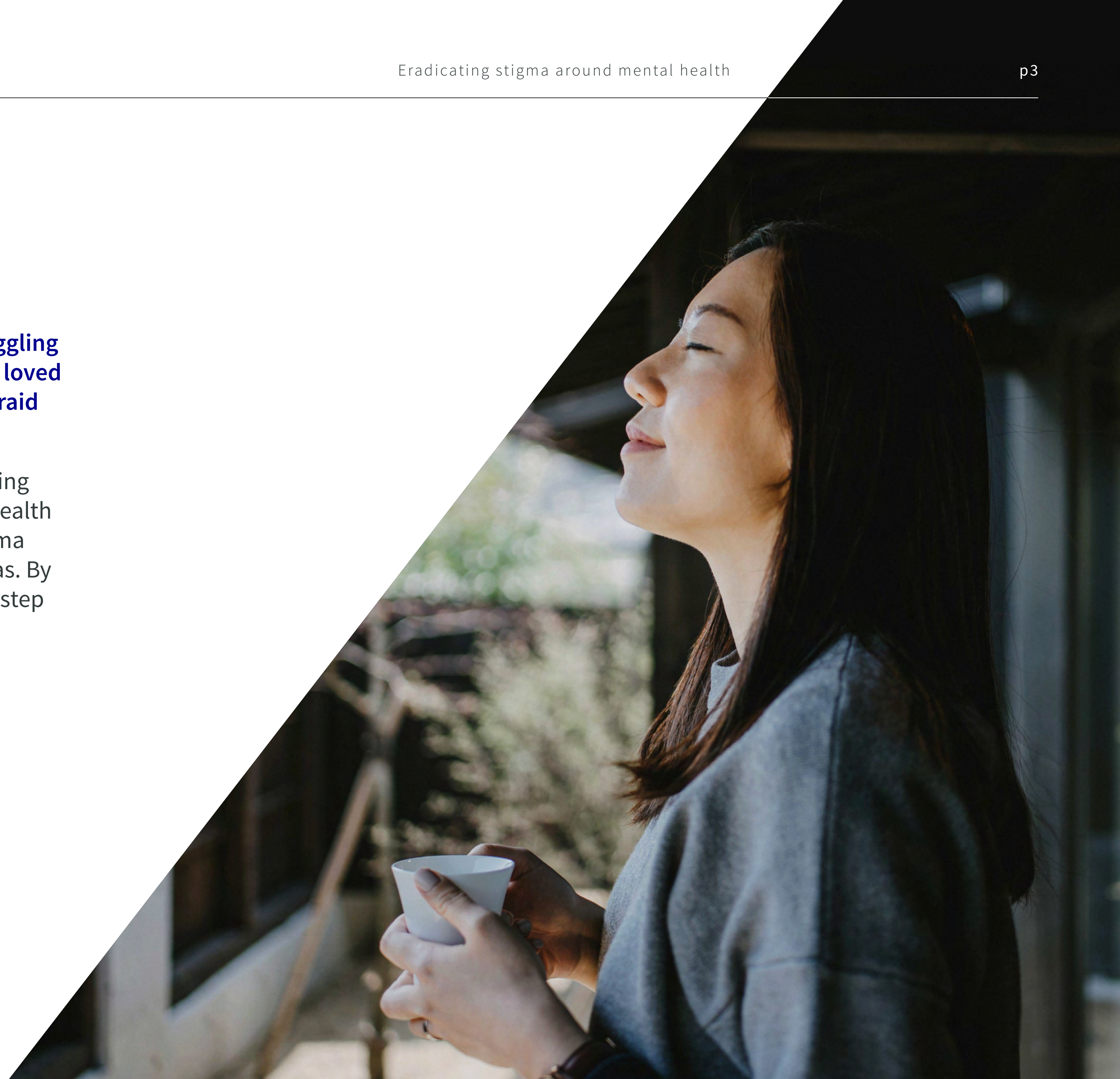
Foreword

Mental health stigma impacts everyone. It prevents people who are struggling from seeking help and getting the support they need. It also affects their loved ones, colleagues and employers. How can we help someone that's too afraid to ask for help?

As part of the next phase of our mind health support activity, we're examining mental health stigma among expats. We've gathered insight from mental health experts and conducted a sample survey to get a better idea of the role stigma plays in the mental wellbeing of those that choose to live and work overseas. By understanding people's fears, experiences and opinions, we can move one step closer to **'eradicating stigma around mental health'**.

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity

World Health Organization



What are we talking about?

Before we look at the insight we've gathered, it's important to understand the background, context and meaning behind the issues we're exploring.

Why is mental health so important?

Mental health is a vital part of our overall wellbeing. The Constitution of the World Health Organization defines health as, “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.¹

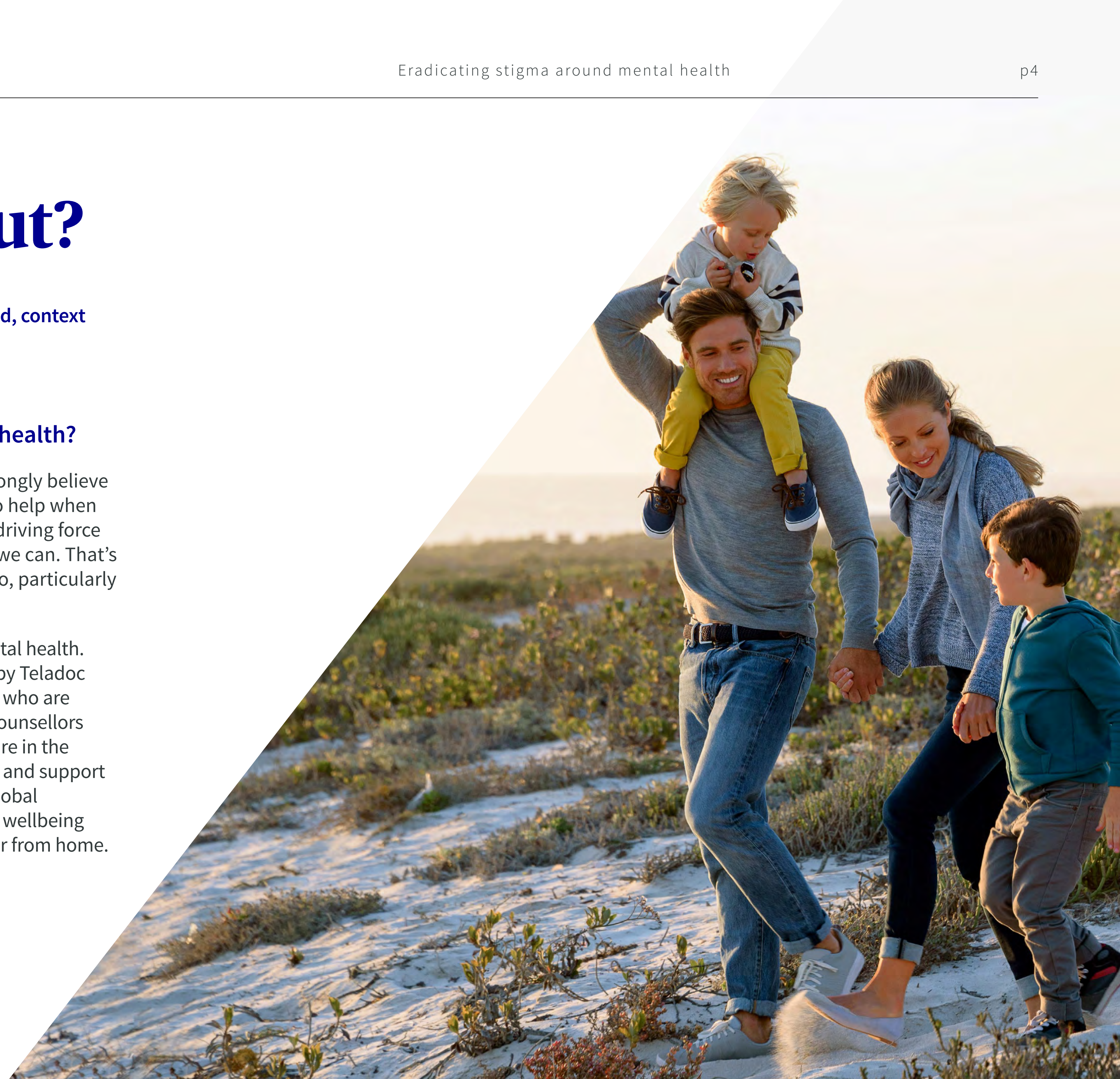
Our mental wellbeing affects everything we do, say and think. It's crucial in maintaining relationships with others, building a successful career and having a stable and healthy family. The quality of our mental wellbeing is also intrinsically linked to our physical health. One of our experts, Dr Leena Johns, said it best: “There is no health without mental health”.

How do we support mental health?

At AXA – Global Healthcare, we strongly believe that our role isn't just to be here to help when things go wrong. We want to be a driving force for change and progress however we can. That's our philosophy in everything we do, particularly when it comes to mental health.

We take a holistic approach to mental health. Our Mind Health service, provided by Teladoc Health, provides support to people who are struggling by connecting them to counsellors and psychologists, wherever they are in the world. But, elsewhere, our benefits and support services are designed to help our global members manage their day-to-day wellbeing and access support while they're far from home.

¹World Health Organization - Constitution



Mental health – what we already know

People with good mental health have the ability to work productively, deal with stress, help others and feel generally positive about their abilities and future opportunities.¹

Poor mental health (or mental illness) can cause significant or long-term changes to these abilities, which could affect someone’s behaviour, mood, emotions, relationships or thoughts.

Through our own research, as well as findings and insight gathered by leading experts, we know there are a number of factors that greatly affect the mental health of people that choose to live overseas. Our goal with all of our research is not just to identify problem areas, but to gather insight that will lead to solutions and help people flourish, wherever they choose to live.



Mental health challenges for expats

Poor mental health is often the result of outside influences, also known as the social determinants of mental health.² That’s the same for someone living overseas as for someone in their hometown. But for expats, these influences can be more intense or have additional stresses attached to them:

Social determinants of mental health²

- Employment status
- General living standards /situation
- Financial situation
- Discrimination
- General access to healthcare

Additional challenges that expats may face

- Higher likelihood of job insecurity
- Higher likelihood of unstable living situation
- The expense of relocating. Adapting to new cost-of-living. Managing finances overseas
- Discrimination, or perceived discrimination, as a foreigner
- Navigating an unfamiliar healthcare system and potentially receiving care in non-native language

¹World Health Organization - [Mental health: strengthening our response](#)

²World Health Organization – [Social determinants of mental health \(pdf\)](#)

What is mental health stigma?

Stigma exists throughout society in many different forms. It can involve negative, and often unfair, attitudes towards people based on a specific characteristic, difference or lifestyle factor. Most stigma embeds itself into society over a long time, which makes it a difficult thing to overcome or combat.

Mental health stigma involves negative or discriminatory attitudes towards mental illness. It can exist within a community, a workplace or on an individual level. This kind of stigma is often caused or spread due to stereotypes, fear or an inherent lack of understanding around the subject.¹

What do we already know?

Stigma around mental illness is widespread in communities and care systems throughout the world.² Societal expectations are a major obstacle for many people when it comes to accessing the right support. According to the World Health Organization, “in many

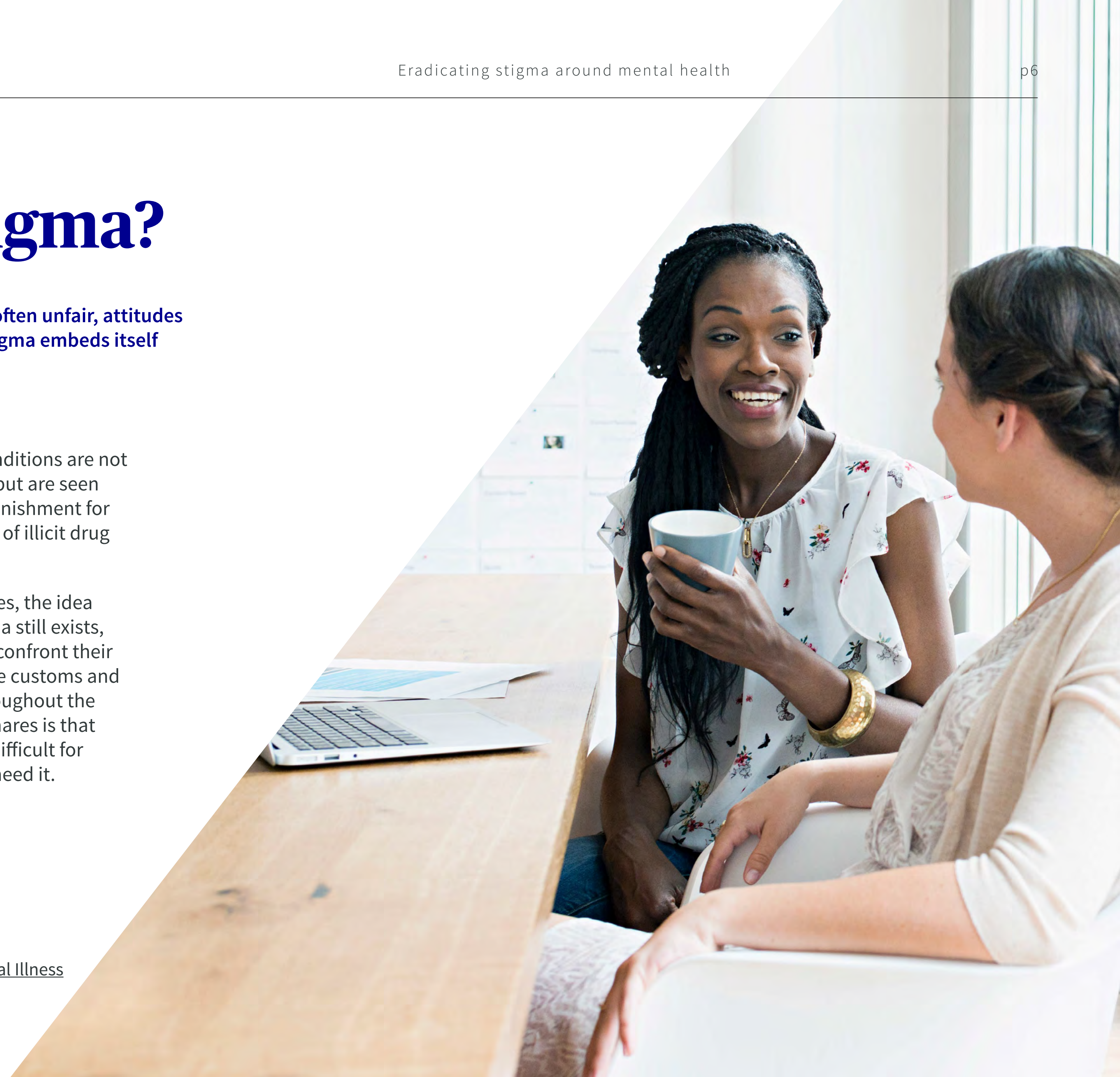
communities, mental health conditions are not considered to be health issues, but are seen as a weakness of character, a punishment for immoral behaviour or the result of illicit drug taking or supernatural forces.”³

Even in more progressive cultures, the idea or legacy of mental health stigma still exists, making it difficult for people to confront their issues and ask for help. So, while customs and cultural values are different throughout the world, one thing every nation shares is that mental health stigma makes it difficult for people to seek help when they need it.

¹ American Psychiatric Association - [Stigma, Prejudice and Discrimination Against People with Mental Illness](#)

² World Health Organization – [WHO highlights urgent need to transform mental health and mental health care](#)

³ World mental health report: [Transforming mental health for all \(page 67\)](#)

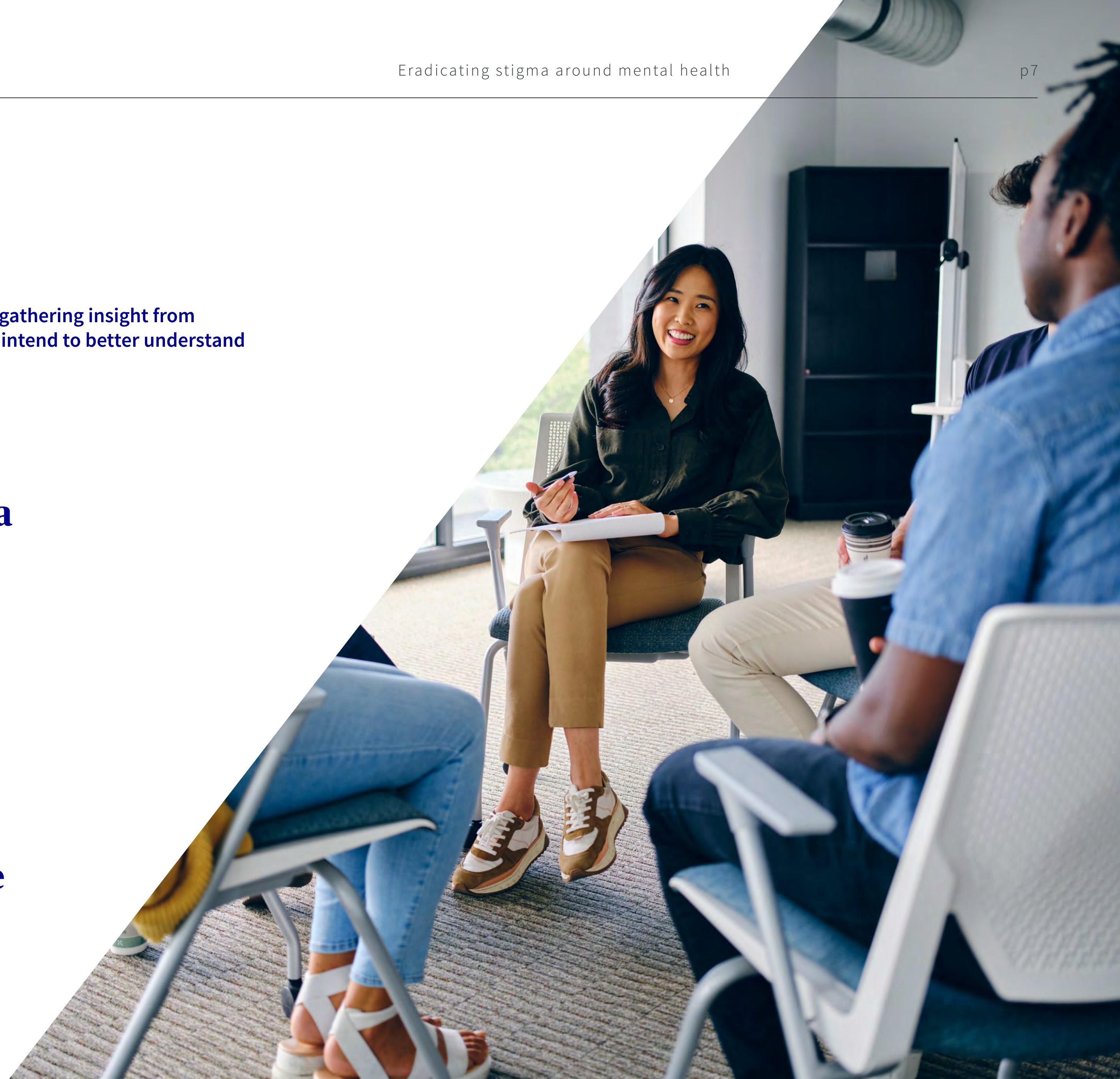


What we're doing

Building upon what we already know we've begun to explore mental health stigma. By gathering insight from our global network of members, clients, colleagues and leading healthcare experts, we intend to better understand stigma and start developing solutions to help people overcome it.

What we hope to learn:

- **How significant is mental health stigma in determining whether people seek professional help while abroad?**
- **Are expats with a mental health concern comfortable notifying their employer, or is the workplace a particular problem area for stigma?**
- **Do people still avoid seeking help, even if they know that their workplace is committed to supporting them?**



Expert insight

On World Mental Health Day 2022, we hosted a panel discussion on ‘Eradicating stigma around mental health.’

Meet our mental health experts



Dr Leena Johns

Chief Health & Wellness Officer, MAXIS GBN

Dr Leena Johns is responsible for global healthcare claims analytics at MAXIS GBN, a joint venture of MetLife and AXA. She spearheads the development of multi-national medical reports and wellness initiatives for a client population across over 80 countries. Before joining the corporate world, Leena worked as an ER physician.



Mark Rowland

Mental Health Foundation’s Chief Executive

As Chief Executive of the Mental Health Foundation in the UK, Mark Rowland is focused on delivering a strategy that aims to find and address the causes of poor mental health. Mark was awarded the President’s Medal by the UK’s Royal College of Psychiatry in June 2022 in recognition of the Foundation’s work. He speaks and writes widely on a range of mental health topics and also sits on the UK Government’s National Suicide Prevention Strategy Advisory Group.



Dr Sarah Jones

Head of Mental Health Services – Teladoc UK & Ireland

Dr Sarah Jones is a chartered counselling psychologist and associate fellow of the British Psychological Society. With over 20 years’ professional experience in counselling, psychotherapy and psychology, she’s worked in both the public and private sectors, including her current role with our virtual care partners - Teladoc Health. Sarah also lectures at higher education institutions and has developed bespoke mindfulness training programmes.



Nicholas Jemetta

Mental Wellbeing Campaigner

Founder of ‘Stories Matter’, Nick Jemetta is a multi-award-winning mental health campaigner, digital product coach and consultant, public speaker, trainer, and organisational wellbeing coach. He also lives and thrives with anxiety. Nick’s mission is to build healthier workplaces by working with businesses and individuals to show that we are all more than our mental health.

Our panel of industry-leading experts shared data, insight and ideas on the relationship between mental health stigma and overall health.

WATCH THE PANEL DISCUSSION



Understanding stigma for expats

We already know many of the key causes of mental health problems among expats. They include feelings of isolation; difficulty adjusting and a perceived lack of job security.¹

The panel discussed the role stigma plays in preventing people from seeking the help they need when they're overseas, and the effects this can have on their wellbeing. For example, in the workplace, expats may feel insecure in their role and put a lot of pressure on themselves to perform.

While their original fears may be unfounded, this pressure can lead to stress and anxiety, which (if left untreated) could have a negative impact on their performance at work. Stigma can, therefore, be part of a self-fulfilling downward spiral.



¹ AXA Health – Mind Health Report 2020

Asking the right questions

We want to understand how mental health stigma impacts expats. Particularly when it comes to seeking professional help and discussing any issues they have within the workplace.

We conducted audience-focused research through an email survey and web-form, which asked respondents to answer four questions focused on 'Stigma'. We recorded 160 responses over a period of 15 days, between 29 September and 17 October 2022.

In this survey of expats and international clients, we wanted to explore:



How likely are people to tell their close friends or family members about a mental health issue?



Do those who experience mental health issues seek professional help?



And are they comfortable opening up to their manager or colleagues about it?

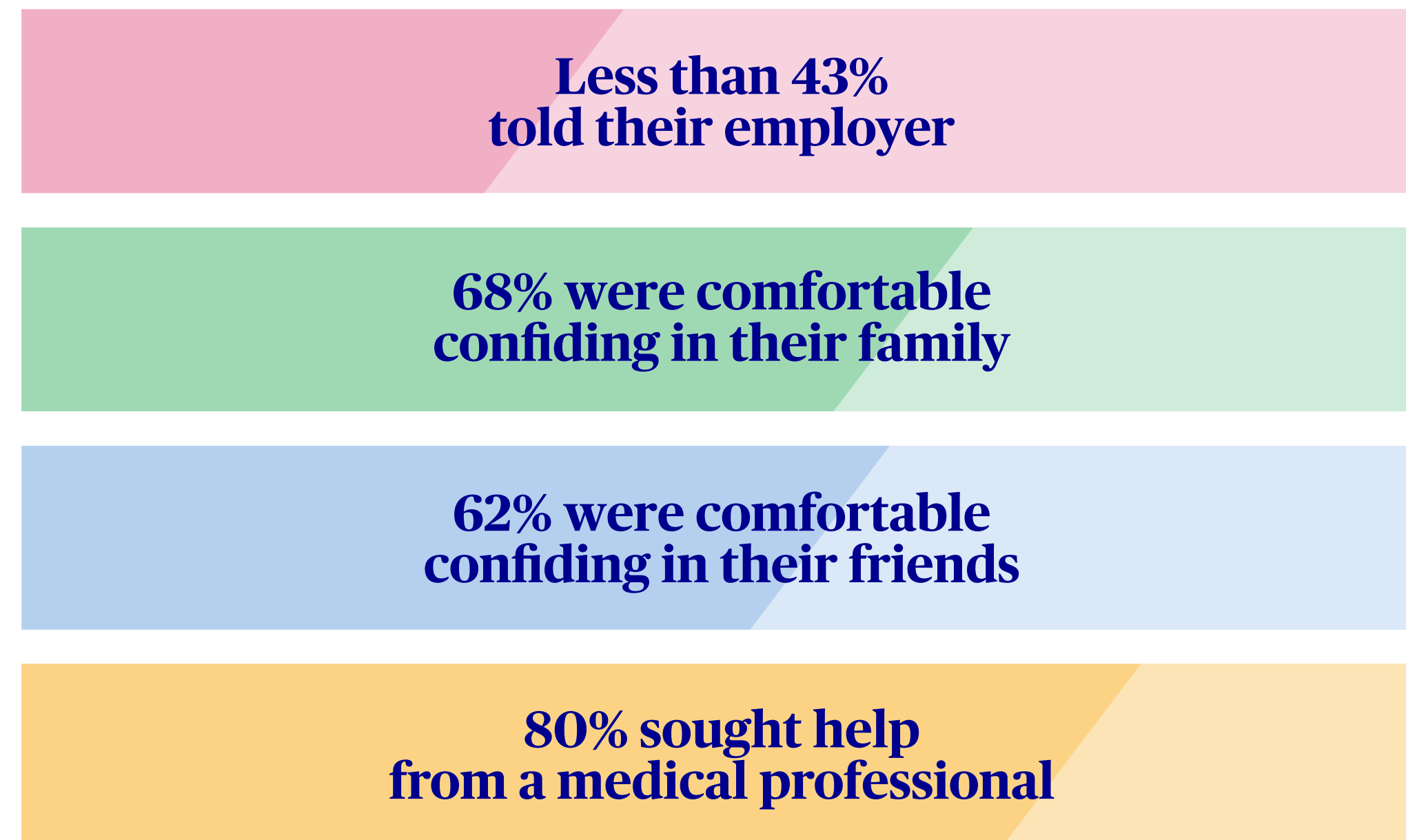


Do people believe mental health stigma makes it harder for anyone experiencing mental health issues to get or keep a job?

What we've discovered

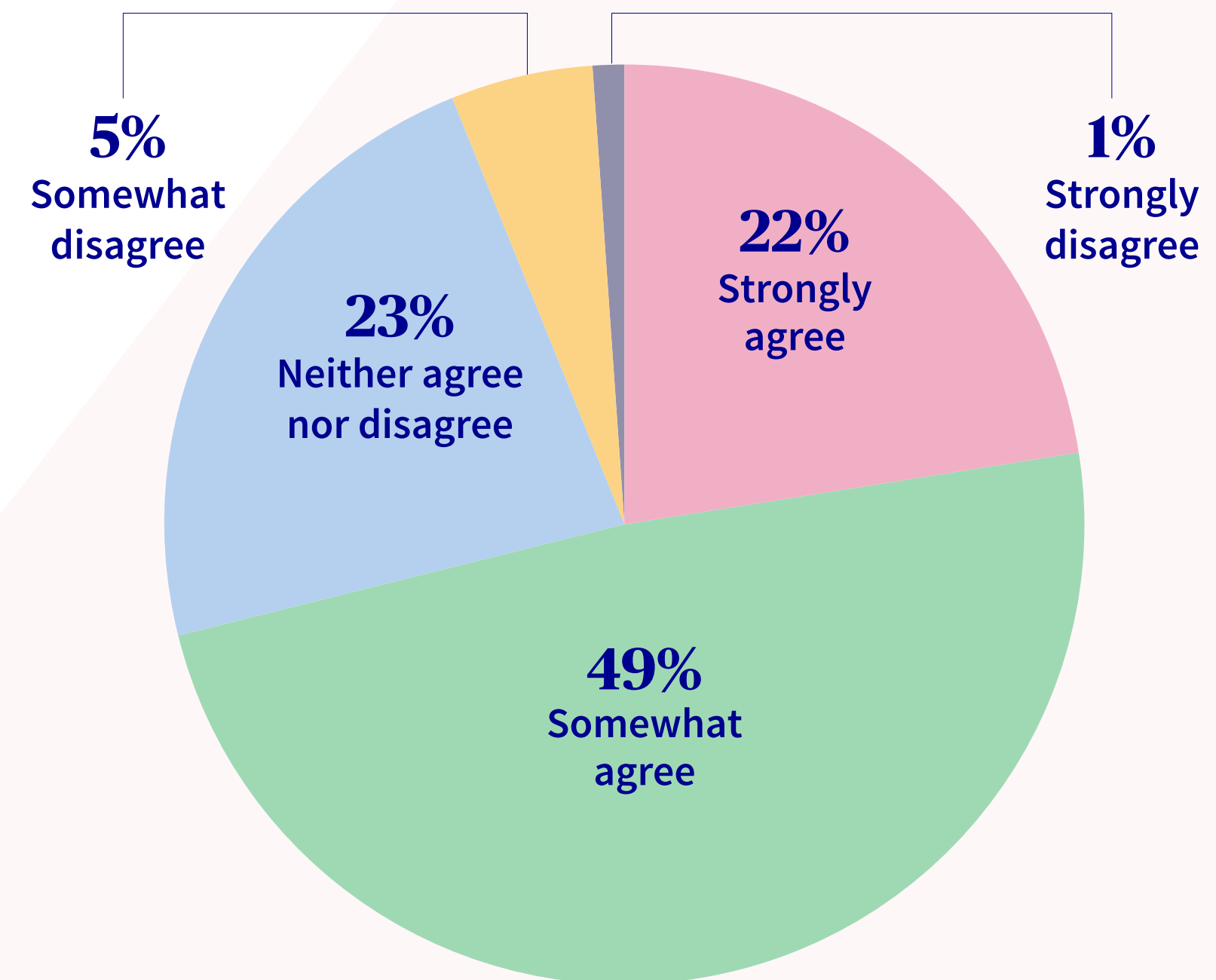
In many ways, the workplace has come further than other areas of society in supporting mental health and trying to destigmatise it. But based on some of our findings, there may still be a lingering perception among expats that they'll get a negative reaction if they speak out about an issue or openly seek mental health support.

One of the most interesting findings from the survey was that, of those that said they have experienced a mental health condition, less than half (43%) told their employer. This was far fewer than the number of people that were comfortable confiding in their family (68%) and friends (62%), while 80% said they'd sought help from a medical professional.



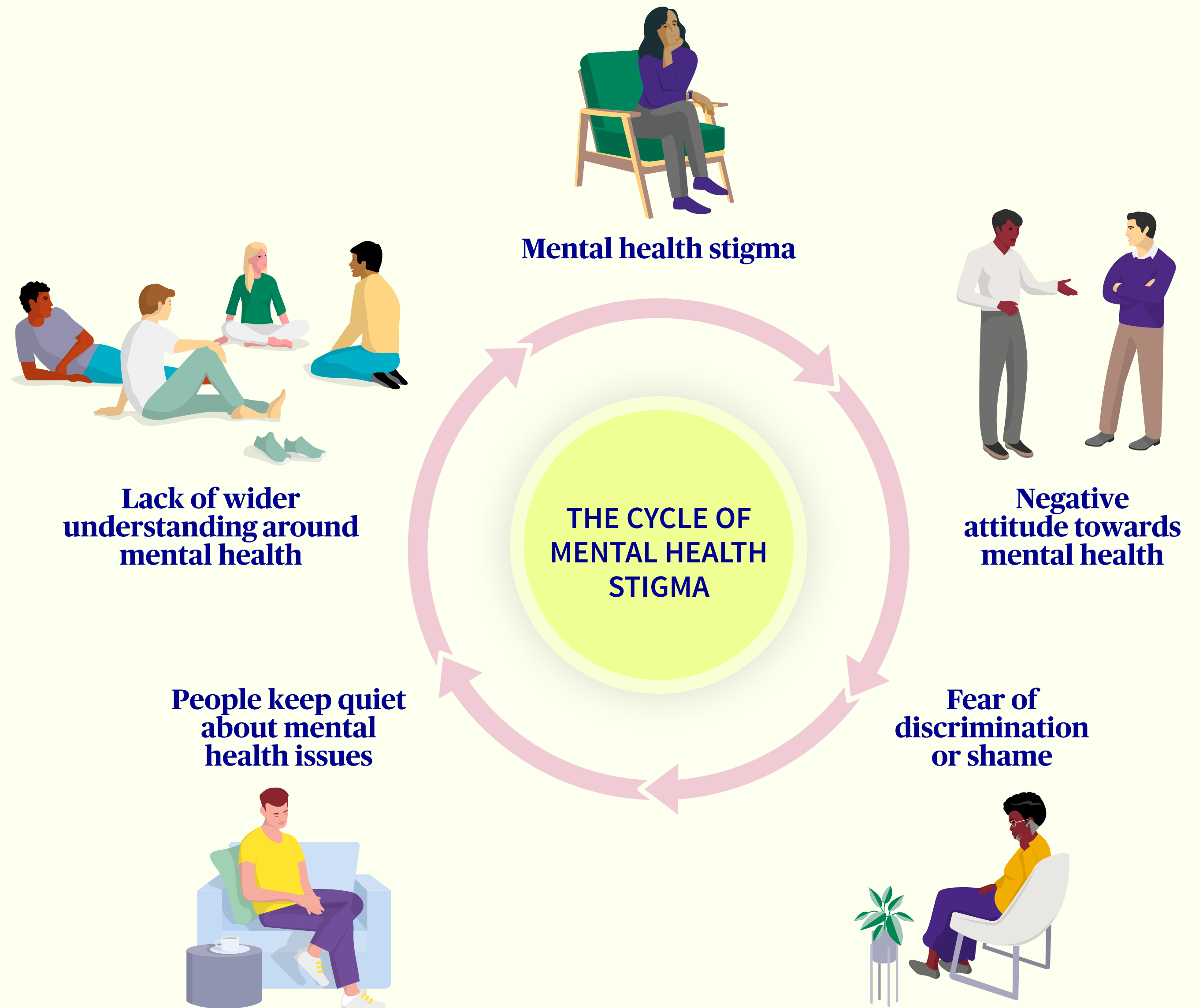
We also found that only 71% of respondents agreed, or strongly agreed, that people experiencing mental ill health find it harder to get or stay in a job because of stigma. In fact, only 6% disagreed with that statement.

People experiencing mental ill health find it harder to get or stay in a job due to the stigma surrounding it.



The cycle of mental health stigma

Our findings, and some of the comments we received, suggest that there's a cycle of mental health stigma among expats. There are indicators to suggest that it could be a perpetual issue, where those that don't feel comfortable seeking support are inadvertently contributing to a cycle that begins and ends with mental health stigma.



Mental health is not something that happens to others. It touches us all. Yet it is the most under-rated and unrecognized component of health and wellbeing of workers.

Dr. Leena Johns

What people said

When asked to comment or provide further insight, a number of replies suggested that more needed to be done...

I find employers tend to be fine with the idea of an employee having a mental health issue ON PAPER, but when it comes to dealing with the employee when they experience (sometimes unpleasant or ‘disruptive’) symptoms of their mental health issue, they do not know how to handle it...

Anonymous

I know of people who had to leave work due to the stigma surrounding ill mental health.

Y Al Saleh

At work, it’s difficult to get that comfort level to share these issues without getting judgments.

A Sharma

The first hurdle is admitting to yourself and those close to you that you are struggling and need help.

R Holtby

Most people with mental health problems hide it well.

Anonymous

I think that employers would be worried about the economic impact of an employee with either a chronic physical or mental condition and who might need to take time off.

Anonymous

What's next?

Throughout the world, more and more businesses are recognising how important it is to support their people when it comes to mental health. But the information and feedback we've gathered suggests that there's more that could be done.

- 1 Many employees are reluctant to seek help for mental health issues.**
- 2 Some employees have experienced stigma when dealing with a mental health issue at work.**
- 3 Employees know mental health support is available, but don't always feel comfortable using it.**
- 4 People still feel that their career might suffer as a result of a mental health issue.**
- 5 People's feelings and preconceptions about mental health are at odds with the messages employers issue about the support that's available.**

Employers need to be proactive in addressing mental health. Making support available is one thing, but encouraging and empowering people to access it is another.

To provide the best possible support, it's important to first try and understand the challenges faced by expats. Our Mind Health Index provides unique insight and perspective on the mental health challenges that are faced by those that choose to live away from home.

[DOWNLOAD NOW](#)

We also need to do more to educate staff and the wider population on mental health issues. Our World of Wellbeing hub provides expert insight and links to resources that you can share with your people and use to develop workplace wellbeing strategy.

[DISCOVER MORE](#)

“Organisations need to take responsibility for creating cultures and working environments that promote health and happiness on an equal footing with productivity.”

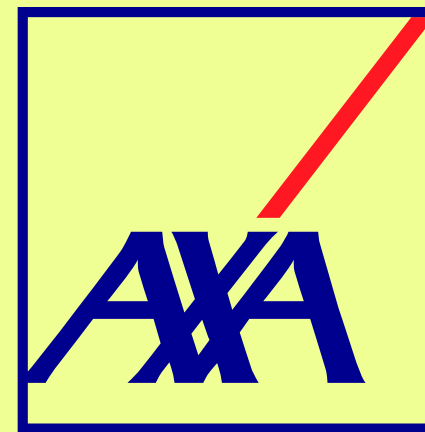
Nicholas Jemetta, Mental Health Campaigner



Mind Health service

Our Mind Health service, provided by Teladoc Health, connects employees with fully qualified psychologists over the phone. They receive the same quality care as they'd expect from a face-to-face session, no matter where they are.

While the service doesn't directly address mental health stigma, it enables people to access the help they need without stigma being as much of a barrier. And, as more people discover and understand the importance of mental health support, we hope the cycle of stigma can be broken.



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