

Long COVID and return to work: HR and people management

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The CIPD

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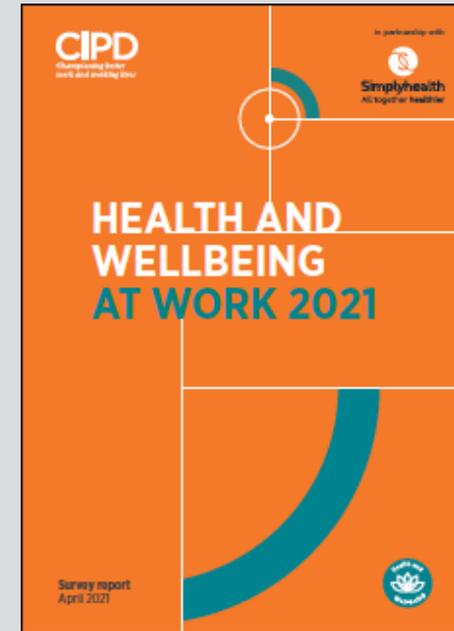
Offices in
the **UK**,
Ireland,
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All committed
to **championing**
better work and
working lives

Context: The pandemic and HR

- Many HR leaders and professionals have been at the centre of their organisation's response - Eg new ways of working, hybrid, return to workplaces, sickness absence, staffing shortages
- A high level of concern for people's **health and wellbeing**, most taking additional steps
- **A big expectation on line managers** to support people day-to-day, eg spotting early warning signs, sensitive conversations, signposting to expert help, making reasonable adjustments – but a **big gap in training, guidance, capability, confidence, time**

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How ready are organisations to support people with a health condition or disability, including long COVID?

- Too few people with a disability or health condition were already receiving the support and flexibility needed to remain in work and thrive
- Just $\frac{1}{4}$ of HR think their organisation **doesn't** experience any challenges in supporting people with a disability or health condition – *'developing line manager knowledge and confidence'* is the most common challenge
- Only a quarter (26%) of organisations **provide line managers with training or guidance** to support people with long-term health conditions and just 19% provide employees with guidance
- And yet...**nearly half (46%)** of employers have employees with long COVID in the past 12 months and **one in four (26%)** employers now include long COVID among their **main causes of long-term sickness absence** (CIPD 2022)



The CIPD is calling on organisations to urgently review their health and wellbeing framework and ensure they are providing effective support for those with long COVID, recognising that each individual's experience is different

Encouragingly, of those employers with employees who have experienced long COVID, many are taking steps to support people, eg:

- Offering OH assessments (70%)
- Tailoring support to individual need (60%)
- Promoting flexible working (58%)



Stepping up support



WORKING WITH LONG COVID

Research evidence to inform support

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Tips

For organisations

1. Flexible and **compassionate** absence management policies
2. Provide timely access to **occupational health** services
3. Ensure **leaders** understand long COVID and its impact
4. Foster an open and **inclusive** work culture

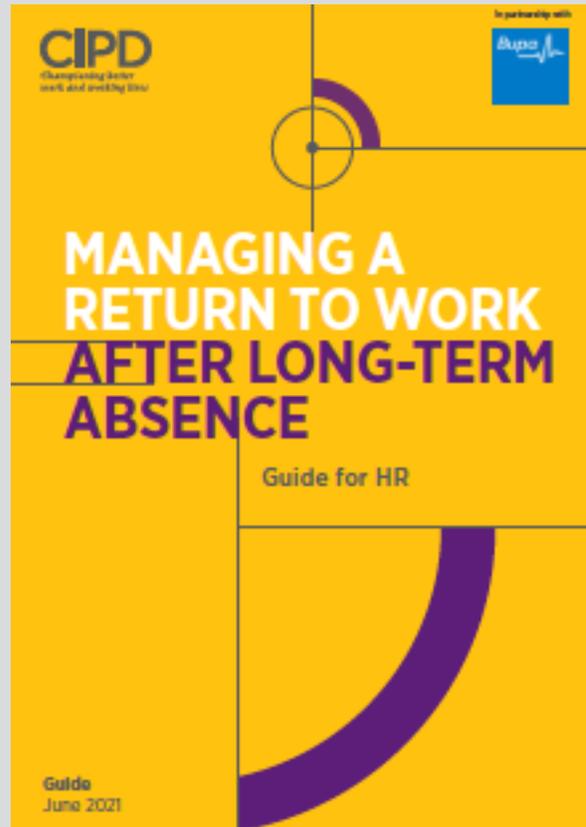
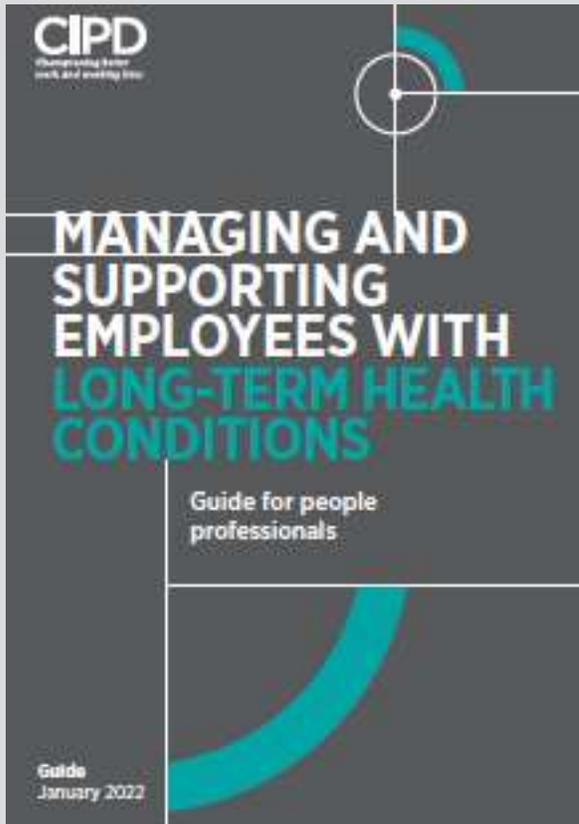
Working with long COVID



The CIPD: committed to championing better work and working lives - www.cipd.co.uk

CIPD long COVID hub

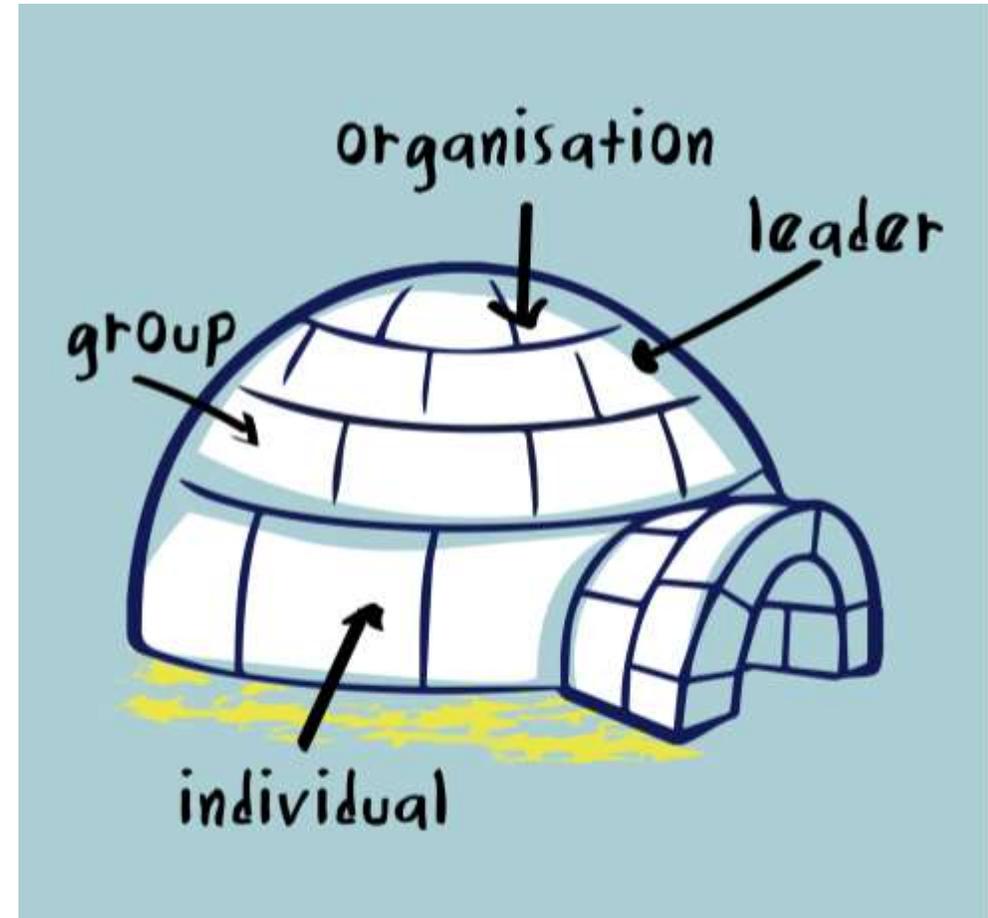
<https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/coronavirus/long-covid>



Our approach



- Whole systems approach to employee wellbeing
- Draws from the Hofball's conservation of resources theory
- Evidence review, interviews with 14 workers, Roundtable discussions with 43 professionals
- Central premise: We can't do it all on our own



Individual level



Resources

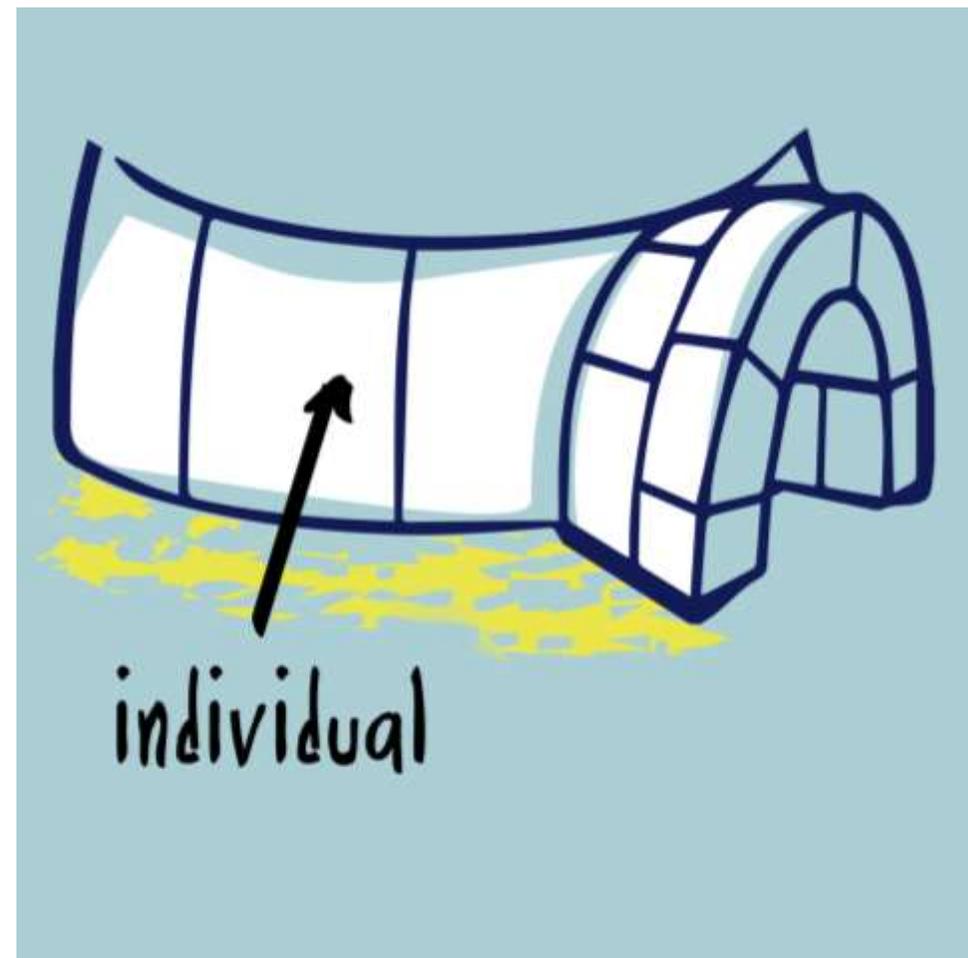
Coming to terms with reduced work functioning and not being able to push through like before – pacing self

Resetting career expectations (for the time being)

Being open about symptoms and work functionality - while hard it is necessary

Prioritising self-care

Knowing employment rights and what accommodations or adjustments might help



Group level



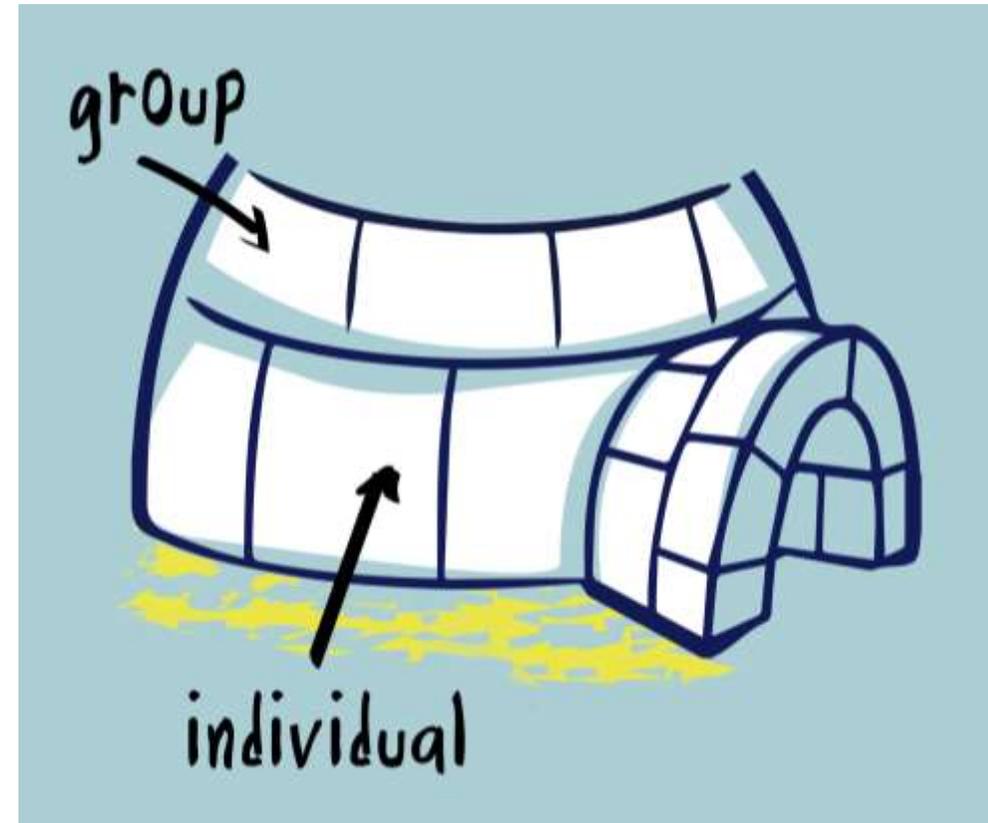
Resources

Knowledge and awareness of long COVID and how it impacts people at work

Stepping in to help with tasks – particularly when the task is challenging

Being treated in the same way as before – not someone who is damaged or broken

Proactive approach to managing team mental health and wellbeing – talking openly



Line manager



Resources

Knowledge and awareness of long COVID and how it impacts people at work

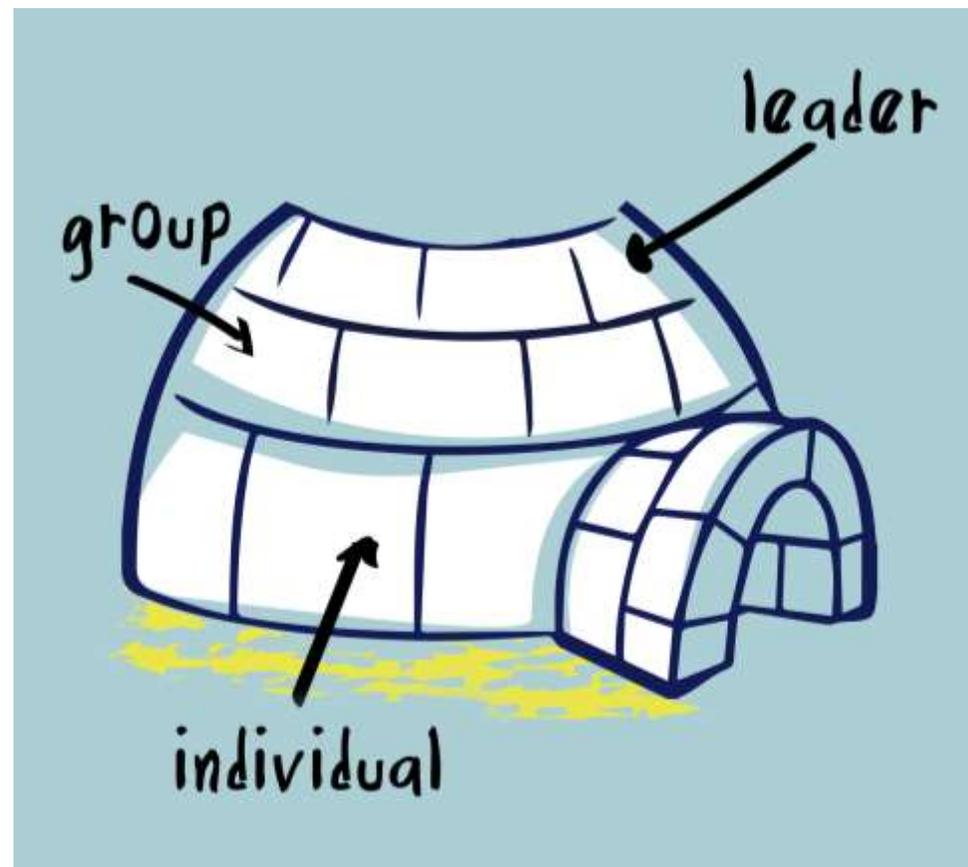
Extending the phased return period (6mths +)

Adjusting tasks e.g. removing cognitively and physically taxing tasks, work from home, flexible hours,

Taking an individualised approach, flexing work adjustments on a test and learn basis

Considering what is communicated to colleagues/ others

Regular and easy check-ins



Organisational level



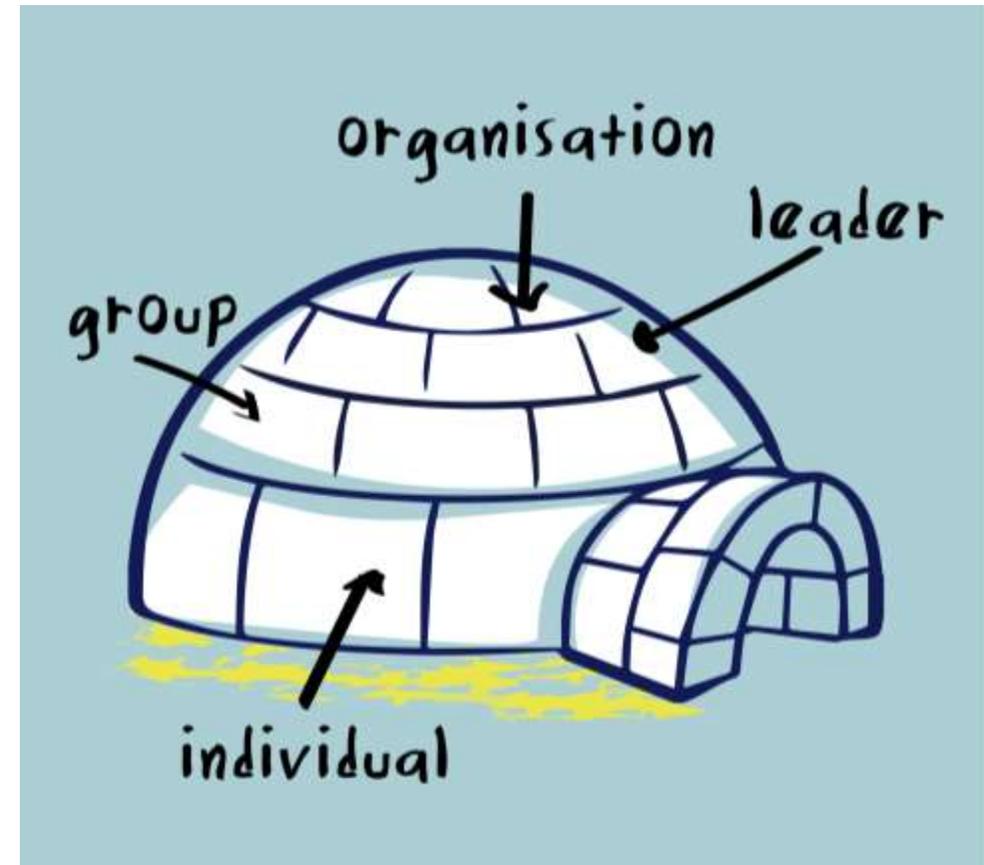
Resources

Providing flexible working practices and leave policies

Establishing a culture of psychological safety where mental health and physical health are prioritised

Reviewing absence management policies to avoid punitive systems for fluctuating conditions

Support and adjustments based on symptoms, not diagnosis



Outside the organisation



Resources

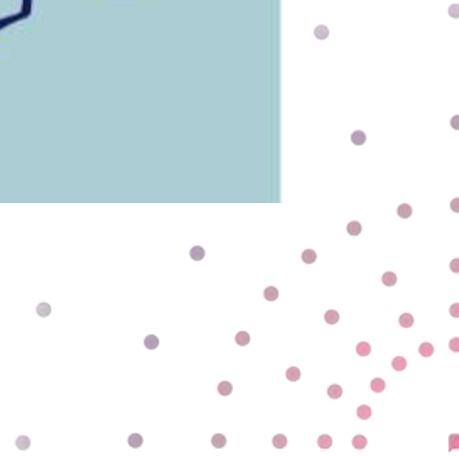
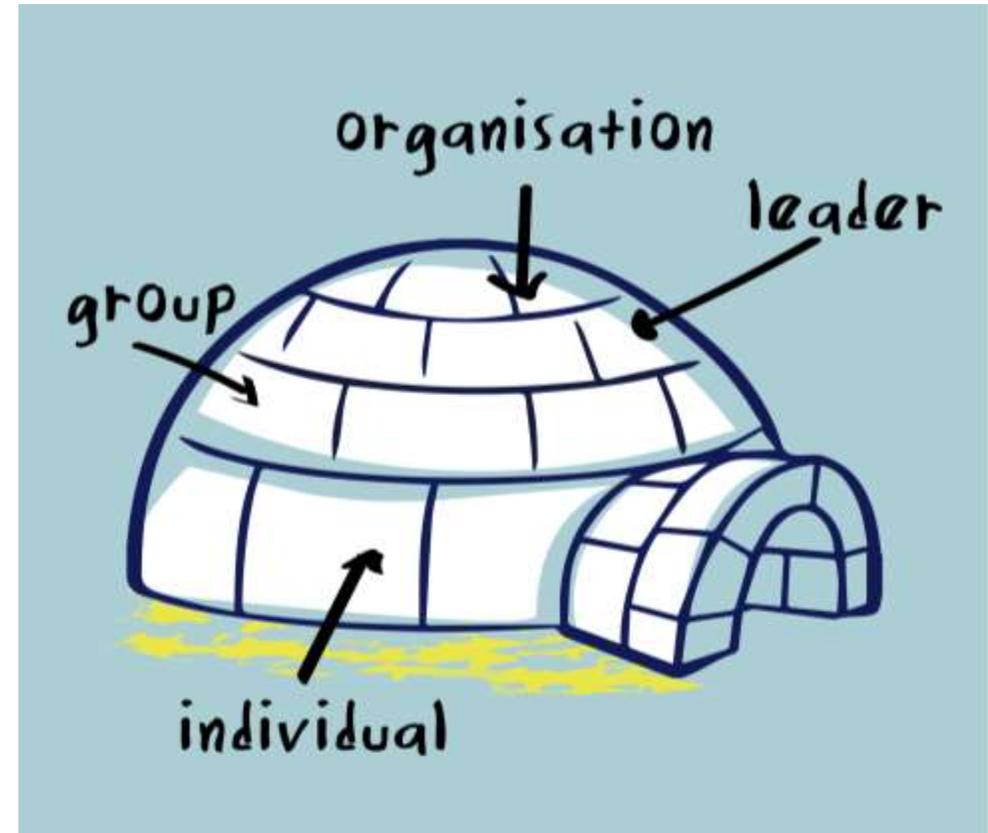
Occupational health

Long COVID clinics

Vocational support

IAPTs and employment advisors

Support groups e.g. Long covid support group



Key messages

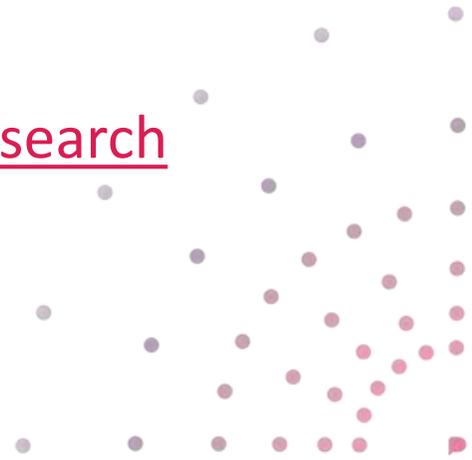


- **Everyone has a role to play:** employees with long COVID, groups, line managers, organisational professionals.
- We need to **increase knowledge, skills and confidence in supporting people to return to and stay at work** when managing long term conditions.
- We need **research** to help us understand how best to support people living with long COVID

For more information

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Find out more about our research: www.affinityhealthatwork.com/our-research



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