



When leading property provider Housing Solutions needed assistance with its Occupational Health provision, it quickly turned to Collingwood Health. Stephen Tyler finds out how the national Occupational Health services have helped to grow the housing association's offering...

IN an age when finding a place to live is arguably less affordable for more of the population than ever before, increasing numbers of people are turning to the expertise of housing associations. From affordable homes to shared-ownership schemes and accommodation for older residents, the property specialists are helping house hunters from all walks of life find a place to call home.

As the demand on their services rises and with no signs of this trend abating, housing groups themselves face a tougher task in managing the gamut of Occupational Health (OH) requirements of their staff and tenants. But while keeping on top of OH may cause a house-sized headache for some, partnering with Collingwood Health has made it a breeze for one of south east England's leading associations.

Housing Solutions, established in 1995, owns, manages and maintains more than 7,500 properties, and calls on Collingwood Health to provide everything from medical assessments for its tenants to back-to-work assessments and vaccinations for its staff.

Caroline Hempstead, Housing Solutions' HR Operations Manager, said that the partnership has provided a real benefit to the staffing side of the organisation since it was put in place. "Collingwood Health's expertise is becoming more important than ever because health and wellbeing is a big issue," she explained. "We want to support employees so that they make a successful return to work and therefore reduce the level of sickness absence."

PEOPLE POWER

Collingwood Health's tailored services have allowed Housing Solutions to implement a first-class Occupational Health package for its employees, including its maintenance team.

Tasked with carrying out a wide range of jobs at properties across the association's portfolio, accidents can occasionally happen.

But where other companies' staff might face a long wait in A&E should the worst happen, Housing Solutions' staff can make use of Collingwood Health's drop-in GP service and medical centre.

By visiting the Occupational Health expert's Slough-based HQ, employees can access basic treatment, receive prescriptions and get specialist advice, saving them and their company a lot of lost working hours.

Caroline added: "Our maintenance team has about 40 people in it and they are working independently in our properties all day.

"On the rare occasion that someone unfortunately has an accident, it used to result in a long wait in A&E. "Thanks to Collingwood Health, they can now travel locally and receive treatment quickly.

"That is good for the employee and means fewer working hours are lost, so it is very beneficial to business."

DIVERSE DELIVERY

In addition to ensuring Housing Solutions' maintenance teams are fit and raring to go, Collingwood Health provides a diverse wellbeing package for the rest of the organization's staff, with physiotherapy sessions and vaccinations among many services on offer.

Collingwood Health also provides detailed assessments on employees who have been absent from work for a long time, taking Housing Solutions specific information into account to suggest ways to get people back on duty quicker.

As well as dealing with pressing medical matters, Collingwood Health assists Housing Solutions in keeping on top of important longer term

legislative requirements such as health surveillance tests.

The check-ups ensure that employees' roles are not damaging aspects such as vision, hearing and lung function and Robyn Quinn, Collingwood Health's Business Development Director, said it highlights the all-round support that Housing Solutions receives.

"It's fair to say many housing associations are looking for a one-stop-shop when it comes to Occupational Health," she explained. "That includes legislative, reactive and proactive services. The challenge can lie in managing these processes.

"We invest our time to listen to our customers, concentrate on their business strategies and provide clarity in our advice to ensure we deliver outcomes in a very clear way."

PROACTIVE PARTNERS

Aside from tending to the day to day health requirements of its staff, Housing Solutions' ongoing partnership with Collingwood Health has also helped them manage an important part of its housing management operation.

When one of its tenants requests a move for medical reasons, they are sent to Collingwood Health to have their needs assessed, ensuring they are eligible for the new property and keeping Housing Solutions in line with legal requirements.

Caroline added: "We are very pleased with the service Collingwood Health provide. They make the effort to get to know us as an organisation and to understand our business.

"We appreciate their drive to come up with new ideas to support us to improve the health and wellbeing of our staff."

Robyn added: "We are very grateful to have Housing Solutions as a customer. Our organisations have a proactive relationship and that has helped our partnership to grow stronger and stronger.

They said...

"Collingwood Health makes the effort to get to know us as an organisation."

*Caroline Hempstead,
Housing Solutions*

Getting to know you

With Housing Solutions just one of a growing number of satisfied partners, Collingwood Health points to excellent customer service as the secret to its success.

Robyn Quinn said: "The advantage we have is that Collingwood Health has been in the OH market for a long time – since 1947– and we place a lot of importance on relationships and delivering advice that is clear, decisive and commercially relevant to each customer's needs.

"We understand the subtle relationship between cost and the requirement to deliver a quality OH service, right across the UK."