

## Avonvoa - Top of the debate on occupational health

**Avonvoa has recently taken part in two opinion pieces addressing the future of sustainable workplaces and its strong link to public health. Tor Erik Danielsen, Chief Medical Officer - Norway, has written on the topic in *Dagens Næringsliv*, while Jonas Arlebäck, Group CEO, has contributed a piece in *Göteborgs-Posten*.**

**Work is the most important health measure** *By Tor Erik Danielsen*

*Published in Norwegian largest daily business paper, Dagens Næringsliv, 26 Nov 2025.*

Around 65 billion Norwegian kroner have been allocated for sickness benefits in the national budget for 2026. If we are to reduce absenteeism, the everyday reality of work itself must become more health-promoting. You who start your shift in the dark. You who stand amid steel and sea spray. You who keep the city running before it wakes, who gather a class that needs one steady adult, who lay seam upon seam until the steel binds, who must weigh your words when they matter most. You know what work means, in your back, your head, and your heart.

The nurse should leave a shift with relaxed shoulders. The offshore worker should come home safe and sound. The welder should have proper protection and the right pace. The teacher should have peace to work. The bus driver should have real breaks. The doctor should have time for the difficult conversation.

We already pay staggering sums for poor working environments, nearly NOK 100 billion a year when Oslo Economics' 2018 estimates are adjusted to today's value. At the same time, we plan to spend about NOK 65 billion on sickness benefits in 2026. That is money we could instead invest in what makes work sustainable: enough people when the pressure is highest, tools that work, and clear priorities.

We spend a large part of our lives at work. When the workday is good, it carries us—belonging, mastery, meaning, and pride. When it is bad, it erodes us quietly, into our sleep, our stomachs, and the conversations around the kitchen table. This is not theory. It is everyday architecture: how we organize shifts, staffing, pace, and support. A good occupational health service should not be a brochure on a shelf, but an active partner. Call it a team around your team. We in occupational health work alongside you, identifying risks before they settle in the body, adjusting schedules before sleep breaks down, testing protective equipment before sparks hit skin, training leaders to cut through noise and prioritize wisely, and following people up early at signs of strain, not months later.

Many need practical help in their workday: assessments without finger-pointing, measures that can actually be implemented, and follow-up until they stick.

We bring the whole person to work, nights with small children and school graduations, commuting and parenthood, financial worries, menopause, rehabilitation after injury. A health-promoting workplace understands the rhythms of both young and old. It allows flexibility when life demands it, builds breaks that can truly be used, and provides support that matters when capacity fluctuates. Smart adjustments to working hours can be the best medicine for the rest of the day.

Norway is one of the best countries in the world to work in. Then we must also be the country that most purposefully uses work as a health measure. That means shifting resources from treating symptoms to addressing causes: better organization, clearer goals, and greater participation. When the quality of the working environment improves, absenteeism falls, not because people "pull themselves together," but because the work becomes possible to do properly.

I may be a bit old-fashioned, but I believe we live in a time that loves shortcuts. An app can remind you to count steps and send push notifications when your energy dips. It can support you—but it does not organize the work. You cannot "mindfulness" your way out of a broken shift schedule, and the best answers rarely come from a chatbot.

Health is clearly important for work, but work is also important for health.

To employers and leaders: Get out into operations. Ask what drains people, what can be improved. Close the gaps, with people, time, and predictability.

To those at work: Speak up about what breaks the flow. Ask for tools that work, breaks that are real breaks, and room to do the job right the first time. That is not nagging. It is prevention.

When work is good, life gets better. When life gets better, the bill shrinks. That is Norway's most down-to-earth public health policy, and it begins with tomorrow's workday.

**Our politicians should use the smart lever for public health** *By Jonas Arlebäck*

*Published e.g. in Swedish second largest daily newspaper, Göteborgs-Posten, 22 Jan 2026.*

In the election year 2026, many issues will compete for the attention of voters and politicians alike. Defence, energy, and crime already dominate the debate, but one of the most decisive issues for future risks is being pushed into the background. This concerns public health, and how it is connected to our working lives.

Today, stress-related mental ill health is the most common cause of sick leave and costs society more than SEK 42 billion annually\*. Behind these figures are individuals torn between the desire to work, family life, and periods of sick leave. Yet despite the scale of the challenge, there is a lack of clear political focus on working life and its impact on public health.

A sustainable working life can no longer be treated as a side issue in politics. Within occupational health services, we meet people before they become patients and can identify risks before they lead to ill health or long-term sick leave. Through initiatives in stress management, psychosocial work environment, ergonomics, and lifestyle-related issues, challenges can be identified and addressed at an early stage, before they develop into complex and difficult problems.

Focusing on work and health is primarily about improving quality of life for people in Sweden, but it also delivers significant socio-economic benefits. Reduced sickness absence and increased productivity benefit society through lower healthcare costs, while employers also gain direct financial returns when they work preventively with occupational health. Investments in the work environment and preventive health should therefore not be seen as costs, but as welfare issues with a natural place on the political agenda ahead of the 2026 election.

Policymakers have the tools, so let us take a closer look at some possible solutions.

More developed legislation could encourage more employers to work systematically and preventively with work environment and health. This could include clearer requirements for preventive work environment plans, financial incentives for investments in occupational health services, and improved collaboration between employers and healthcare providers.

**Role models abroad.** Our neighbouring country Norway has demonstrated political resolve. There, requirements for mandatory occupational health services have recently been strengthened for several industries, including provisions that psychological counselling must be offered to employees as an integrated part of health initiatives.

**Targeted initiatives.** Historically, political decision-makers have supported employers through reforms. Reduced employer contributions for young people and the Home PC initiative are two examples that have had a positive societal impact. With similar initiatives focused on work environment and health, employers who act preventively could be rewarded through tax incentives or other benefits.

Ahead of the 2026 election, politicians have a responsibility to take work environment and public health seriously. Doing so will lead to more healthy and resilient citizens who can help build the society of the future and strengthen Sweden's competitiveness.

\* Sources: Swedish Social Insurance Agency, *Paid sickness benefits by diagnosis; Skandia, How Are You, Sweden 2024?*

**About Us**

Avonova is Nordic's leading provider of occupational health services and is the only Nordic occupational health services provider with a fully integrated hybrid digital/physical delivery model.

Avonova offers a comprehensive range of services to promote well-being and reduce absence, among employees of companies and institutions of all sizes and in all industries. It is leading in preventive evidence based occupational health services in highest impact areas, such as presenteeism, vaccination, and drug testing and rehab.

Avonova has its main offices in Larvik, Norway and Stockholm, Sweden and delivers its services digitally and from 166 locations in Norway and Sweden, by about 1 100 employees – mainly physicians, psychiatrists, nurses, and workplace engineers. For more information, visit [www.avonova.com](http://www.avonova.com).