

# Leading the way to a mentally healthy workplace



This toolkit aims to assist leaders and managers in establishing and promoting mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

Whilst everyone's experience is unique and people will respond and react to situations in varying ways, given these statistics and current research most, if not all workplaces will have employees who experience a mental health condition; the most common being anxiety or depression.

## Understanding the importance of a Mentally Healthy Workspace

The workplace often represents a significant part of a person's life, and consequently plays an important role in supporting the mental and physical health of its employees.

Work-related mental health conditions (psychological injuries) are an increasing concern for workplaces. Safe Work Australia estimates that over 7,200 Australians a year are compensated for psychological injuries, 92% of serious psychological injury claims are attributed to mental stress <sup>(2)</sup>.

Mental health conditions cost Australian workplaces approximately \$10.9 billion per year <sup>(3)</sup>. This is measured by the total cost of absenteeism, presenteeism (when you are at work, but aren't working at full capacity) and compensation claims estimated in one year across all industries.

1 in 5

Australian workers experience a mental health condition in any year <sup>(1)</sup>

47%

of Australians aged 16–85 will live with a mental health condition at some point in their lives <sup>(1)</sup>

\$10.9  
BILLION

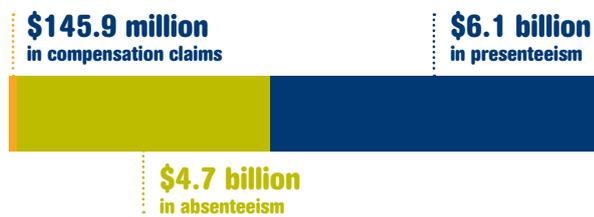
Mental health conditions cost Australian workplaces \$10.9 billion per year <sup>(3)</sup>

For 24-hour telephone crisis support call 13 11 14.  
For more information visit [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au).



The total estimate of approximately \$10.9 billion per year comprises

It's not only a good financial investment, it's also a legal requirement that employers protect the both physical and mental health and safety of their employees.



## So, what is a mentally healthy workspace?

A mentally healthy workplace is one that promotes a positive and inclusive workplace culture where staff feel appreciated and supported in the workplace, and where leaders and managers:

- Drive mental health awareness through open communication enabling employees to feel safe raising mental health conditions and seek help
- Are trained to recognise possible signs of mental health conditions in staff, to have mental health conversations, respond appropriately and know how to refer to professionals when necessary. Relevant training: [Lifeline Workplace Training](#)
- Are aware of mental health support and know how to access both internal support and external mental health resources (External support resources can be found at the end of this document)

While it's important for leadership and management to promote and drive a positive and inclusive workplace culture through policies and practices, it's worth noting a mentally healthy workplace is everyone's responsibility.

## How to develop a Workplace Mental Health Plan

The aim of a Workplace Mental Health Plan is to have a structured, ongoing approach in the supportive management of employees' mental health and wellbeing. It includes intervention strategies, addresses risk factors, and has a plan to manage mental health conditions and support staff.

Health and safety needs to be front of mind and integrated into all workplace procedures, workplace practices and communicated openly by the leaders and management to all employees. Once developed, best practice would be to seek input and feedback from employees to ensure they are aware of and are comfortable with the Mental Health Plan.

Let's look at some considerations to include in your Mental Health Plan.

### 1. Mental Health Awareness and Wellbeing training

Leaders and managers who are formally trained in mental health and wellbeing, will be equipped to openly and regularly communicate the importance of mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

Additionally, having the skills and knowledge to recognise when someone could benefit from a mental health conversation, respond appropriately in crisis conversations and refer

to professionals when necessary, is key.

Mental health awareness at the senior level also helps to reduce the stigma attached to mental health conditions which helps create a supportive environment.

A recent study has shown that attending a 4-hour manager mental health training programme could lead to a significant reduction in work-related sickness absence <sup>(4)</sup>.

Lifeline offers a range of evidence-informed courses to upskill leaders and managers and develop capability in employees. All our courses include suicide awareness and self-care. ([Lifeline Workplace Training](#))

- Accidental Counsellor
- Managing Challenging Interactions
- Mental Health and Wellbeing eLearning
- Suicide Prevention
- Domestic and Family Violence

## 2. Understanding mental health risks in the workplace

Knowledge of mental health risks can assist leaders to proactively identify, evaluate and minimise possible psychological issues in the workplace. This can help alleviate stress which can have a positive effect on an employees' mental health. For instance, consider:

- Reviewing absences to identify any trends – for instance staff burnout, stress leave or compassion fatigue for customer facing staff
- Programs to identify bullying and violence and aggression Safe Work Bullying Safe

Work Violence and Aggression

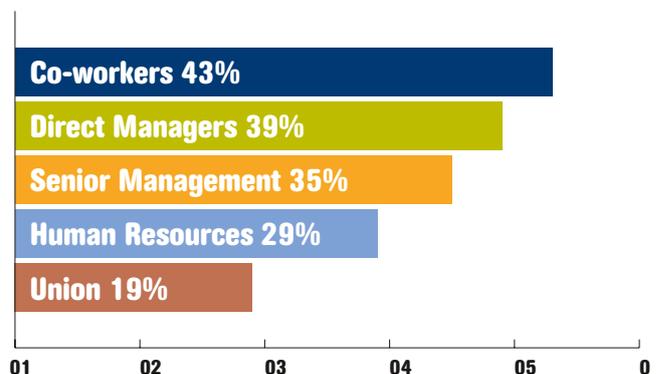
- Conducting exit interviews to determine if there may be any systemic mental health concerns in the workplace
- Reviewing job design for mental health risks such as workplace conditions, physical danger and exposure to trauma, as well as less obvious aspects such as repetitiveness, lack of peer and management support, and inability to meet expected outcomes.

## 3. Ensuring a fair and reasonable workplace environment

A 2014 study of Australian employees found that 35% of employees didn't know if their workplace had any policies, procedures or practices to support mental health. Whereas, 81% of the leaders indicated their workplace had one or more policies, procedures or practices to support mental health <sup>(5)</sup>.

Consequently, many employees don't actively seek mental health support at work because there is either a lack of policies, procedures and practices in place, or they don't know that these resources are available.

Research tells us that employees are more likely to seek support from a work colleague than from a manager or through formal pathways, so it's important employees have the basic skills and awareness to help assist them with supportive conversations and guide their peers to the EAP <sup>(6)</sup>.



Source: State of Workplace Mental Health in Australia

## Implementing safe workplace practices should include:

- Fair and reasonable expectations are set and agreed regarding job design, workloads and work life balance
- A process in place to support employees that disclose they have a mental health condition
- A Return to Work Plan to help employees return to work after being absent with a mental health condition
- Access to counselling via an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Encouraging peer level, informal support networks and mechanisms is an important component of improving and addressing mental wellbeing at work.
- Regular communications to the whole organisation in conjunction with proactive support of these policies by management.

## Resources

- For Crisis Support if life is in danger call **000**
- For 24-hour telephone support call Lifeline on **13 11 14**
- For more information visit [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

## Useful Information and Resources for Workplace Mental Health

[Workplace Training Lifeline Australia](#)

[Lifeline Service Finder](#)

[NSW Government Mental Health at Work](#)

[Creating a Mentally Healthy Workplace](#)

[State of Workplace Mental Health in Australia Heads Up](#)

### References

1. The National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing conducted in 2007 found that an estimated 1 in 5 (20%) Australians aged 16–85 experienced mental disorder in the previous 12 months (ABS 2008).
2. SafeWork NSW, Mentally health workplaces in NSW: A return on investment study, October 2017
- 3, 4 & 5. TNS (2014). State of Workplace Mental Health in Australia. (In Conjunction with Beyond Blue)

## Referral pathways

**Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** – program information must be communicated not just at Induction, but also at regular intervals and at critical times, such as global events (e.g. pandemics) and post disasters or life-changing events (e.g. bushfires, floods or relationship breakdowns). It's critical EAP is easy to access and not hidden somewhere on the intranet.

Consider having posters with details of EAP accessible in high traffic areas such as kitchens and photocopy machines. It's also useful to have EAP cards accessible throughout the office and in bathrooms.

**Managers Assistance Program via EAP** – often a forgotten and underutilised service, leaders and managers have access to psychologists via EAP 24/7 to assist them with difficult situations, such as how to handle a performance review with an employee who has disclosed they have a mental health condition, or to debrief after a crisis conversation with an employee.

**Mental Health Support and Resources** – There are many additional options available providing referral information, helplines, resources and websites from trusted sources for employees via internal communications will help have information available when an employee needs it.

