

# Mentally healthy workplaces toolkit



## About this toolkit

The *Mentally healthy workplaces toolkit* aims to help employers, managers and leaders eliminate and minimise risks to psychological health and create workplace environments that are mentally healthy.

Use the guidance material and practical resources in this toolkit to facilitate positive steps towards a mentally healthy workplace.

The tools, checklists, activities, videos and case studies can be accessed when you see one of these icons:



Tools   Checklists   Activities   Video   Case study



# Mentally healthy workplaces

A mentally healthy workplace is one that:

- promotes workplace practices that support positive mental health
- eliminates and minimises psychological health and safety risks through the identification and assessment of psychosocial hazards
- builds the knowledge, skills and capabilities of workers to be resilient and thrive at work
- is free of stigma and discrimination
- supports the recovery of workers returning after a physical or psychological injury.

Positive mental health is referred to throughout this toolkit and is defined as ‘a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community’.

Mental health is different from mental illness and occurs on a continuum. Mental health is not a fixed state and people can move up and down the continuum regularly. At one end

of the mental health continuum is optimal wellbeing and functioning whilst at the other end people are likely to be experiencing severe symptoms.



This toolkit provides a comprehensive approach to creating and maintaining a mentally healthy workplace by targeting multiple levels of a workplace including systems, policies, processes, culture and leadership. A comprehensive approach incorporates four key elements:

- Promote
- Prevent
- Intervene early
- Support recovery.



This toolkit is structured around a four part model that outlines a comprehensive approach to creating and maintaining a mentally healthy workplace.



## The benefits

While building a mentally healthy workplace makes good business sense, controlling psychological health and safety risks is also a legislative requirement.

Throughout this toolkit, the words ‘must’ or ‘requires’ indicate a legal requirement exists that must be complied with. The word ‘should’ is used in this guide to indicate a recommended course of action, while ‘may’ is used to indicate an optional course of action.

Improving current workplace systems, practices and processes with the help of this toolkit will contribute to a workplace where workers thrive, as well as assist in meeting legal obligations.

The [Managing the risk of psychosocial hazards at work Code of Practice 2022](#) (the Code) is a practical guide on how to prevent harm from psychosocial hazards at work, including psychological and physical harm.

The Code is an approved code of practice under the [Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#)\*. It provides information for a PCBU on how psychosocial hazards and risks can be controlled or managed and can be used to help decide what’s reasonably practicable to reduce risk.

The Code is also a helpful resource for workers who may experience harm from psychosocial hazards, including psychological harm, at work.



Thriving workers



Increased productivity



Decreased absenteeism



Decreased occupational injuries and illnesses



Decreased workers' compensation claims



Increased engagement and job satisfaction



Decreased turnover and selection costs



Increased attraction of top talent



The [return on investment](#) of a mentally healthy workplace is \$2.30 for every \$1 invested

## Case study

In early 2015, Sunshine Coast Council (SCC) launched the FRESHminds program, which aimed to promote a mentally healthy workplace. Key metrics that highlight the success of the FRESHminds program include:

- Approximately 30 per cent of SCC’s workforce have voluntarily undertaken mental health related training.
- In a 2016 survey, 87 per cent of workers agreed that SCC provides for their health and wellbeing (an increase of 37 per cent since 2014).
- SCC’s Employee Assistance Program utilisation rate for 2016 was 8.4 per cent, 2.7 per cent higher than the government industry benchmark.
- The total number of leave days taken due to injury (including stress leave) has reduced by 40 per cent since 2014.

For more information [watch the video](#) created as part of the program.





## Promote positive mental health at work

Promoting positive mental health at work goes further than focusing solely on eliminating or minimising psychological health and safety risks. Promoting positive mental health focuses on taking a strength based approach, focusing on opportunities, strengths and resources that help to foster a healthy, positive and supportive workplace culture. Actions within the Promote section of the toolkit reflect actions the workplace should take. These actions are key to creating a mentally healthy workplace.

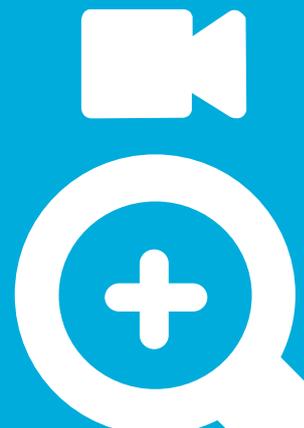
Workers who feel positive about the environment and culture in their workplace are less likely to experience work-related stress, sustain a psychological injury or leave the workplace, and more likely to have better performance and engage in learning and self-development.

### Establishing a positive and supportive workplace culture

Consider these seven factors when establishing a positive and supportive workplace culture that promotes positive mental health.

### Case study

Out Doors Inc. developed a workplace culture in which everyone feels valued and respected and where staff can freely communicate with their direct managers, senior managers and co-workers. This has allowed workers to discuss issues as soon as they arise, which plays an important protective role in promoting positive mental health. This has also had positive impacts on worker retention, satisfaction, productivity and communication. View the full story [here](#).





## Leadership commitment

1

Leaders and managers should visibly demonstrate and communicate the workplace's commitment to building a mentally healthy workplace. This shows workers that positive mental health is important and encourages them to engage in positive practices.

### How to gain and demonstrate leadership commitment

Try these strategies to get managers and leaders on board:

- Develop a business case ([The state of workplace mental health in Australia report](#) outlines some statistics on mentally healthy workplaces in Australia).
- Remind leaders of their [legal obligations](#).
- Use case studies to show how other workplaces have developed mentally healthy workplaces (there are a series of case studies throughout this toolkit).
- Demonstrate the return on investment of a mentally healthy workplace using the [interactive calculator](#).

Once you have leadership commitment, it can be demonstrated by:

- developing and endorsing workplace policies that align with a mentally healthy workplace
- promoting learning and development opportunities around the effective identification and management of psychosocial hazards in the workplace
- implementing and participating in programs and initiatives that contribute to a mentally healthy workplace
- circulating and displaying communications such as emails, newsletters and posters with key messages that promote a commitment to a mentally healthy workplace
- modelling psychological self-care.



[Return on investment calculator](#)



[Managing mental health risks at work: Training for managers and workers](#)





## Supportive and capable managers and leaders

2

It is important for managers to have the knowledge and skills to be able to effectively communicate, empower their team, manage their stress and emotions, as well as manage difficult situations when they arise.

### How to develop management capabilities

There are particular competencies that, when achieved by managers, are shown to reduce work-related stress and promote positive mental health. These competencies

centre on being respectful and responsible, managing and communicating existing and future work, managing the team, and managing difficult situations. It is in the best interest of the workers and the business for managers to understand and develop these competencies.

A self-assessment is a great starting point for managers to identify and measure their strengths and development areas across the competencies. However, self-perceptions may differ from the team, peer and manager perceptions. Consider consulting other sources of data or information to inform strengths and development areas and continue to perform assessments on a regular basis.

Competency	Sub-competency
<b>Respectful and responsible</b>	<p><b>Integrity:</b> Be respectful and honest with workers.</p> <p><b>Managing emotions:</b> Behave consistently and calmly around the team.</p> <p><b>Considerate approach:</b> Be thoughtful in managing others and delegating.</p>
<b>Manage and communicate existing and future work</b>	<p><b>Proactive work management:</b> Monitor and review existing work, allowing future prioritisation and planning.</p> <p><b>Problem solving:</b> Deal with problems promptly, rationally and responsibly.</p> <p><b>Participative/empowering:</b> Meet, listen to and consult with the team. Provide direction, autonomy and development opportunities to individuals.</p>
<b>Manage the individual within the team</b>	<p><b>Personally accessible:</b> Available to talk one-on-one.</p> <p><b>Sociable:</b> Relaxed approach, such as socialising and using humour.</p> <p><b>Empathetic engagement:</b> Seek to understand each individual in the team in terms of their health and satisfaction, motivation, point of view and life outside work.</p>
<b>Manage difficult situations</b>	<p><b>Manage conflict:</b> Deal with conflicts decisively, promptly and objectively.</p> <p><b>Use of organisational resources:</b> Seek advice when necessary from other managers and divisions/work areas.</p> <p><b>Take responsibility for resolving issues:</b> Be accountable and take the lead for resolving problems.</p>



[Take the competency indicator self-assessment](#)

### Improving competencies

This series of activities is aimed at improving these competencies, with a focus on:

- understanding self-perceptions
- communicating more effectively
- engaging team members.

### Managing difficult situations

This resource provides a framework for effective conflict resolution and managing difficult conversations.



[Building stronger teams](#)



[Conflict resolution: Using the interest based relational approach](#)



## Workplace policies that support psychological safety and flexible workplace practices

3

Documented policies and procedures can help formalise the workplace's stance, demonstrating to workers the importance of psychological health and safety in the workplace and helping to reduce the stigma associated with mental health conditions. These policies can also help workers to organise their workloads and optimise their performance.

### Psychological health and safety policy

Most workplaces should have a work health and safety policy that includes psychological health and safety. This policy should be followed through with meaningful action to be effective.

The template below provides a starting point for creating a policy.

### Flexible workplace practices

A flexible work arrangement is any work arrangement that changes standard hours, days or location of work on a temporary or long-term basis including part-time work, job sharing, teleworking, flex-time or varying job hours.

Flexible work arrangements assist with reducing work-related stress, providing a sense of empowerment and control for workers, reducing turnover, decreasing absenteeism and increasing engagement and productivity.

The [National Employment Standards](#) outline scenarios where employers must provide flexible working arrangements to workers.

The tools below will assist in planning and implementing a flexible work arrangements policy.



[Psychological health and safety policy template](#)



[Developing a flexible working arrangements policy](#)



[Flexible work arrangements: Five steps to implementation](#)



## Respectful and dignified workplace interactions

4

Workplace interactions that acknowledge workers' contributions and effort create a workplace culture where everyone feels valued.

Respectful and dignified interactions can also help in reducing the incidence of work-related bullying. The linked activities will help you improve the interactions in your workplace and team.

This generally starts with leaders or managers modelling behaviours that they want others to exhibit.



[Specific active acknowledgement](#)



[Acknowledging strengths activity](#)



## Open, honest and effective communication and consultation

5

A workplace that has a culture of open, honest and effective communication and consultation helps workers to talk openly, express ideas and resolve conflicts.

Consultation is also a key requirement under the [Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#). As such, workplaces must have consultation channels in place. Detailed information about consultation can be found in the [Work health and safety consultation, co-operation and co-ordination Code of Practice 2021](#).

### How to improve communication and consultation

**Model:** Leaders should set a good example and emphasise that honesty in communication is valued. Workers cannot be expected to speak openly and honestly if leaders are not.

**Consult:** Keep workers updated on what is happening in the workplace and consult with them about changes. Genuine consultation enhances a worker's sense of security and inclusion.

**Respond:** Respond to others as promptly as possible.

**Recognise:** Recognise those who communicate honestly and openly, but respectfully.

**Be open:** Adopt a real open door policy. Although many managers might believe they have an open door policy, they are often unavailable. Managers should actively welcome conversations with others and listen to their ideas and feedback. Even when managers are busy with their own time pressures and deadlines, they should still acknowledge the worker and offer an alternative time or avenue for the worker to provide feedback or express concerns. For example, "I'm caught up with some urgent work now and don't have any time to spare, however, we could meet tomorrow at 11am. Let me know if you would prefer an alternative time".

**Empower:** Empower everyone to see mistakes as a learning opportunity. Facilitate a supportive and open culture where everyone feels comfortable sharing their mistakes and learnings. Consider whether the design of work is contributing to recurrent mistakes (refer to [The prevent section](#)).

**Check in:** Schedule regular times to check in with the team whether it is face-to-face, over the phone, through email or another method. This will allow them to raise any problems or concerns as they arise.





## Build organisational awareness of psychological health and safety

6

It is important that the workplace offers opportunities to build worker knowledge and awareness of psychological health and safety. This knowledge can significantly increase proactive, early intervention and can help in reducing the stigma associated with mental health conditions.

### How to increase workers' knowledge

There are a number of ways to increase workers' understanding of how to manage risks to psychological health and safety.

- Leave a list of referral sources and information in staff rooms, newsletters, emails and/or on the intranet to raise awareness of what support is available. You may use some of the sources in the [additional resources](#) section.
- Offer informative presentations on mental health from one of the many [local mental health organisations](#).
- Invite individuals who have experienced a mental health condition or work-related psychological injury to share their stories with workers with opportunities to ask questions.



Display posters around the workplace that provide constant reminders and encourage early intervention. These can help normalise stress for workers so they don't feel isolated.



[Provide online learning and development opportunities for everyone in the workplace. A starting point is beyondblue's e-learning module.](#)

## Model psychological self-care

7

As a leader, manager or worker, it is important to model good work-life balance and self-care to others in the workplace. It is difficult for others to look after themselves if they don't see leaders and managers modelling the same behaviours. Tips for modelling self-care:

- Try limiting working hours to a defined range of hours and avoid taking work home as this can hinder time for personal recovery.
- Take time for a lunch break and to connect with others in the workplace.
- Take up a hobby outside of work.

You can reflect on your self-care using the below self-care assessment to help you identify areas where you could improve.



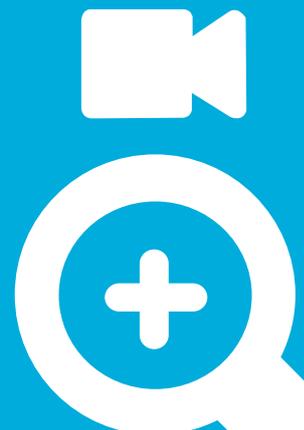
[Self-care assessment](#)



[Managing stress](#)

## Case study

G&S Engineering developed their [I Know Someone video](#) which was rolled out to all workers, together with a toolkit, as part of their #HANDSUP – end the stigma, change lives campaign. The purpose of this campaign was to encourage workers to talk more about mental health in the workplace in order to reduce stigma and increase awareness and capability. The video features a number of G&S workers talking about their experience and the different support options available.





## Promote positive practices: Action summary

-  Show **leadership commitment** to mentally healthy workplaces.
-  Develop **supportive** and **capable** leaders and managers.
-  Implement **workplace policies** that support psychological safety and flexible workplace practices.
-  Practice **respectful** and **dignified** workplace interactions.
-  Encourage open, honest and effective **communication** and **consultation**.
-  Build **organisational awareness** of psychological health and safety.
-  **Model self-care** and work-life balance.





## Prevent psychological harm

### Case study

#### Burstow's Funeral Home

Workers in the funeral industry are exposed to a number of psychosocial hazards such as high workloads, short timeframes and high emotional demands that can increase their risk of psychological injury. Burstow's assessed its psychological health and safety risks and implemented a number of workplace changes including regular worker consultation, branch and department managers meetings and working more as a supportive team. This dramatically reduced workload, conflict and emotional demands. See the [full story here](#).



### Understand psychological health and safety risks

[Psychosocial hazards](#) are anything in the design or management of work that increases the risk of work-related stress. A stress response is the physical, mental and emotional reactions that occur when a worker perceives the demands of their work exceed their ability or resources to cope. Work-related stress if prolonged and/or severe can cause both psychological and physical harm.



Stress itself does not constitute a physical or psychological injury. Workers are likely to be exposed to a combination of psychosocial hazards; some may always be present, while others only occasionally.





Common psychosocial hazards and factors are listed below. The [Managing the risk of psychosocial hazards at work Code of Practice 2022](#) provides further information on each of the hazards and options for control measures.

### High/low job demand



**High job demand** refers to the physical, mental, emotional, social or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort or skills. Examples include high workloads, long periods of vigilance looking for infrequent events, emotional effort in responding to distressing situations or distressed or aggressive clients and shift work leading to higher risk of [fatigue](#).

**Low job demand** refers to sustained low levels of physical, mental or emotional effort required to do the job or little task variety. For example, tasks or jobs where there is too little to do or highly repetitive or monotonous tasks.

### Low job control



**Low job control** refers to having little control over aspects of the work including how or when a job is done. Examples include tasks or jobs where work is machine or computer paced, work is tightly managed, workers have little say in the way they do their work and when they can take breaks, or workers are unable to refuse dealing with aggressive or clients.

### Poor support



**Poor support** refers to tasks or jobs where workers have inadequate emotional and practical support from supervisors and co-workers; inadequate training or information to support their work performance; or inadequate tools, equipment or resources to do the job.

### Low role clarity



**Low role clarity** refers to jobs where there is uncertainty about or frequent changes to tasks and work standards; where important task information is not available to workers; or where there are conflicting job roles, responsibilities or expectations (e.g. a worker being told one task is a priority but another manager disagrees).

### Poor organisational change management



**Poor organisational change management** refers to workplaces where there is insufficient consideration of the potential work health and safety and/or performance impacts during downsizing or relocations; or associated with the introduction of new technology and production processes where there is inadequate consultation and communication with key stakeholders and workers about major changes; or not enough practical support for workers during transitions.

### Poor workplace relationships including interpersonal conflict



**Poor workplace relationships** refers to poor workplace relationships or interpersonal conflict between managers, supervisors, co-workers or others with whom workers are required to interact. It can appear as frequent or excessive disagreements, or rude comments—either from one person to another or between multiple people.

### Bullying



**Bullying** refers to repeated and unreasonable behaviour directed toward a worker or group of workers. Examples include insulting, offensive language, deliberately excluding someone from work activities, spreading misinformation or rumours.



## Poor organisational justice



**Poor organisational justice** refers to processes or decisions that are perceived as unfair. Examples include inconsistent application of policies and procedures; unfairness or bias in decisions about the allocation of resources and work; or poor management of underperformance.

## Reward and recognition



**Low reward and recognition** refers to jobs where there is a lack of positive feedback; there is an imbalance between workers' efforts and formal and informal recognition and rewards; there is a lack of opportunity for skills development; or skills and experiences are underused.

## Violence and aggression



**Violence and aggression** includes incidents where a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in relation to their work. Examples include robbery, assault, being bitten, spat at, scratched or kicked or being threatened with a weapon.

## Traumatic events



Workers may be exposed to this hazard at work through investigating, witnessing or being directly exposed to **traumatic events** or situations. This may include reading, hearing or seeing accounts of traumatic events.

## Harassment, including sexual harassment



**Harassment** refers to behaviour that is unwelcome or unsolicited, offensive, humiliating or intimidating and relates to someone's sex, race, age or other personal attribute. Sexual harassment includes unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature.

## Remote work or isolated work



**Remote work** refers to work at locations where access to resources and communications is difficult and travel times may be lengthy. **Isolated work** refers to work where there are no or few other people around. Examples include farmers, real estate agents, a community nurse conducting visits at night, night shift operators in petrol stations or convenience stores, or fly in, fly out (FIFO) workers.

## Poor environmental conditions



**Poor environmental conditions** refers to exposure to poor quality or hazardous work environments. Examples include hazardous manual tasks, poor air quality, high noise levels, extreme temperatures or working near unsafe machinery. We need new icon for <https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/safety-and-prevention/mental-health/Psychosocial-hazards-and-factors/harassment-including-sexual-harassment>



[Guide for managing the risk of fatigue at work](#)



[Guide for preventing and responding to work-related violence](#)



[What do these hazards and factors look like in my industry?](#)



[Guide for preventing and responding to workplace bullying](#)



## A risk management approach for psychosocial hazards

Risk management is a four step process for managing health and safety risks in the workplace.

The WHS laws require you to manage risks from reasonably foreseeable hazards, including work-related psychosocial hazards.

A mentally healthy workplace does not happen by chance or guesswork. You have to think about what could go wrong at your workplace and what the consequences could be. Then you must do whatever you can (in other words, whatever is 'reasonably practicable') to eliminate or minimise psychological health and safety risks arising from your business or undertaking.

This process is known as risk management and to properly manage risks, a person must:

1. identify hazards
2. assess risks
3. control risks
4. review control measures to ensure they are working as planned.

The below figure provides an overview of the four step risk management process.



## Step one and two: Identify the hazards and assess and prioritise risks

The first step in the risk management process is to identify workplace hazards. This means looking for the workplace factors that have the potential to cause harm.

Common psychosocial hazards:

- high and/or low job demands
- low job control
- poor support
- low role clarity
- poor organisational change management
- low reward and recognition
- poor organisational justice
- poor workplace relationships, including interpersonal conflict
- remote or isolated work
- poor environmental conditions
- traumatic events
- violence and aggression
- bullying
- harassment, including sexual harassment.

1



### [How to examine workplace data](#)

This tool helps to examine sources of workplace data that might give you an insight into potential hazards in your workplace.



2

The second step in the risk management process involves assessing the likelihood and consequences of injury or illness that may result from exposure to psychosocial hazards. The level of risk can be determined by understanding the nature of the harm that could be caused by the psychosocial hazards, how serious the harm could be and the likelihood of it happening. This step may not be necessary if you are dealing with known risks to psychological health and safety that have known control measures. A number of ready made tools as well as feedback from workers can help assess and prioritise the level of risk.

## How to assess and prioritise risk

### People at Work survey

The People at Work<sup>®</sup> survey is a free and comprehensive survey of psychosocial hazards. The People at Work survey provides an indication of each hazard as compared to other Australian workplaces.



#### [People at Work](#)

- ✓ **Suitable for:** workplaces larger than 20 workers.
- ✓ **Resources required:** a staff member to complete the survey and report on the findings and create an action plan in response to the risks identified.

### Psychosocial risk assessment

This psychosocial risk assessment provides a template for conducting a psychosocial risk assessment. The template also provides a risk management plan to help implement controls for the risks identified and an evaluation plan to track the effectiveness of the controls.



#### [Psychosocial risk assessment](#)

- ✓ **Suitable for:** all businesses.
- ✓ **Resources required:** someone to conduct the risk assessment (approximately one to two hours time commitment).

### Focus group guide

The focus group guide helps you prepare for a focus group including how to prepare, how to conduct the focus group, and how to analyse and report on the data. Focus groups are a powerful tool to help you engage in consultation with workers.



#### [Focus groups](#)

- ✓ **Suitable for:** all businesses.
- ✓ **Resources required:** someone to conduct the focus group(s) and review data and participants' allowed time to attend the focus group.

## Control risks

3

After assessing the risks and determining which risk(s) have the greatest priority, the most appropriate control measure(s) need to be selected and implemented.

When implementing controls, you should always check you have not inadvertently introduced new hazards. Further guidance on controls specific to each of the psychosocial hazards can be found in the [Managing the risk of psychosocial hazards at work Code of Practice 2022](#).



## Review effectiveness of controls

4

The last step of the risk management process is to review the effectiveness of your control measures. This can be achieved by simply revisiting the first three steps of the risk management process.

Risk management for psychosocial hazards should be an ongoing process. Some of the key triggers for reviewing processes might be a change in supervisors, new workers starting, new processes or procedures being implemented, a workplace incident or a worker suffering a psychological injury.

## Participation, communication and consultation

The WHS laws have a focus on consultation in risk management, which means that employers must seek advice or information from workers. Use work health and safety representatives and committees and clear communication management structures to oversee, implement and evaluate the risk management process.

Consider the following methods and/or groups or committees to help drive effective consultation with workers.

### 1. Senior steering committee

A senior steering committee is a group of individuals drawn from senior management positions and strategic areas of the workplace. Generally, only larger workplaces will have a senior steering committee. The purpose of a senior steering committee is to:

- provide guidance and direction for a project and to interface with the workplace at a senior level about the project
- provide risk management for psychosocial hazards
- show tangible evidence of management support.

### 2. Working group

A working group includes the people who more actively facilitate the risk management process on the ground.

### 3. Feedback the results of risk assessments

Providing feedback to workers on any risk assessments conducted is crucial. This step helps ensure information about hazards is used in designing, implementing and evaluating appropriate interventions.

Refer to the Code of Practice for [Work health and safety consultation, co-operation and co-ordination](#).





## Prevent: Action summary



Understand the **key psychosocial hazards**.



Undertake the **risk management process**.



Undertake **meaningful consultation** with workers.



Ensure there are appropriate resources and processes to **control risks**.



Use a **combination of control measures** to effectively control the risk.



**Maintain, monitor and review** control measures to make sure they remain effective.





# Intervene early

## Early recognition and intervention

A key characteristic of a mentally healthy workplace is that when a worker begins to show signs of distress, there are established workplace systems and processes to intervene early before someone suffers a psychological injury.

## Recognising the signs

The following list of indicators could help management and workers recognise when someone might need support. These signs do not necessarily mean there is an issue but it is important to check in with the person regarding their wellbeing.

### Indicators of potential distress

#### Physical

- Constant colds
- Being tired at work
- A change in appearance or dress
- Rapid weight loss or gain
- Complaining about physical health issues (headaches or migraines)

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#### Emotional

- Irritability
- Sensitive to criticism
- Uncharacteristic loss of confidence
- Loss of sense of humour

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#### Cognitive

- Increase in mistakes
- Problems with decision making
- Inability to concentrate
- Performance decline

#### Behavioural

- Arriving late
- Not taking lunch breaks
- Taking unofficial time off
- Not joining in workplace banter
- Not meeting deadlines
- Becoming more introverted or extroverted
- Generally acting out of character

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#### In the business

- Increased absence
  - Increased staff turnover
  - Staff working longer hours
  - Decrease in motivation
-



## How to ask if someone is OK

When someone suffers from a physical condition, such as a broken leg, most managers know the right course of action to take and what to say. However, with distress or psychological injury, managers and workers may have less certainty around what to say or do. There are some simple steps you can take to start a conversation with someone in the workplace.

### Getting ready to ask

1. Be ready - to listen and give time if needed.
2. Be prepared - to be open minded and understanding.
3. Pick a moment - where and when will you approach them.

### Starting a conversation

1. Ask R U OK?
2. Listen without judgement.
3. Encourage action.
4. Check in.



If a worker confides that they may need additional support, it is important to respond. Some examples of the support your workplace can offer include:

- providing details of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or a list of support resources such as those provided in the [additional resources section](#) of this toolkit
- redesigning aspects of the job that can cause work-related stress or psychological harm ([example good work design](#))
- examining [suitable alternative duties](#) or reasonable modifications or supports if the worker is experiencing personal difficulties.



[The conversation guide](#)



[Have a conversation](#)

## Provide early intervention through EAP

EAP offers free, confidential, third-party counselling and support services to workers via telephone or in person. Referring workers to EAP when an issue is first identified can help prevent a situation from escalating and becoming a larger and more serious issue. EAP can also form part of a workplace's overall psychosocial risk management process.

Workplaces that offer EAP services should ensure that:

- all workers are aware of how to access the EAP
- workers can access the EAP anonymously
- processes are in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the EAP. This will assist in ensuring a sustainable approach (the EAP tool provides suggestions for evaluation).

A less formal arrangement with a local psychologist to provide services to workers could also be considered. To find a local psychologist refer to the [Australian Psychological Society's](#) find a psychologist service. There are also [other support services](#) that can be promoted to and accessed by businesses and workers.



[Selecting and strengthening EAP programs: A purchaser's guide](#)



[A list of EAP providers within Australia](#)



## Reasonable modifications or support

If someone is feeling overwhelmed or needs additional support, making modifications to their work can help prevent them from becoming injured. Small modifications can make a big difference for people and their ability to cope. Most modifications can be made in consultation with a worker and are based on the needs of the worker and the operational needs of the business. They do not need to be expensive and can be a simple and temporary change.

### Some examples of how work can be modified

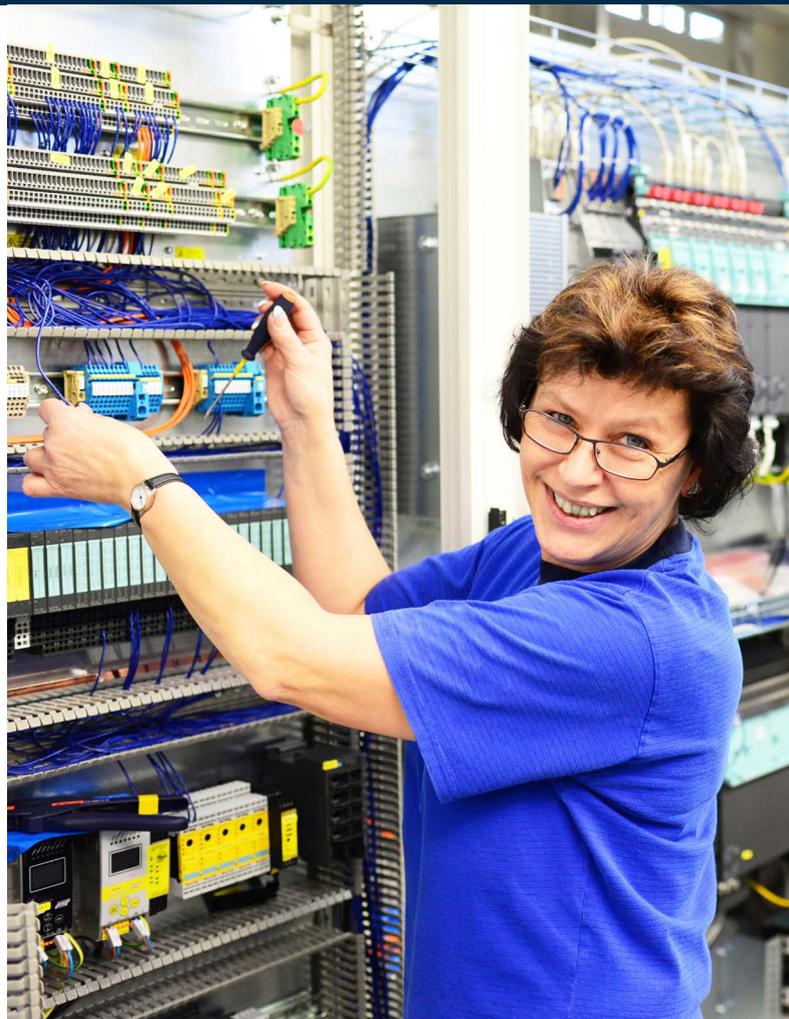
1. Modify start, finish or break times.
2. Examine the workplace environment to determine if a location move would be best (e.g. to a quieter desk area, to a site closer to home).
3. A decrease in hours and/or days worked if stamina is an issue. Alternatively, if returning after a period of leave a gradual increase in hours and/or days worked.
4. Provide the worker with tasks they are most confident about completing successfully.
5. Make changes or modifications to tasks and or workload.
6. Make changes or modifications to communication including instructions, directions and feedback.
7. Ensure inclusion of the worker at meetings, offsite events or social events.
8. Provide training if training needs are identified to help support skill development.
9. Provide greater autonomy to the workers to manage their work.
10. Examine aspects of the role causing particular stress and rearrange (if applicable).

## Managing disclosure

Workers may or may not disclose a mental health condition to you. If it is evident a worker is not coping well, you should check in with them using the conversation guide.

### If a worker discloses their mental health condition to you:

Privacy legislation requires employers to ensure personal information about a worker's mental health status is not disclosed to anyone without the worker's consent. Any information can only be used for the purposes for which it was disclosed, such as arranging modifications in the workplace to support the worker. It is important not to tell co-workers unless the worker has expressly consented for you to do so. Discussion with the worker is essential in determining the parameters for disclosing a worker's mental health status to their co-workers.



[What can a manager do?](#)



[SuperFriend Peer Support Booklet](#)



[Mental Health First Aid](#)

The Mental Health First Aid program provides training to workers and managers to help them recognise the signs and symptoms of mental health problems, understand how to give appropriate initial help and support and check in later to see if they have sought help and support.



### If a worker does not disclose their mental health condition to you:

If you suspect that a worker is experiencing a mental health concern, it is a good idea to ask if there is any support the workplace can offer them and/or encourage them to speak to someone from the EAP (if available) or other professional help. If a worker does not disclose anything to you, there is limited further action that can be taken. However, you should continue to check in with that worker to signal you are concerned for their wellbeing and available if needed.

More information about managing a worker with a mental illness and disclosure can be found in the below tool.

Sometimes return to work coordinators or other managers may have workers confide in them about a mental health concern where the worker is unsure whether to formally disclose this concern. In these cases you might like to direct them to material to help in their decision making process.



[The pros and cons to disclosure tool will help workers in their decision to disclose to their managers or colleagues.](#)

### Peer support programs

Peers in a support program are trained to recognise changes in others, how to intervene in an unobtrusive way and guide an individual to appropriate support services. Peer support programs:

- help foster workplace engagement
- increase resilience across the workplace
- contribute to a mentally healthy workplace
- encourage proactive help-seeking behaviour.

### Workplace trauma

Exposure to workplace trauma can be rare or common depending on the business and/or industry. It is important to know what to do in the unfortunate event that there is a traumatic event at work. Some examples of traumatic events can include a death or suicide of a colleague, an incident of customer aggression or [violence](#), a natural disaster, workplace incident or exposure to other emotionally disturbing events.



[Workers with Mental Illness: A Practical Guide for Managers](#)



[Heads Up Australia | Legal Responsibility](#)




[Mates in Construction](#)

Mates in Construction offers a community development program on work sites and supports workers in need through case management. Mates in Construction can offer a similar alternative to a peer support program. It also offers services outside of the construction industry.



[Traumatic Events: First Aid Guidelines for Assisting Adults](#)

This guide provides some steps on how to manage a workplace trauma.

**Case study**  
[New South Wales Fire and Rescue](#)

**Case study**  
[Mates in Construction connectors](#)





## Intervene early

- Improve awareness of the **signs of distress** in workers.
- Have a conversation** when a worker may be struggling.
- Encourage early intervention** through EAP or other local services.
- Make **reasonable modifications** or supports as necessary.
- Understand how to **manage worker disclosure**.
- Consider implementing a **peer support program**.
- Understand how to **respond to workplace trauma**.





## Support recovery

### Understanding return to work and recovery

If a worker has suffered a psychological injury, it is important to support their journey back to work. Work plays an important role in recovery for workers as it provides meaning, purpose, structure and opportunities for social contact.

Employers also have a legal responsibility to take all reasonable steps to help with or provide rehabilitation to a worker suffering a work-related injury while they are receiving compensation.

In addition to supporting an injured worker back to work, a workplace should also review workplace policies and procedures, and changes that have been made as a result of the injury.

The [prevent from psychological harm](#) section of the toolkit can assist in planning and reviewing controls.



What has been implemented to avoid psychological injury in the workplace re-occurring?



What controls have been reviewed as a result of a worker suffering a psychological injury in the first place?



How are the controls being monitored to ensure they're effective?

### 'Doing' promotes recovery

Getting back to work is an important step in recovering from a work-related injury. It means a worker can return to normal life, often reducing the financial and emotional impact on them and their family. A workplace can promote 'doing' by:

- implementing a suitable duties plan - a graduated work program that helps injured workers improve their work fitness while they recover from their injury
- using a personalised approach to return to work and recovery
- involving a Rehabilitation Return to Work (RRTW) Coordinator. This provides an immediate contact to express concerns and provide support. As a RRTW coordinator, having an understanding of mental health/psychological injury can also help to better assist an injured worker.

### Workplace relationships and communication

A supportive and positive approach, at the time of injury and throughout the rehabilitation process, can have a positive impact on recovery and improves the likelihood of a prompt and successful return to work. This in turn reduces the costs of the claim and the impact of the injury on your workers compensation premium. Regular communication lets your worker know they are valued and alleviates uncertainty about their job security.



[Tips for communicating with injured workers](#)



### Workplace relationships

- Supportive conditions at work
- Relationship with supervisor
- Co-worker support

It is important that there is ongoing communication with workers away from work.



### Personalised approach to recovery

An individual's biological, psychological and social factors (known as the biopsychosocial model) will influence their reaction to the same set of events. For example, imagine two workers who experience the same traumatic incident at work:

- worker one has a very supportive family and home environment, high levels of self-esteem and good physical health
- worker two does not have any immediate family and has been having treatments for poor physical health.

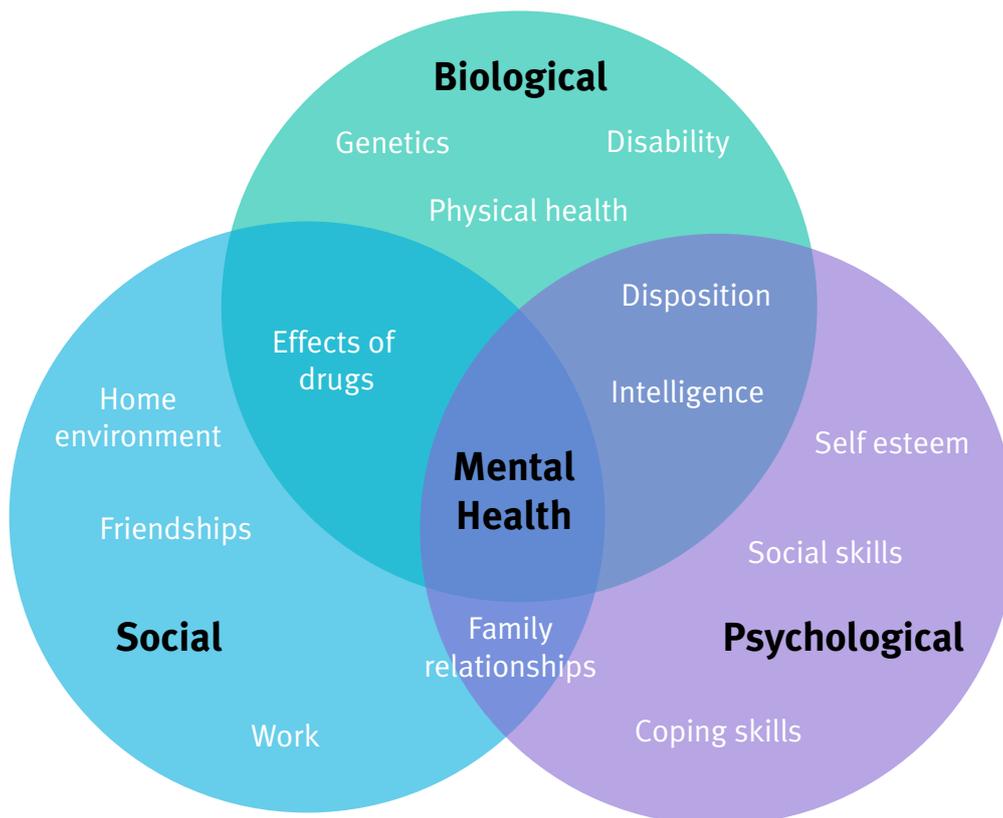
Worker one and worker two have very different responses to the event and worker two requires additional time off work and modifications to their work in order to manage.

This means that a personalised approach to return to work and recovery is required for every individual. The resources below provide a series of useful tools to tailor the return to work process for the individual.

### Return to work planning

- consider all information and recommendations from health professionals
- allow flexible working arrangements where appropriate
- consider gradually increasing the worker's hours over time
- minimise any environmental stressors such as harsh lighting, noise or heat
- consider any relevant psychosocial hazards and factors (refer to [Prevent section](#) of the toolkit)
- negotiate an appropriate level and variety of tasks for the worker to achieve. The level and type should be negotiated as the worker progresses in their recovery.

For further information regarding return to work, visit [worksafe.qld.gov.au](https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au).



[A best practice framework for the management of psychological claims](#)



[Managing psychiatric injuries: a guide for return to work coordinators](#)



[Supporting worker success: A tool to plan adjustments](#)



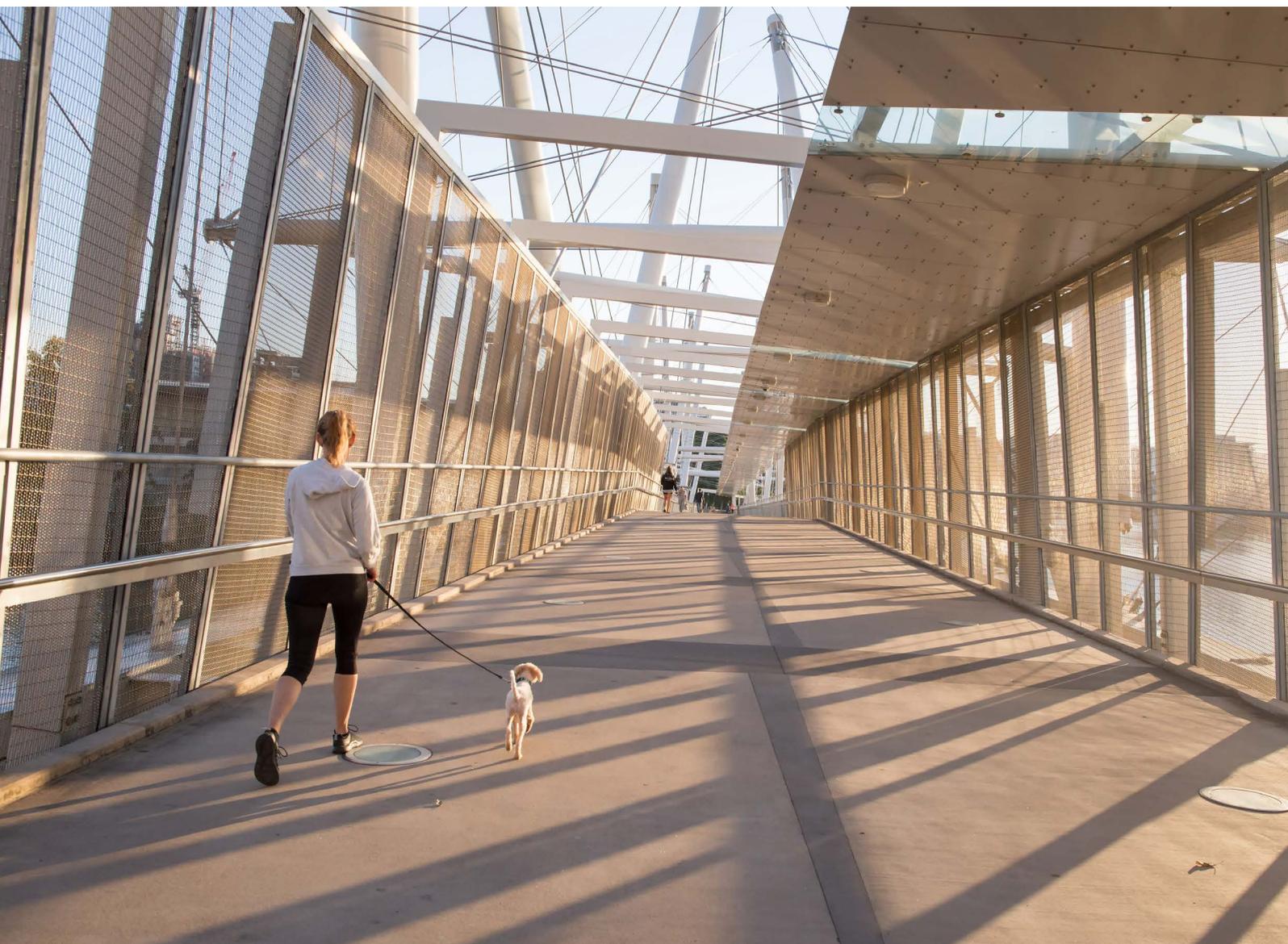
[Working for recovery: Suitable employment for return to work following psychological injury](#)



## Empower workers for recovery using a strength-based approach

Once a worker is back at work, taking an approach that focuses on the worker's strengths empowers them and results in a more positive return to work outcome. The list below provides a series of strategies to empower workers in their recovery:

1. **Recognise existing capabilities and strengths:** Recognise and grow workers' capabilities and support them to use their capabilities at work.
2. **Set clear expectations:** Articulate roles, responsibilities and expectations. Reinforce the links between the worker's work and the workplace's objectives.
3. **Promote support networks:** Engage peer and personal networks, such as family contacts, alongside professional involvement as a way of providing recovery skills, transferring knowledge and supporting change.
4. **Facilitate rather than deliver:** Ask workers for their input in decisions and use the rehabilitation team as catalysts and facilitators of change, rather than purely service providers.
5. **Recognise progress:** Recognise gains and setbacks of workers to create a sense of progress.
6. **Communicate effectively:** Inform, engage and involve workers. Effective communication helps build positive relationships which contribute to workplace resilience.
7. **Promote personal skills:** Encourage others to think critically and develop alternative solutions to workplace problems.
8. **Balance work with other life activities:** Balance effort and recovery for workers (including time for rest, exercise and adequate nutrition). This is important to maintain resilience. Everyone should have energy left over at the end of the working day.





## Support recovery: Action summary

- Consider what the workplace will do differently in the workplace to **prevent injury reoccurring**.
- Ensure that **workplace factors** that may have contributed to the injury have been **addressed**.
- Take an **individual-focused approach** to recovery.
- Promote the **importance of work** to recovery.
- Keep in touch** with your worker while they are away from work due to injury.
- Use the **return to work planning** checklist.
- Involve** the worker in their recovery planning.
- Empower the worker in their recovery by using a **strength-based approach**.





# Commit to action for a mentally healthy workplace: Five tips for small business

For a small business there are five key areas that will help to cultivate a mentally healthy workplace.

1



## Identify and control psychosocial risks

The psychosocial hazards and factors that may be impacting those in the workplace can be identified and addressed at team meetings, workplace walk throughs and individual conversations. The psychosocial risk assessment template may assist in documenting identified hazards and control measures. As a business owner, take the time to educate yourself further on identifying worker concerns. There are a number of easy ways to enhance your knowledge:



[For small businesses](#)



[Headsup](#)



[Psychosocial risk assessment tool](#)

2



## Promote and model self-care and balance

Business owners should promote and model psychological self-care. Workplaces where leaders model positive behaviours help others to look after themselves. This can be as simple as ensuring that everyone takes the time to have a lunch break and connect with others in the workplace, and encouraging workers to have good work-life balance. Take the self-care assessment to help you reflect and identify areas where you can improve your self-care.

3



## Recognise the signs

If someone in the workplace needs support there are common signs that provide indications to prompt early intervention. Refer to the [Intervene early](#) information.

4



## Support workers when they need it

If there is someone you suspect is not coping well, have a conversation with them to see how the workplace can better support them. The earlier intervention occurs the better the outcome for the individual. The conversation guide and example workplace modifications in the [Prevent](#) section of the toolkit provides some guidance to help support workers. Workplaces can consider engaging the services of a local psychologist for workers if they need it ([find a psychologist service](#)) or let workers know about the [better access to mental health care](#) which provides subsidised psychological services to Australians. [Mates in Construction](#) also provide suicide awareness training across numerous industries.

5



## Stay in touch with anyone who is injured

If any workers need to take time off due to a psychological injury or work-related stress, make sure to check in with them regularly. Make a point to help them feel like they are still part of the team by providing regular updates. Also, consider what will be done to avoid an injury reoccurring in the workplace. You can also access more information on managing [work-related violence](#), [bullying](#) and [fatigue](#) using the linked material. [NewAccess](#) is a program developed by beyondblue that provides free and confidential support to help tackle day-to-day pressures.



[Ahead for business](#)



[Creating a mentally healthy workplace in small business](#)



[Psychological health for small business](#)



[Safety fundamentals toolkit for small business](#)



## Additional resources

If it is suspected that someone in the workplace may be suicidal refer to the [Heads Up Suicide Prevention Resource](#) for practical tips, videos, and steps on what to do.

### [Beyond Blue](#)

Provides information and resources about depression and anxiety.

### [Black Dog Institute](#)

The Black Dog Institute is dedicated to understanding, preventing and treating mental illness.

### [Employee Assistance Professional Association of Australia \(EAPAA\)](#)

EAPAA are the Peak Australasian Body representing provider and user members that supply Employee Assistance Programs in the workplace.

### [Head to Health](#)

Head to Health (H2H) helps you find the information, resources and services that most suit your needs.

### [Heads Up](#)

Heads Up is all about supporting Australian businesses to create mentally healthy workplaces. There is a range of resources and guidance for all workers to help create a tailored action plan.

### [Healthy Worker Initiative](#)

The Healthy Worker Initiative provides tools and resources to enhance the health and wellbeing of your workforce.

### [Lifeline](#)

Lifeline is a national charity providing all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24 hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.

### [MensLine Australia](#)

MensLine Australia is a telephone and online counselling service for men with family and relationship concerns.

### [Mates in Construction \(MIC\)](#)

MIC is a charity established in 2008 to reduce the high level of suicide among Australian construction workers. MIC provide suicide prevention through community development programs on sites and support workers in need through case management and a 24/7 help line.

### [NewAccess Coaching](#)

NewAccess is a free service that provides support in the form of a coach. A coach is someone who will guide you in setting practical goals that will get you back on track. This resource can be provided to workers.

### [Queensland Council of Unions \(QCU\)](#)

QCU provide support and advisory services for workers. They provide workers' compensation advisory services which are accessible from their web platform and a personalised phone service for any worker who requires assistance with the workers' compensation scheme after experiencing a work-related injury.

### [Queensland Mental Health Commission \(QMHC\)](#)

QMHC encourage and facilitate change to improve the mental health and wellbeing of all Queenslanders.

### [Remote and Rural Mental Health](#)

Remote and Rural Mental Health deliver mental health programs and resources to people living and working in rural and remote Australia.

### [Richmond Fellowship Queensland \(RFQ\)](#)

RFQ provides a personalised response to the needs of people living with mental illness. They provide a series of events, forums and resources on their website.

### [Safework NSW Mental health at work](#)

A website with support and resources for managers and workers about workplace mental health.

### [Sane Australia](#)

SANE Australia is a national charity helping all Australians affected by mental illness.

### [Suicide Call Back Service](#)

This service provides free phone, video and online counselling for anyone affected by suicide.

### [The Better Access Initiative](#)

The Better Access initiative aims to improve outcomes for people with a clinically diagnosed mental disorder through evidence based treatment. Under this initiative, Medicare rebates are available to patients for selected mental health services provided by appropriately qualified mental health professionals.

### [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry QLD \(CCIQ\)](#)

CCIQ provide training and education, advice and business intelligence. Specifically, they offer a workers' compensation hotline to provide free independent advice to Queensland employers in relation to workers' compensation issues.

### [Workers' Psychological Support Service](#)

An independent support service for those experiencing a work-related psychological injury.

### [WayAhead Workplaces](#)

WayAhead Workplaces is a membership of leading organisations, researchers and practitioners in workplace health.

### [Mental Health Commission](#)

The National Mental Health Commission promotes understanding of the outcomes that drive change across service systems for people with lived experience of mental health issues.

The National Workplace Alliance is a group of national organisations from the business, union, community and government sectors leading change to promote and create mentally healthy workplaces.



This document was developed by the Office of Industrial Relations (Workplace Health and Safety Queensland) and includes content adopted or adapted from the following publications:

Australian Human Rights Commission, [Workers with a mental illness: A practical guide for managers \(2010\)](#)

Government of Western Australia, Department of Commerce, [Psychologically safe and healthy workplaces: risk management approach toolkit](#)

Heads up, [Mental health and wellbeing policy template](#)

Health and safety executive, [Line manager competency indicator tool](#)

[RUOK](#)

Unum, [Managing mental health in the workplace](#)

Worksafe VIC, [WorkWell](#)

[workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com](#)

World Health Organisation, [Mental health: A state of wellbeing, 2014](#)

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