

MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK



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Key action areas

Every workplace is different and requires a tailored approach, however, there are six actions that can set your organisation on the path to creating a mentally healthier workplace. Read our practical tips for taking action, below.

1) Design jobs to minimise harm

The health and wellbeing of a workplace can be enhanced by minimising the impact of risk factors and maximising the impact of protective factors in the way jobs are done. Good job design strategies include providing clear instructions on expectations at work, seeking and valuing worker input into the work they do, ensuring workers have the resources they need, and developing your people so that they continue to learn and grow. One easy strategy is ensuring regular team catch ups where expectations on work outputs are made clear and workers have an opportunity to provide input into how work is achieved and any challenges they may face.

Consider individual worker factors, such as whether workers are juggling work and home life demands, and operational factors, such as the interaction employees have with clients/customers, shift work implications and rostering (e.g. avoiding long shifts). It's also important to ensure the work environment itself is set up to promote good work and concentration for the task at hand, such as making sure the lighting is appropriate and it is not too noisy.

Check out Safe Work Australia's [Good Work Design Handbook](#) and the Future of Work Institute's [Thrive at Work](#) initiative for more information.

2) Promote positive factors

Consider a range of actions that can support the mental health of your staff by contributing to a positive workplace culture. These actions may include providing training that builds leaders' capability to promote and manage mental health of workers and training for workers to increase their mental health literacy. If you haven't already, your workplace can also develop a 12-month health and wellbeing plan with free support from [Healthier Work](#) to promote positive factors in your workplace, including strategies to reduce sedentary behaviours and increase opportunities for safe physical activity.

3) Provide information, resources and strategies

Provide information to help individuals practice self-care, seek help when needed and better manage work-related stressors and challenges. There is a range of external sources of mental health information, supports and helpful tools. [Smiling Mind](#) (website and app) is one example of free tools you can promote – teaching mindfulness meditation, which can help staff take a pre-emptive approach to promoting wellbeing, as well as managing their mental health, stress and emotions in the workplace.

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4) Intervene early

Evidence shows that early support improves outcomes from mental illness. Encourage staff to get support early when they need it (through your EAP or external supports, such as GPs, [Lifeline](#) or [Beyond Blue](#)) and develop skills of leaders around mental health and suicide prevention. Consider staff training needs and opportunities, including suicide prevention gatekeeper training (such as [Question, Persuade Refer](#)) or peer support initiatives.

5) Support recovery

The notion that a worker needs to be fully recovered before they can return to work is outdated. In most cases, early return to work can play a significant part in a person's overall recovery. Explore what resources are available in your organisation to support workers recovering from mental illness. Talk to the impacted worker about what they need to identify and implement job adjustments to support them to return to and/or stay at work. If taking time away from work is what's best for the individual, provide flexible working and leave arrangements.

Check out the Australian Human Rights Commission's [Workers with mental illness: A practical guide for managers](#).

6) Reduce stigma

Promote zero-tolerance from discrimination against staff who have a mental health condition. Effective stigma reduction initiatives have shown to improve overall organisational culture. Encourage senior leaders and managers to speak openly about mental health in the workplace by actively endorsing and participating in activities and events aimed at reducing stigma. Organisations such as [Mental Illness Education ACT \(MIEACT\)](#) can also link your workplace in with a lived experience speaker to share their personal experience and reduce stigma around speaking up about mental health concerns.

Mentally healthier workplaces during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we live, the way we work and the way we relate to others. It has also brought unprecedented challenges and disruptions to workplaces. It's natural for individuals to feel a range of emotions at this time.

There are a range of resources available to help your workplace support the mental health and wellbeing of your workers and create a mentally healthier workplaces during COVID-19.

Check out the series of evidence-based, easy to use guides created by the National Mental Health Commission, in conjunction with the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance. Resources have been developed for sole traders, small business, as well as medium to large business. Access these guides from the Mental Health Commission's [website](#).

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There are also a range of telephone and online mental health supports that you can promote within your workplace, including:

- The ACT Government's [Mental Health and Wellbeing during COVID-19](#) webpage
- The Australian Government's [Head to Health COVID-19 Support](#) website
- Beyond Blue's [Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service](#), including its 24/7 helpline: 1800 512 348
- E-Mental Health in Practice [Managing Your Mental Health Online During COVID-19 Factsheet](#) for a comprehensive list of online supports.

It's important to keep good communication going within your workplace, support each other and encourage help seeking if needed.

Get in touch!

If you'd like further information on how you can create a mentally healthier workplace by becoming a Healthier Work recognised workplace, please get in touch with us!

Web: www.healthierwork.act.gov.au

Email: healthierwork@act.gov.au