Fact Sheet 15 – What this means for workplace mental health

Key Issues

- Mental health is often overlooked as a barrier to workforce participation, but in fact it is a major issue for businesses and our society.
- Around 1 in 6 Australian workers are affected by a mental health condition each year\(^1\).
- In Australian workplaces, employees with job-related stress and mental illness are absent (on average) from work for almost 11 weeks a year.
- Recent research\(^2\) reveals that the direct financial impact of mental health conditions for employers is $10.9 billion every year in Australia due to absenteeism, ‘presenteeism’ (on the job productivity loss) and compensation claims.
- For every $1 invested in mental health initiatives there’s an average return on investment of $2.30\(^3\). The opportunity cost of not promoting good mental health at work and not supporting people who have mental illness is very high.
- The greatest barrier to full-time workforce participation, by workers with mental ill-health, is not lack of treatment options, but lack of workplace support\(^4\).
- Mentally healthy workplaces have a positive culture conducive to mental wellbeing and support people who experience mental health difficulties. Mentally healthy workplaces are found to be more productive, innovative and likely to recruit and retain the best and brightest people\(^5\).
- Action on workplace mental health represents a significant opportunity to reduce human wastage and productivity leaks, build stronger and more resilient organisations, and promote thriving communities.
- Supporting people’s recovery and promoting good mental health at work is good for people and good for business.
- Businesses can and are doing something about this to better support people and create mentally healthy workplaces, but more needs to be done.

---

2 Ibid
3 Ibid
4 Ibid
Key Responses

- Mental health and wellbeing starts with us, our families and our communities, usually long before any signs of mental ill-health. The opportunities for people to have contributing lives, to participate and be productive as well as many of the solutions, belong in our families, neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces. Encouraging workplaces to become mentally healthy benefits the whole community and businesses big and small.

- The Commission established the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance in 2013 – a collaborative project between business, the mental health sector and government. Its aim is to encourage Australian workplaces to become mentally healthy, for the benefit of the whole community and businesses, big and small.
  - Alliance members include the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Australian Industry Group, the Australian Psychological Society, beyondblue, the Black Dog Institute, the Business Council of Australia, Comcare, Council of Small Business Australia, Mental Health Australia, Safe Work Australia, SANE, SuperFriend and the University of New South Wales.
  - All members share a commitment to supporting Australian employers and operators to take active steps to create workplaces that are mentally healthy.
  - The Alliance can assist employers to recruit, retain and support staff, increase productivity, reduce discrimination and ultimately help people with a lived experience of mental ill-health to gain and retain meaningful employment.
  - In 2014 the Alliance partnered with beyondblue to launch the Heads Up initiative - www.headsup.org.au. Heads Up has a tool that enables businesses of all sizes to develop a tailored action plan to become a more mentally healthy workplace.

- The Commission’s Review of mental health programmes and services (Contributing Lives, Thriving Communities) recommends using evidence, evaluation and incentives to reduce stigma, build capacity and respond to the diversity of needs of different population groups. Employers, along with schools, community organisations and workplaces are encouraged to take part in local initiatives to improve understanding of mental health and reduce stigma and discrimination.

- Every business has a role to support mental health safety and wellbeing, promote self-help, and reduce stigma and discrimination in the workplace.