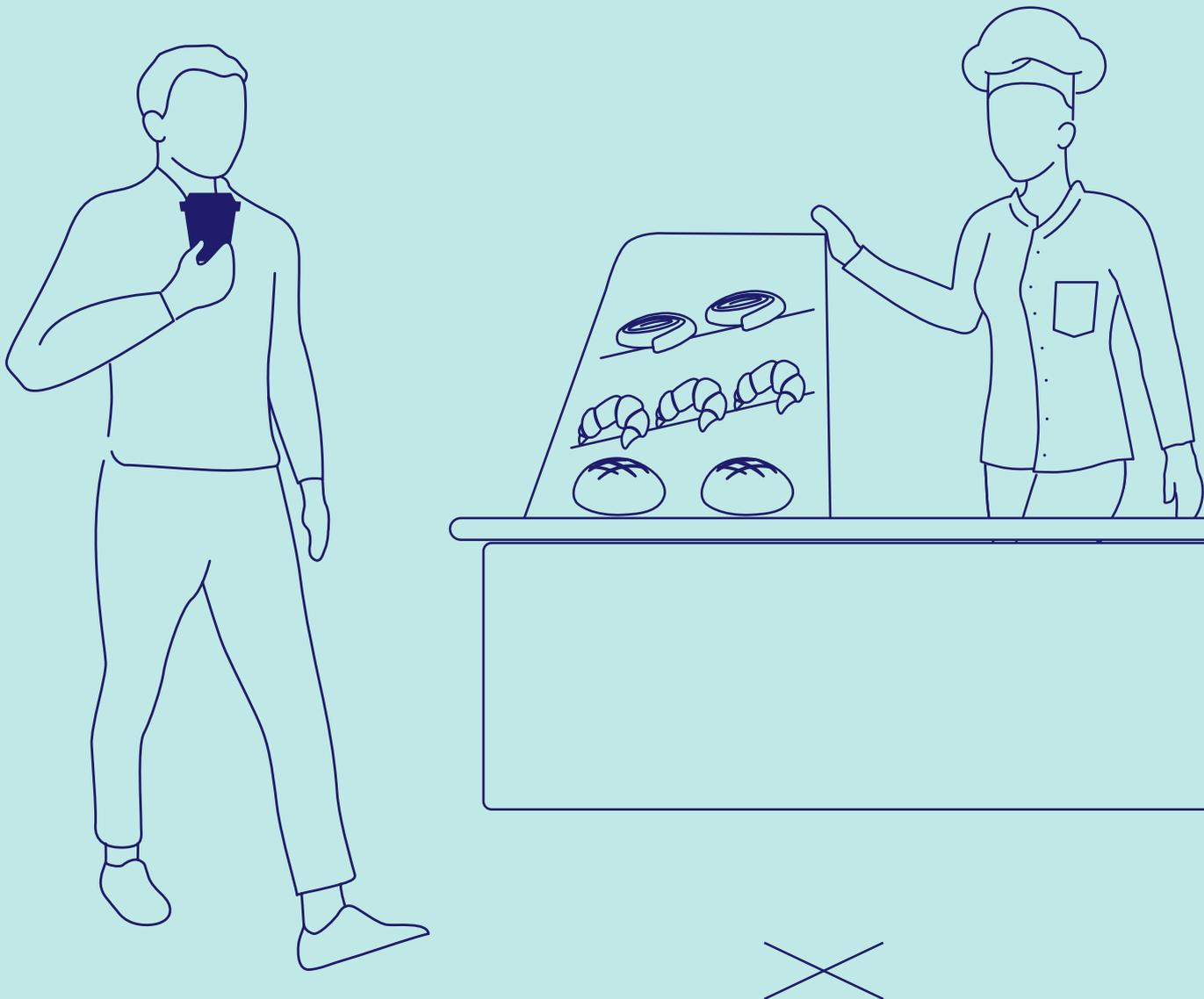




Mentally Healthy Workplaces during COVID-19: **SMALL BUSINESSES**



CONTENTS

Mental health for small business	3
Looking after yourself	3
Looking after yourself to look after your business	3
Managing financial distress	3
Reflect on what you have achieved	3
Looking after your people	4
Guide your people through change and involve them in planning	4
Communicate clearly and regularly	4
Building and maintaining good relationships	4
Common ways COVID-19 may be impacting people at work	5
Signs to look out for	6
How to have a supportive conversation	7
Supporting someone experiencing mental ill-health	8
Making your business mentally healthy	8
Understand your obligations related to mental health	9
Know where to get reliable information and support	10
Mental Health Supports	11

The information provided in this resource was developed by the National Mental Health Commission's National Workplace Initiative, in collaboration with members of the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance and Ahead for Business.

MENTAL HEALTH FOR SMALL BUSINESS

Being a small business owner can be a very rewarding experience, but it can also be challenging. COVID-19 has created additional challenges, however it does not mean you need to face things alone. This guide will help you look after your mental health throughout COVID-19 and the road to recovery.

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

Looking after yourself to look after your business

While it can be tempting to focus all your time and attention on your business at the moment, it is also essential that you take care of yourself. Running a small business can be rewarding, but it also comes with a range of unique challenges that can impact mental health and have serious flow on effects to the business.

Managing financial distress

Financial distress is one of the biggest sources of stress for small business owners, and for many, there has never been a tougher time to be in business. The Australian Government has announced a series of **financial support measures** to support businesses impacted by COVID-19.

The **National Debt Helpline** and **Financial Counselling Australia** provide free and confidential support. They can provide you with information, strategies and guidance to help you with any financial difficulties you are experiencing. The **Australian Banking Association** also provides a list of the hardship team contact details for most banks in Australia. In addition to financial counselling, you may wish to seek advice from a business adviser, such as an accountant.

Reflect on what you have achieved

It can be easy to focus on the negatives, however COVID-19 has also encouraged many people to come up with different and innovative ways to do business. Spending some time reflecting on achievements and new opportunities can be a great boost for mental health, as well as a great way to shape your business into the future.

It might be harder to get balance between work and life at the moment, but where you can, set aside some time for activities that help manage stress such as:

- Spending time with family and friends and doing activities you enjoy
- Doing some exercise to increase your strength and balance your mood
- Eating healthy food and getting enough sleep to manage your energy and boost your immune system
- Allowing yourself to say 'no' so you are not over commit yourself
- Find ways to fit in relaxation breaks such as five minutes of meditation, listening to music or doing some deep breathing exercises to calm your mind
- Get support when you need it – talk to someone and ask for help

LOOKING AFTER YOUR PEOPLE

As a small business owner, your people are your business. How they interact with customers, the quality of their work and how they interact with each other defines your business. Investing time in supporting your people will help bring out the best in them and the business. Here some simple principles for supporting your people through COVID-19.

Guide your people through change and involve them in planning

Change is difficult for many people, particularly changes that may impact their financial security or livelihood. Even if you cannot control the changes you have to make to your business, engaging people in the process can make them feel more valued, empowered and onboard with the decisions you make. Involving people in planning can also reduce stress and conflict across the business. Some decisions or changes are never easy, but they can be managed with dignity and respect.

There are legal requirements to consult with workers and other businesses you share duties with about things like health and safety. Engaging your people in the change process is also likely to uncover new perspectives on potential issues and solutions.

It is normal for people to experience a range of emotional reactions to change, including frustration, anger, shame, embarrassment or depression. It is important to listen and acknowledge that this is not business as usual and it is okay to not feel okay.

Communicate clearly and regularly

Your business might be changing every day to keep pace with COVID-19-related changes. Communicating clearly, regularly and consistently can reassure your people, customers and other people you work with. You might not know all the answers, but letting people know what steps you are taking and where you are in the process is often enough.

Communication about what safety measures are in place can also reduce anxiety about infection and help people know what you are doing to protect their health. Sourcing information from reliable and official sources can help your business protect mental and physical health as well as reducing the confusion people are experiencing from conflicting advice online and within the community.

Building and maintaining good relationships

Good relationships at work not only protect mental health, but they also help people work better together. Good relationships build loyalty and make it easier to work collaboratively to negotiate challenges and changes.

Good relationships are also important to maintain for staff who are working from home, have been stood down or had their hours reduced or changed. Simple things like checking-in, making an effort to include people and acknowledging the contribution people are making can go a long way in building positive relationships in your business.

Many small business owners find connecting with other small business owners helpful. Not only does this provide an opportunity to find out how other businesses are adapting, but it also builds a network of people who can share what you are going through.

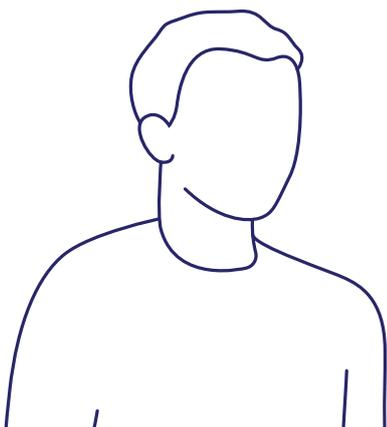
Common ways COVID-19 may be impacting people at work

COVID-19 is changing the way many people work and live. Feeling uncertain, overwhelmed, scared, sad, confused or angry is normal. These feelings may also be heightened by work-related stressors, such as:

- Fear of exposure to COVID-19
- Changes in work such as too much work, too little work or changes in the work environment.
- Increased customer violence, aggression or racism at work
- Rapid change and lower support as everyone adapts quickly
- Feeling isolated or lonely because of physical distancing
- Increased tension in work relationships resulting in conflict
- Poor communication and consultation about changes and workers' concerns
- Changes in resources or supplies
- Fears about losing work or income

It is also important to be aware that people working from home may also experience stressors such as caring for children or parents, domestic violence, financial pressures, loneliness, isolation or increased use of alcohol or other drugs.

Listening to your people will help you understand what is posing a risk to mental health in your business.



People with an existing mental illness may also face a unique set of additional challenges associated with COVID-19, for example:

- People with generalised anxiety may find the increase in negative or conflicting information has increased their level of worry and anxiety
- People with depression may find the changes in routine and isolation from others has worsened their mood
- People with eating disorders may find the change to routine, restrictions around exercise and food insecurity has led to an increase in concerns about size, shape and weight and disordered behaviours
- People with obsessive compulsive disorder may find frequent reminders about hygiene, handwashing and germs anxiety provoking or stigmatising
- People who have experienced trauma may find certain situations triggering which could lead to being re-traumatised.

Signs to look out for

You don't have to be a mental health expert to spot signs that you or someone around you might need extra support. Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations and these are not the only signs you or someone around you might need support. Some signs to look out for include:



The main thing to remember is to trust your gut – if you feel there is a change, reach out to check-in on how they are going.

How to have a supportive conversation

A simple conversation can play a powerful role in keeping someone safe during a difficult time and connecting them to support.

Starting these conversations can feel challenging and you may fear that talking about things might make it worse. However, talking often makes people feel heard, understood, supported and less distressed. You don't need to be someone's manager or good friend to ask if they are okay.

Here are some simple tips for reaching out to someone you think might need support:



Find a private space to have the conversation so you are not putting them on the spot somewhere public



Check-in and ask them how they are going



Ask open questions such as “how are you going?” or “what’s on your mind?”



Listen without judgement



Encourage action such as calling a support line, making an appointment with their GP or contacting the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if available



Check in after the conversation to see how things are for them now



Look after yourself and seek support if you have been affected by the conversation.

The list of resources in this guide provides some ideas on where to link people into support.

Supporting someone experiencing mental ill-health

In addition to linking people into external services and supports, you can also support people experiencing mental ill-health by thinking about how you consider their needs at work.

Ways to support your staff who are experiencing mental ill-health include:

- Listen and offer support
- Explore adjustments or practical supports to help people stay at work
- Develop a work plan to clarify expectations
- Check-in with them regularly
- Communicate any adjustment with other team members where appropriate
- Review workloads of other team members to make sure adjustments are not creating conflict
- Allow time off work
- Keep in touch

Making your business mentally healthy

In addition to supporting your people and your business through COVID-19, there are many benefits to building a mentally healthy workplace into the longer term. Here are some things to get you started:

- Increase your own knowledge about mental health
- Be aware of the support available
- Educate your staff about mental health in the workplace
- Talk openly about mental health at work and encourage your staff to do the same
- Provide support to any staff member who is struggling with their mental health
- Communicate regularly with your staff
- Encourage respectful behaviour
- Address potential workplace stressors for you and your staff

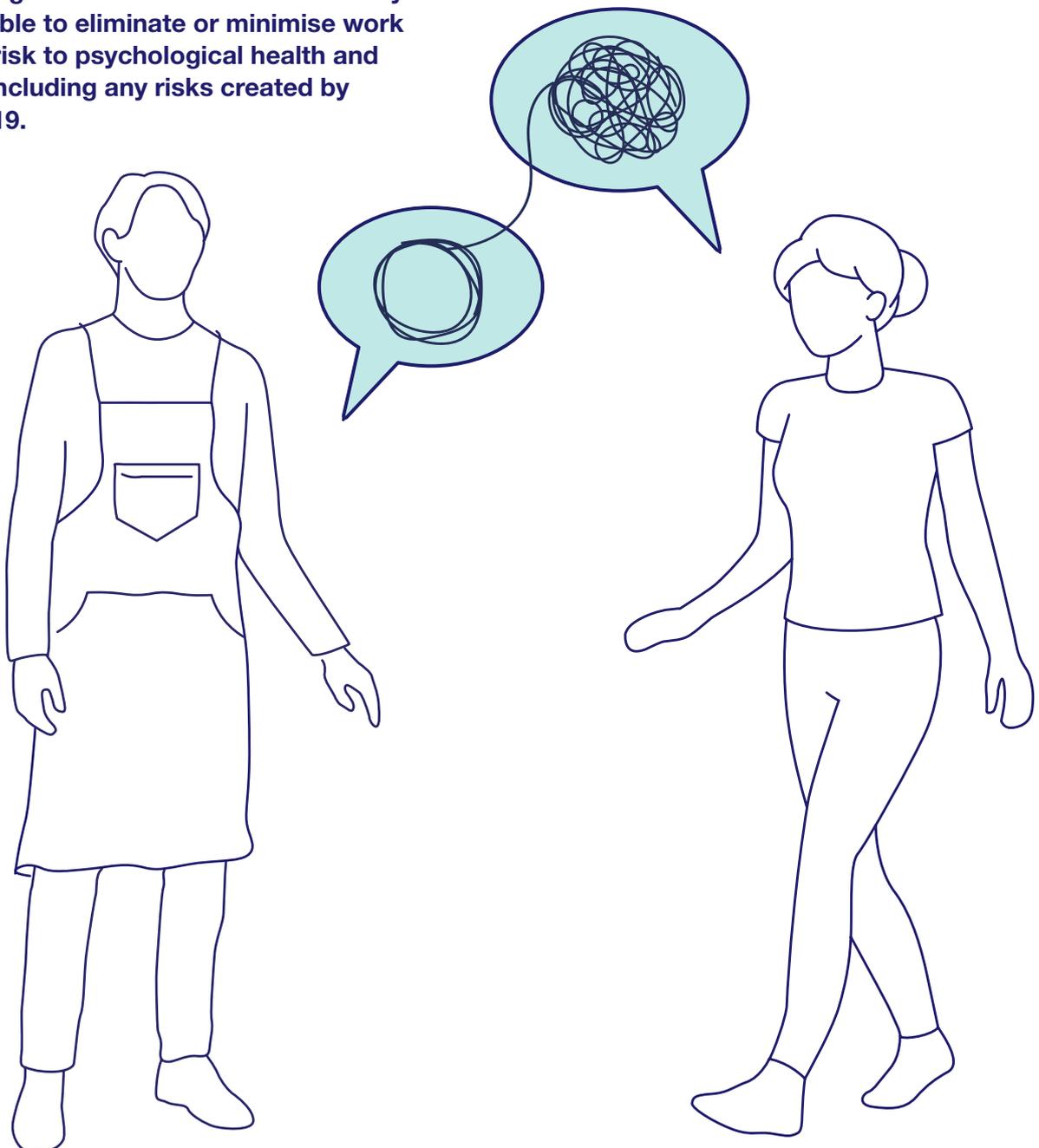
Understand your obligations related to mental health

Doing what you can to ensure your business does not harm the mental health of your workers is the law. Similar to obligations to identify and manage the physical risks related to COVID-19, small businesses also need to identify risks to mental health, assess these risks, eliminate or minimise the risks and review to ensure these strategies are effective.

Employers large or small have duties and obligations under the WHS laws to provide a safe work, this includes both physical and psychological safety. All organisations have obligations to do what is reasonably practicable to eliminate or minimise work related risk to psychological health and safety, including any risks created by COVID-19.

Organisations also have obligations to consult with workers and their representatives about health and safety. If your business engages sub-contractors you also have a responsibility to them to do all you reasonably can to eliminate or minimise their work-related risks.

Safe Work Australia has developed a four-step process for preventing psychological injury. To understand more about how to meet your legal duties, you can seek **advice** from your state or territory regulator.



Know where to get reliable information and support

Knowing where to get reliable and trusted advice can help reduce anxiety, inform better decisions and keep you safe. You may hear a lot of conflicting, unfounded or incorrect advice through friends, family, professional networks or social media. Relying on trusted information sources can help you dispel myths to protect your health and your business.



Find trusted advice for small businesses:

- Australian Government [Business.gov.au](https://www.business.gov.au)
- [Safe Work Australia Small Business Planning Tool for COVID-19](#)
- The Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman [My Business Health portal](#)
- The Fair Work Ombudsman [advice for small business](#)
- The Australian Taxation Office [supports for small business](#)
- The Australian Securities & Investments Commission [advice for small business](#)
- Australian Department of Health:
<https://www.health.gov.au/resources>

Access information, resources, tools, and supports for small business mental health and wellbeing at:

- [Ahead for Business](#)
- [My Business Health](#)
- [Heads Up for small business](#)
- [Beyond Blue Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service](#)
- [SuperFriend's "Looking after You" guide](#)

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

If you are concerned about yourself or a colleague, help is available through these free and confidential supports.

Organisation	Phone number	Website	Description
Head to Health		headtohealth.gov.au/covid-19-support	Provided by the Department of Health to search free or low cost digital supports for mental health.
Beyond Blue Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service	1800 512 348	coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au	24/7 support for mental health and wellbeing via phone, web chat and online forum.
Lifeline Australia	13 11 14	lifeline.org.au	24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services.
Suicide Call Back Service	1300 659 467	suicidecallbackservice.org.au	24/7 telephone crisis support for people at risk of suicide, carers and bereaved, as well as online resources and information.
MensLine Australia	1300 78 99 78	mensline.org.au/phone-and-online-counselling	24/7 telephone and online support, information and referral service for men
Kids Helpline	1800 55 1800	kidshelpline.com.au	24/7 telephone counselling for young people under 25 years.
headspace Australia	1800 650 890	headspace.org.au	Telephone and web chat for young people aged 12 to 25 years.
QLife	1800 184 527	qlife.org.au	Telephone and online chat support service for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and/or intersex (LGBTI) communities.
Relationships Australia	1300 364 277	relationships.org.au	Relationships Australia offers a broad range of services to individuals, families and communities throughout the country.
Butterfly Foundation	1800 334 673	butterfly.org.au	Support for people affected by eating disorders via telephone, web chat or email.
Carers Australia	1800 422 737	carersaustralia.com.au	Carer gateway of practical advice and connection with local carer services.
SANE	1800 187 263	sane.org	Resources, forums and support for people affected by complex mental health issues.
National Debt Helpline	1800 007 007	ndh.org.au	Financial counselling advice for financial hardship.
Counselling Online	State-based numbers	counsellingonline.org.au	24/7 support for anyone affected by alcohol and other drugs.
Gambling Help Online	1800 858 858	gamblinghelponline.org.au	24/7 support for anyone affected by gambling.
Wellmob		wellmob.org.au	Social, emotional and cultural wellbeing online resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

health.gov.au