Stories from the field: Case studies of pioneering industry action

Series on industry initiatives supporting mentally healthy workplaces

Paper 2

Australian Government

National Mental Health Commission

Introduction

The National Workplace Initiative has produced this paper to share the inspiring examples of industry-led initiatives driving transformational change in mentally healthy workplaces.

This paper is the second in the series on industry initiatives supporting mentally healthy workplaces. It provides first-hand accounts of the pioneering organisations and passionate individuals who led collaborative action in their industries to tackle poor mental health.

These case studies showcase the variety of different ways that initiatives have taken industry-led approaches. They demonstrate the power of collective action when leaders and groups come together around a common cause.

Although each of these initiatives are different, what they do have in common is a shared mission to make work mentally healthy. They are keen to share their experiences and lessons. They are also passionate about the power of industry-led initiatives. That's because they are seeing the impact it can have for individuals, organisations and whole industries.

We thank the organisations and individuals who have shared their experiences and lessons with us. We are delighted to share these with you in the hope they inspire you to explore what is possible in your industry.

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Case study 1

Construction, mining and energy

At a glance

- Construction industry leaders, unions and employer associations were noticing higher rates of suicide among workers compared to the general population. They thought these might be influenced by factors like the low job security and stressful work patterns.

- To better understand what was happening, industry organisations jointly funded research that identified issues such as work hours and alcohol use in the industry. Mates in Construction was created as a bipartisan approach across worker and employers to implement the recommendations from this research. Later, the industry jointly established an industry-specific blueprint for better mental health and suicide prevention.

- Their efforts have improved awareness about mental health and suicide, and reduced stigma. Workers say they are now more likely to seek help if they are struggling as a result of this initiative.

Lessons learned

- The importance of industry ownership of initiatives. Mates in Construction learned early if it was going to be trusted by construction workers, it needed to be a group of construction workers setting up the initiative. A bipartisan approach was found to be important across the industry.

- The necessity of designing any programs or resources with the people who are intended users. Mates in Construction's approach is that it is a construction worker program, designed by construction workers and informed by mental health and suicide prevention experts.

- The importance of not starting with a solution, because you will most often be wrong. Instead, taking an iterative approach. Test and pilot with workers who you are targeting with your initiative.

For more information:

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'We had to create the change ourselves'

Mates in Construction is often seen as a poster child for industry-led initiatives around mental health at work, but as one of the founders recalls, it has taken many years of collaboration and effort.

"We called 52 industry leaders together at a national level in Sydney and essentially asked, are we happy being the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff or do we look at what we can do further upstream?"

When Jorgen Gullestrup appeared before the Cole Royal Commission into the Building and Construction Industry in the early 2000s as a construction union official, he gave a stark response to a question posed about current issues in the industry.

"I gave them a list of 17 people I knew had died from suicide in the three months before that Royal Commission," said Mr Gullestrup, owner of Semicolon Consulting and co-founder of the Mates in Construction program. "Similar evidence was given by other people, because it was such a common experience for people within the industry... All of us had gone to too many funerals, had done too many postventions, without really knowing it was postventions that we were doing, had taken up collections on the job to support the family."

Following the Royal Commission, a coalition of unions, employers, industry funds and government departments came together and raised funds to research suicide in the industry further.

That subsequent research, the Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention's *Suicide in Queensland's Commercial Building and Construction Industry* 2006 report,[1] led to shock in the industry, though not surprise. Among the report's findings were that young workers aged 15 to 24 had suicide rates 2.3 times greater than the working-aged male population in Australia.

"People had been saying that someone should be doing something about this, because it's not right. It took that report for us to realise that the someone was actually us; if we wanted change then we had to create change ourselves," he said.

Getting off the ground

The construction industry redundancy fund provided $400,000 seed funding to get an intervention off the ground. While initially the thinking was that an existing workplace mental health or suicide prevention program could be tweaked, Mr Gullestrup and his collaborators soon realised that unique factors in the industry meant a specifically designed program was needed.

These factors included the prevalence of sub-contracting in construction, which meant workers typically have no long-term relationship with employers, the competitive nature of jobs and the existing culture around risk management and physical safety on sites.

"We worked out some core ideas and then had a consultation with about 50 industry leaders and presented what we thought the program would look like, which was to base it on mentoring, as that was very big at the time. That idea got caned; Unions felt that mentors could be boss's stooges while business felt they could become de facto union delegates, so it became evident that this model would not work."

However, around the discussion tables at that consultation, another idea was taking hold. "Someone had the idea that we need a 'Mick' on site – the Irish guy who tells jokes and everyone likes and feels comfortable with. Through that idea we came up with Mates in Construction – men talking to each other on sites. That became the program and it has changed very little over the next 10 years," said Mr Gullestrup.

Mates in Construction was established as a charity in 2008, with three industry redundancy funds coming together as founding partners.

The program was intentionally designed to replicate the existing industry culture around physical safety on site. "You can't get on site without a safety induction, workers are used to that, so our general awareness training replicates that culture. Similarly, jobs can't operate without a first aid person on site, and we do the same with suicide prevention by training someone to be a Connector on site," said Mr Gullestrup.

Activities and outcomes

Mates in Construction is based on four pillars: raising awareness of suicide; building resilience through a peer network; connecting workers in need through the peer network and a 24/7 support line; and research and data collection to enable evaluation.

There are three elements to the training – General Awareness Training is a one-hour suicide literacy program; the Connectortraining is a four-hour 'gatekeeper program' (usingLivingWorks safeTALK); and the 16-hour ASIST worker training (LivingWorks suicide intervention training program).

"Mates is now training between 2,000 and 3,000 Connectors and a few hundred ASIST workers each year. It's a viral affect, and we build momentum because it's the workers you engage who drive it, and they take it from site to site every time they go on a new job," said Mr Gullestrup.

The collaborative process underpinning Mates' in Construction's creation was repeated in 2016 when industry leaders sought to expand the focus of their efforts. "We called 52 industry leaders togetherat a national level in Sydney and essentially asked, are we happy being the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff or do we look at what we can do further upstream?"

Their deliberations, facilitated by Beyond Blue, led to *The Australian Building and Construction Industry Blueprint for Better Mental Health and Suicide Prevention,*[2] which aims to align the industry and its programs and interventions. Mr Gullestrup said the blueprint is starting to influence business as usual. "The Queensland Government has it reflected in their policy to use Queensland procurement policy to ensure construction companies on Government projects have a focus on long-term mental health such as the blueprint."

Academic reviews[3] show Mates in Construction has improved mental health and suicide literacy, increased help seeking intention, reduced stigma and positively impacted inter-personal relationships.

Since its formation in 2008, the Mates program has evolved to be adopted in other sectors. Mates in Mining was established in 2012 through a collaboration between the CFMEU mining division, NSW Coal Services Trust, Minerals Council of Australia and Glencore, while Mates in Energy was formed in 2016 in a collaboration between the ETU, the four major energy companies in Queensland and Energy Super. Work is also underway for a similar approach in the NSW energy sector.

Mates in Construction is also recognised as international best practice in community capacity building in the World Health Organization's LIVE LIFE: An Implementation Guide for Suicide Prevention in Countries.

Advice for others

Mr Gullestrup advises that initiatives link their activities to evidence and research where they can. "Look to evaluate your activities and approach, if possible, to demonstrate benefits."

He suggests individuals and groups think about the dynamics and relationships between different groups in the industry as they go about setting up and running an initiative.

He also advises new initiatives to seek out open and honest input and feedback from workers, which may involve facilitating conversations away from managers or employers.

Case study 2

Transport and logistics

At a glance

- Major companies and leaders in transport, warehousing and logistics were keen to address issues in the industry like long hours and work pressure that were causing it to be ranked among the bottom of industries for workplace mental health.

- A group of major industry companies provided initial funding for a foundation to be established, with the primary objective to develop a national mental health and wellbeing strategy that addresses the industry specific challenges.

- Their efforts have led to increased awareness and engagement, with a new Roadmap Strategy for the sector and research, training and resources in development.

Lessons learned

- The importance of being clear what you are trying to achieve and how you can align with existing efforts.

- Openness and transparency in the approach is essential. This helps with engagement and allaying any concerns within industry about a new initiative.

- The importance of finding people who are genuinely passionate about the cause to take on key positions within the initiative, such as chair or patron.

- Dedicated resourcing and support are needed to help drive initiatives forward and to maintain momentum, otherwise efforts can stall.

For more information:

Visit	www.healthyheads.org.au
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'A coalition of the willing'

Healthy Heads in Trucks & Sheds is driving a national approach to tackling mental health problems in transport and logistics through engagement and a national mental health and wellbeing roadmap.

"Like mental health, the road transport, warehousing and logistics industry knows no borders, it operates nationally. If we are going to tackle this issue, we needed a national solution."

For Australia's road transport, warehousing and logistics industries, it was a confluence of factors including a set of stubborn statistics, the personal passions of a handful of leaders and the dawning reality of an economic imperative that drove a new industry initiative to improve mental health.

"The reality is that, statistically, mental health was and remains a massive problem across the industry. If you look at SuperFriend's Indicators of a Thriving Workplace,[4] we're ranked 19th out of 19," said Naomi Frauenfelder, Chief Executive for Healthy Heads in Trucks & Sheds (HHTS).

"We also had a group of people, particularly our chair Paul Graham, who care very passionately about mental health across the industry…. There was also an economic necessity sitting under this, which is around the importance of looking after the people who drive our trucks and work in our warehouses," said Ms Frauenfelder.

While there were some existing efforts to improve mental health in the industry, these tended to be locally based – at a company or perhaps state level. "The reality is that the transport industry knows no borders, it operates nationally, and mental health knows no borders either. If we are going to tackle this issue, we needed a national solution," she said.

A key goal became establishing a national mental health and wellbeing roadmap that would elevate existing efforts and programs to a common standard and share lessons and resources from successful approaches.

"We've seen the construction, mining and water industries create these national strategies. It serves a double purpose for us – first as a rallying point to get people's attention, and second in providing the detail around what we need to do for the next three years," Ms Frauenfelder said.

Getting off the ground

Major industry groups Woolworths, Coles, Linfox, Toll, Ron Finemore Transport, Australia Post and Qube provided support as founding partners, while the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator and Federal Government (through the Heavy Vehicle Safety Initiative) provided further support.

From 2018, a series of working groups and workshops over 18 months helped to build the 'coalition of the willing' and begin scoping out what an industry initiative wanted to achieve. However, this period was led by a voluntary steering committee of senior industry leaders, which while passionate, had limited dedicated resources to maintain momentum.

In mid-2019, before the official launch of HHTS, three pieces of foundational work were progressed. These included stakeholder engagement to co-design the initiative, including its organisational model (covering operations, funding and governance), a mapping of mental health programs underway in the industry and their areas of focus, and branding work to create an identity for the initiative.

"The company-led initiatives traditionally focused on recovery, whereas we wanted to try and tackle the strategic challenge around how we actually stop people from having a mental health issue in the first place; how we build better systems, cultures and ways of working to address those source problems," said Ms Frauenfelder.

The stakeholder co-design informed the development of Healthy Heads in Trucks & Sheds as an independent 'by industry for industry' solution, involving companies, regulators and unions, and overseen by an independent voluntary board. In addition to the financial contributions of the founding partners, the initiative's funding model includes industry partners and sponsors. A membership model enables companies of different sizes, and individuals, to join and commit to improving mental health.

An advisory board of 15 industry and mental health leaders provides policy advice and guidance, while four working groups help shape work on key areas including training and standards.

Activities and outcomes

Three core activity areas underpin the initiative: training for people working in the industry; standardising regulations and policies; and improving the mental and physical wellbeing of workers.

On training, Ms Frauenfelder said Healthy Heads in Trucks & Sheds is promoting existing quality resources while also partnering with mental health leaders like Lifeline, Beyond Blue and Black Dog Institute to either customise existing content to meet industry needs or develop new content where gaps are identified.

The initiative promotes existing evidence-based mental health supports, though it is also exploring with Lifeline a new 1800 service for transport and logistics workers.

The National Mental Health and Wellbeing Roadmap,[5] launched in May 2021, will soon be supported by a certification process where companies are encouraged to self-assess their standing. "We want to try and drive implementation of that national framework of best practice within the industry," Ms Frauenfelder said.

A new Healthy Heads in Trucks & Sheds app is being developed to provide workers with information and resources on wellbeing, while a partnership with other researchers will allow for analysis of data collected via the App to produce an industry scorecard.

Ms Frauenfelder said awareness around mental health in the industry has increased substantially since the initiative was launched in August 2020. "Our launch focused around having the conversation about mental health, which we leveraged heading into World Suicide Prevention Day, then RUOK? day and then Mental Health Month."

Analytics from the initiative's social media channels show Healthy Heads in Trucks & Sheds is attracting considerable and persistent engagement, which bodes well for the update of its resources, Ms Frauenfelder said.

Advice for others

Ms Frauenfelder advises that stakeholder engagement is particularly important for gaining foundational support. "There can be a trust issue out there, whenever a new venture comes along. We disarmed that very simply with our approach, which was to say – we're here to help, how can we help you?

She also suggests staying above the fray in terms of industry politics. "Something we decided early on was to say we're not going to get involved or engage in that, we're an independent and neutral player and we're interested in working with everyone here."

Ms Frauenfelder advised groups to tap into passion and goodwill within their industries. For instance, a well-known lawyer in the industry agreed to become company secretary and provides pro-bono work for the initiative, while one of his junior lawyers acts as assistant company secretary.

Case study

3

Superannuation and Life Insurance

At a glance

- Industry superannuation fund CEO's saw that suicide and mental illness was impacting their members, as well as Australian workplaces, families and communities.

- Superannuation funds and life insurers established SuperFriend to coordinate their efforts in tackling mental ill-health and suicide, especially in the workplace where their members are employed.

- The organisation has helped improve understanding of mental ill-heath, suicide prevention and how to create thriving workplaces. It has carried out industry and national research, and facilitated cross-sector collaborations to advocate and create systems change. It has provided expert workplace mental health consulting services to a wide range of workplaces and produced workplace solutions including resources, tools and training.

Lessons learned

- Leveraging the professional generosity of the mental health and suicide prevention sectors and other industry initiatives to create mentally healthy workplaces within financial and insurance services.

- The value in creating opportunities by collaborating with and developing constructive relationships with other like-minded individuals and groups across different sectors.

- The importance of getting clear on what your initiative is, your unique offering and who you are trying to serve.

- Sticking to your remit – avoiding the temptation to jump at new trends and instead staying true to your core purpose and values.

- Being prepared to say goodbye to your ventures or initiatives that were once valuable but are no longer fit-for-purpose.

For more information:

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'It comes from us all listening and leaning in'

The superannuation and insurance industry's SuperFriend has been an early advocate of workplaces as settings to improve Australia's mental health and wellbeing.

"There was an enormous amount of education that needed to happen for the financial services industry to understand that no amount of funding by super funds or life insurance was going to solve this problem overnight."

It was an analysis into insurance claims data that sparked the initial concerns around the table at the Industry Funds Forum, the then association representing major industry superannuation funds.

From around 2005, that analysis was starting to highlight the detrimental impacts from mental ill-health and the tragic loss of life from suicide amongst members of superannuation funds, and through them, on Australian workplaces, families and communities. The industry saw the direct impact on members and wanted to be part of the solution.

The group of CEO's at the forum could see the broad social and economic impacts of mental ill-health and suicide, including through insurance claims and lost productivity. As discussions progressed, they became increasingly motivated to collectively act.

Getting off the ground

Helen Hewett, then executive officer of the Industry Funds Forum, recognised the industry's new initiative would require a fit-for-purpose operating model and funding, given it was essentially seeking to help drive the kind of long-term societal change needed to tackle mental ill-health and suicide.

If the initiative was successful in reducing the impacts of suicide and mental ill-health on fund members, then superannuation funds and their life insurers would see financial benefits for all members. Therefore, the initiative was established to work with the insurers inside superannuation, with SuperFriend's recurrent funding tied to the insurance premium.

Following its launch in 2007, SuperFriend initially focused on raising awareness of mental health, particularly in the workplace, and helping create understanding around the fledgling concept of mentally healthy workplaces.

Margo Lydon, who commenced as CEO in 2010, said much of the focus in the early days was on educating key groups about the nature of mental health and suicide in the workplace, clarifying the role of the initiative and what it was trying to achieve.

This education effort involved challenging persistent calls from some partners for detailed and short-term measurement on outcomes and return on investment. "There was an enormous amount of education that needed to happen for the financial services industry to understand that no amount of funding by super funds or life insurance was going to solve this problem overnight," Ms Lydon said.

One of the great and long-running challenges was the diversity of the initiative's partner groups, she said. "On one hand, we had the insurers who are very shareholder driven, commercial and highly competitive, and didn't have a lot of experience sitting around the table working together to solve some of these issues. On the other hand, we had the industry super funds who were well served at working on non-competitive issues... and at their core were driven by member's best interests. Each had very different motivations and expectations in terms of outcomes," said Ms Lydon.

Activities and outcomes

Key early pieces of work included co-designing evidence-based and lived experience-informed mental health skills-based training for staff in the industry who were dealing with members in distress (such as at time of claim). Other early initiatives included SuperMIND, a five-year national project analysing five years of claims data around mental illness and suicide by age, gender and location, and an industry needs analysis that highlighted the need for new supports for workplaces and staff in dealing with bereavement, grief and loss.

"Super funds and insurance claims staff are dealing with people who are terminally ill, who have lost someone to suicide and other causes of death, who are distressed or inconsolable, who are dealing with the worst times of their life – there is an enormous amount of dealing with bereavement, grief and loss, which has flow on affects for mental health," said Ms Lydon.

"We were really clear about doing work that wasn't being done elsewhere; we did a lot to understand the environmental landscape so we were not replicating what others were doing or what was already available for us to refer to, or use," she added.

Beyond developing tailored supports for industry, SuperFriend was also working to improve business literacy around creating mentally healthy workplaces for all workers – an area still in its infancy in Australia, and indeed globally, at the time.

"It was trying to create workplaces as places of practical change – recognising that if we are going to influence how people function from a mental wellbeing perspective, you don't need to be a clinician to do that well, instead it comes from us all listening, understanding and leaning in," she said.

While awareness has improved, Ms Lydon said SuperFriend continues to encounter myths within some organisations that openly addressing mental health and suicide may have unintended consequences, such as an increase in suicides. Research has found there is no evidence to support such concerns. "It's this ongoing education piece, that we continue to sit alongside business and encourage them to come on this journey and give it a go."

Today, SuperFriend's activities include a range of training, resources and tailored supports including consulting into organisations as a trusted adviser in helping organisations on their own journey of creating a mentally healthy workplace. Along with this is ongoing research and advocacy work, including Australia's largest national survey runannually – the Indicators of a Thriving Workplace survey of 10,000-plus workers. The survey results in a series of insight reports exploring key issues, evidence of actions that have positive impacts, and measuring trends over time.

Advice for others

While working with and listening to experts is important, Ms Lydon advocates that industry needs to recognise and draw on the knowledge and insight from within its industry – from peak bodies, senior leaders and staff – especially in terms of identifying issues and potential solutions.

She also advises respecting all groups and remaining neutral in the industry. "I refer to SuperFriend as Switzerland – we are not politically or industry aligned. What we say to one insurer or super fund we make sure to say to everyone else."

Ms Lydon stresses the importance of good governance, which has benefited SuperFriend and its track record enormously. "That helps counteract some of the myths and fears around mental health, because it enables you to stand behind the work you do with conviction... We have an amazing governance policy and framework."

Gaining third party support, especially from groups and advocates outside the industry, who can support and validate the initiative's activities, is also recommended. "Sometimes when something is right in front of you, you don't always recognise its value. Galvanising support from outside, to help industry understand why it's investing and why that should continue, is really important," said Ms Lydon.

Case study 4

Media, Marketing & Creative industry

Lessons learned

- The importance of engaging people in a personal rather than professional capacity. It's not about where someone works or their role in the company, it's about them and what they bring to the table.

- The value in maintaining regular meetings to ensure continuity and help with building momentum.

- What can be achieved by tapping into the skill and expertise of those in the industry, especially passionate people who are able to contribute in kind.

At a glance

- While many in the media, marketing and creative industry had seen mental health handled poorly in their workplaces, a major survey highlighted how widespread the issue was, prompting concerned individuals to come together.

- About 30 individuals and groups joined the Mentally Healthy Change Group, set up by passionate individuals, to undertake a series of activities and resources to improve mental health in the industry.

- The group's research, training and resources has helped to raise awareness, educate and train leaders and support those seeking help for themselves or others.

For more information:

Visit	www.mentally-healthy.org www.nevernotcreative.org
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'It was about the system – the way we work'

From training leaders to raising standards around mental health at work, the Mentally Healthy Change Group is driving big industry-led change.

"Those things aren't fixes for poor mental health at work – they're apologies for poor mental health at work."

Have your say, share your experiences, help us make our industry mentally healthier

Andy Wright used to have a running joke with his peers in the Australian creative industry – you're always only eight weeks away from going out of business... until the next project comes in.

"That next project nearly always came in, but it was never certain," said Mr Wright, who has 20 years' experience with agencies and clients and is CEO of Streamtime, a project management software company for the creative industry.

While the project-based and competitive nature of the industry creates a hustle and bustle that many thrive on, there is growing recognition that it can also give rise to ways of working that do not always support mental health at work.

"I watched a lot of poor mental health happen around me and to me. Only in hindsight I saw just how poorly it was managed and how so much of it was about the system – the way that we work, not improving things or helping people's mental health," said Mr Wright.

Motivated by his own experiences living with periods of mental ill-health and working in the industry, Mr Wright set up a community, Never Not Creative, to look at gaps in the industry around mental health at work.

"It's stuff that we all know but just assume is going to happen or we take for granted – mental health is very much top of that list," he said.

One of the first major actions was to benchmark issues in the industry. He partnered with mental health leaders Everymind and UnLtd, a social purpose organisation for the creative, media and marketing industry, to deliver a tailored survey in the industry in 2018.[6] Of the 1,800 people who responded to the survey, 56% reported mild to severe symptoms of anxiety and depression.

After the research was launched, some 50 individuals and groups approached Mr Wright and Nina Nyman, the Chief Marketing Officer of UnLtd, expressing an interest in taking some collective action on mental health in the industry. "Out of that we created what is now called the Mentally Healthy Change Group," said Mr Wright, which he now co-chairs with Ms Nyman.

Getting off the ground

The group started in 2019 with around 30 interested individuals who would meet each month and work on ideas for initiatives or resources to improve mental health in the industry. "If someone in the group is passionate about something, and we all agree that it's a good idea, then we just support them in making it happen," Mr Wright said.

The Mentally Healthy Change Group set up on a voluntary and largely casual basis, with members contributing time and resources to produce the activities and resources it has undertaken to date.

An early action was to conduct a follow-up survey in 2020, which found that many activities to improve mental health that were commonly employed in the industry were seen as unhelpful.

"When we asked what would you like done to improve your mental wellbeing at work, at the bottom of the list were all the things that businesses do – the mental health at work checklist, the healthy food and snacks, the motivational posters, employee assistance program, mental health first aid officers, the wellbeing programs and yoga on Thursdays," said Mr Wright.

"Those things aren't fixes for poor mental health at work – they're apologies for poor mental health at work," he added.

Conversely, people in the industry pointed to empathic leadership, flexible work and clarity around objectives and job roles as the factors that could improve their mental health at work.

"It was all about how you work, the stuff that you have to deal with day to day; the stuff at the bottom of the list is extracurricular, you have to make time for it. Everyone should be eating better, and yoga on a Thursday is probably a good thing, but they're not going to fix anything," he said. The findings helped provide guidance to the fledgling group around the kind of industry-level issues it could help progress.

Activities and outcomes

Among the group's many activities is producing a set of Minimum Standards for Mental Health for its industry. Mr Wright said the standards reflect organisations' legislated requirements in the area but also takes a more human perspective.

The standards are already starting to have an impact, with instances of individuals using them in their organisations to spark conversations and raise issues, Mr Wright said.

Two versions of a *Heart on my Sleeve* leaders story book have been produced, with industry leaders sharing their stories and experiences around mental health. Mr Wright said the resources powerfully demonstrate leaders showing vulnerability and normalising the conversation around mental health.

Elsewhere, the group's Asking for a Friend monthly webinar teams an industry leader with a psychologist each episode to explore issues around mental health at work in the industry. "We just did our first one in the UK as well, so it's spreading," added Mr Wright.

The group is also facilitating training in the industry. It has trained 120 people in Mental Health First Aid for free and 30 leaders in a Mental Health First Aid course for leaders.

Advice for others

Mr Wright advises individuals and groups looking to lead action in an industry to listen to their community. "Everyone has lived experience and there's a real breadth of experience within the industry that you're working in, across all levels. Listening to everyone – from the junior person in one place to the CEO in another – does wonders for them and for you."

He also advocates innovation and suggests groups and individuals don't restrain themselves in terms of what's possible. "Strip away the precedents for what you're about to do and just have a crack. If it doesn't work it doesn't matter, you probably learned something that you can use to do it again better."

Arts

At a glance

- Research highlighted poor mental health was widespread across the performing arts, which reinforced industry leaders' concerns about the adequacy of current approaches and prompted collective action.

- A pilot project tested a range of responses and informed the strategy underpinning the initiative, the Arts Wellbeing Collective.

- The initiative produces resources, programs and initiatives that support individuals, organisations and the industry, using a collaborative design process.

Lessons learned

- Thoroughly identify the problem you are trying to solve; unless there is a clear problem, the solutions we land on will be at best meaningless and at worst, harmful.

- The importance of working upstream; it is not as exciting as working in crisis mode but when prevention efforts are effective, you are set up for success.

- The potential for industry initiatives and value in making connections with those seeking to create change in other sectors and sharing approaches and lessons.

For more information:

| Visit | www.artswellbeingcollective.com.au |
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Creating a 'sense of togetherness'

The Arts Wellbeing Collective is working to improve mental health in the performing arts through activities at the individual, organisation and industry level.

"Be curious about what people are experiencing and what's needed – never assume. Discover what factors are impacting mental health and wellbeing, and really explore them and what they mean."

Early in Claire Spencer's tenure as CEO at the Arts Centre Melbourne, she began to suspect that the organisation's efforts around mental health at work were too reactive.

The performing arts centre had been through a period of significant change. Ms Spencer, who wanted to focus on people and culture, was concerned the approach to mental health was essentially picking people up when they fall, not stopping them from falling in the first place.

Then the release of research in late 2016 by Victoria University, commissioned by industry health promotion charity Entertainment Assist,[7] appeared to confirm her suspicions.

The survey had 3,000 respondents from across the industry, and found higher reported prevalence of mental ill-health, including symptoms of anxiety and depression, compared to the general population. They came from roles as diverse as production crew, publicists, artistic directors and administrators.

While Ms Spencer had been concerned with her organisation's approach to mental health at work, the findings showed the issue was in fact industry wide. This meant there may be broad appetite for action. She also suspected that equipped with data, the industry could seek out some funding to develop a collective response.

Getting off the ground

The centre's resident companies were interested in collaborating as they shared similar concerns about the effectiveness of existing approaches around mental health at work. The companies include The Australian Ballet, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Melbourne Theatre Company and Opera Australia.

Ms Spencer secured funding from WorkSafe Victoria, Marriner Group, VicHealth, the Department of Health, and private philanthropy, to initiate a pilot program in 2017, which ultimately became the Arts Wellbeing Collective.

Tracy Margieson, former Head of Program for Arts Wellbeing Collective, said the pilot focused on three key areas: understanding the issues contributing to poor mental health in the industry, why existing programs were seemingly not hitting the mark, and the level of change readiness in the industry for addressing mental health and wellbeing.

"We spent the first year doing a lot of listening," said Ms Margieson. "We created the initiative as a collective, so we were truly working together to discover what positive change might look like. We had about 140 members sign up to the Arts Wellbeing Collective in that first year. Our approach was to test and trial lots of different things, and continually get feedback to inform the direction we should take. It was constantly testing and trialling and listening to what was going on to see what we might be able to do together."

An independent evaluation of the pilot highlighted the value of resources and programs being tailored to industry context. The evaluation informed the Arts Wellbeing Collective's future strategy, which was launched in October 2018. WorkSafe Victoria's Mental Health Improvement Fund funded the first three years of the strategy.

Design thinking, organisational development principles, positive psychology, and research into workplace wellbeing are all used to inform the Arts Wellbeing Collective. Every element of the Arts Wellbeing Collective is co-designed with subject matter experts, practitioners and performing arts workers. Its elements are specifically tailored to the unique landscape of the performing arts sector.

Activities and outcomes

The Arts Wellbeing Collective has embedded the integrated intervention approach to workplace mental health[8] within its program. This emphasises the importance of protecting and promoting mental health and addressing mental health problems. It also draws on Aaron Jarden's 'Me, We, Us' model,[9] which outlines the importance of action at the individual, organisation and system levels.

The Arts Wellbeing Collective designs and delivers support for individuals through resources, toolkits and access to support. It works with member organisations in creating mentally healthy workplaces. The collective also advocates for changes to broader system examining things like funding, the ways that it operates, and how the sector is valued.

The Arts Wellbeing Collective is using design thinking in how it goes about creating and developing its different activities and resources. "It's picking up everything we learned from that first year of listening very carefully, clearly stating what the problem is, then collaboratively testing some solutions, before sharing what we've created as broadly as possible," she said.

This collaborative approach has engendered a sense of community ownership in the Arts Wellbeing Collective and its activities. A recent example of action at different levels occurred when addressing touring in the performing arts industry. In discussions, members of the Arts Wellbeing Collective frequently raised touring as a scenario presenting unique challenges to mental health. Typical supports for good mental health and wellbeing such as sleeping, eating and exercising were difficult to maintain with the pressures of touring schedules. This was then coupled with increased workload, the risk of interpersonal conflict and stress.

To support those going on tour, the Arts Wellbeing Collective produced Tour Well, a guide for helping people prepare for and manage the challenges of being on tour. At an organisational level, it created Tour Well for Tour Managers, to help design more mentally healthy tours. Finally, at the system level, the Arts Wellbeing Collective has sought to influence how tours are funded, as this determines a range of factors such as the number of company and crew that are hired and the possibility of time off work.

Now comprising more than 400 members, other activities undertaken by the Arts Wellbeing Collective team have included creating more than 90 toolkits and resources including posters, videos, podcasts and webinars. It has designed and delivered more than 200 workshops and presentations and established a 24/7 helpline through a partnership with Support Act. In addition, it has created a strategic framework to guide companies in creating mentally healthy workplaces and consulted with member organisations regarding mental health and wellbeing in creative workplaces.

The Arts Wellbeing Collective has also undertaken broader advocacy for change, including submissions and involvement with the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. The Commission's final report last year highlighted the role of industry-led action around mental health at work and included the Arts Wellbeing Collective as a case study.

The Arts Wellbeing Collective has been recognised with several awards, and has presented at international events including keynotes at International Society for the Performing Arts Congress in New York, 15th International Conference on Arts and Cultural Management at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, and Communicating the Arts Montreal.

Advice for others

"Learn," Ms Margieson advised individuals and groups seeking to drive change in their industries. "There can be a fear of addressing mental health and wellbeing in the workplace, but often that fear stems from a lack of knowledge, so learn. No one automatically knows how to do this well, so – as we would with many leadership practises – be curious and find out. There's so much amazing research and evidence on prevention and health promotion that can inform your organisation's strategic approach to creating a mentally healthy workplace."

Similarly, she suggested an inquisitive approach to understanding the root causes of issues. "Be curious about what people are experiencing and what's needed – never assume. Discover what factors are impacting mental health and wellbeing, and really explore them and what they mean."

Ms Margieson suggested individuals and groups reflect on their past achievements when seeking to make similar changes. "Look at what your organisation is doing well, and aim to do more of the good. Ask, what's the best we can be? What does it mean for our people to be well? That vision for a mentally healthy workplace helps direct energy towards meaningful change. Many companies have probably done this before, as we change, strengthen and improve ways of working to make our workplaces physically safer. We can apply our abilities to learn, change and adapt to psychosocial safety too, and enable everyone to thrive."

Case study 6

Consulting—built and natural environment

At a glance

- Consult Australia championed an industry-led response to mental health in the consulting sector, encouraged in part by the personal experiences and advocacy of key leaders.

- It produced a research paper advocating mentally healthy workplaces, and established a working group and ambassador network, and a supporting knowledge hub.

- The activities have increased awareness of mental ill-health in the industry and seen increased action among various organisations.

Lessons learned

- The importance of engaging senior leaders and executives from the outset, especially decision makers and those who can influence in the sector.

- The necessity of capable and passionate people to undertake and drive much of the foundational work; the association's policy advisor led work on a key initial piece of thought leadership.

- That leading action on mental health has demonstrated the best of what industry associations can achieve – coming together around a common good and facilitating sharing of knowledge and practice, especially to benefit smaller organisations.

For more information:

Visit   www.consultaustralia.com.au/home/advocacy/people/mental-health-knowledge-hub

Email   info@consultaustralia.com.au

LinkedIn   Consult Australia

'We had to provide some answers for industry'

Those leading Consult Australia's efforts to improve mental health in consulting and professional services in the built and natural environment say the initiative shows the unique potential of industry groups in driving meaningful change.

"All these questions came to the fore about how managers and businesses actually manage mental health and mental illness. And then for us as an organisation, we realised we had to provide some answers for industry..."

Gerry Doyle, President, Consult Australia

As a senior executive who felt he had to hide his experiences living with chronic depression and mild anxiety from colleagues, Gerry Doyle's motivation for speaking up was that he wanted things to be better for people coming behind him.

"I'm at the stage of my career where I'm pretty well insulated," said Mr Doyle, the CEO of Tonkin, a provider of engineering and environmental services, and President of Consult Australia, the industry association representing design, advisory, and engineering businesses.

"But that was not the case earlier in my career and it's not the case for many others in the industry. I wanted to make it a better place for them so that other people don't have to go through the years of hiding that I did."

Since 2014, a close friend had been impressing on Mr Doyle the importance of him sharing his lived experience of mental ill-health as a senior figure in the industry, and by mid-2016 "the voice of my friend had made its way into my head."

Mr Doyle raised the issue of mental health in the industry at a board meeting of Consult Australia, though initially without discussing his personal experience and instead advocating it an important societal issue. "It got a lukewarm response," he said. Later, when the then president of the association asked about his motivation for raising the issue, Mr Doyle shared his personal experience of mental ill-health.

"Next thing it appeared as a topic of a panel session on the program for the upcoming conference, with me down as one of the speakers," said Mr Doyle.

Nicola Grayson, CEO of Consult Australia, said that the panel session, and Mr Doyle's contribution in particular, had a profound impact on the industry.

"It sparked other senior leaders coming out and saying they have had episodes or similar experiences," said Ms Grayson. "All these questions came to the fore about how managers and businesses actually manage mental health and mental illness conversations. And then for us as an organisation, we realised we had to provide some answers for industry and look at building a network of support, because this great demand had been unleashed."

Getting off the ground

The association established a working group in March 2018, which initially drew on existing people and an HR roundtable that was populated mainly by specialists from larger member businesses.

"They are all the people who are across the situation because they've been the ones who have had that person come to their door and say 'I need you'… They are aware of how significant this issue is, they're a passionate group who are really helping to drive this conversation," said Ms Grayson.

The group identified Beyond Blue as a partner to help steer the group and advise on best practice. "Importantly for our industry, being a technical-based professional services industry, we needed to demonstrate facts and figures – why this is something that is good to do from a business as well as obviously a human perspective," Ms Grayson said.

Activities and outcomes

One of the first key activities for the group was producing a piece of thought leadership, the Striving for Mentally Healthy Workplaces paper.[10] This was spearheaded by the association's policy advisor James Robertson. The paper advocated the importance of action on mentally healthy workplaces, including the social and legal obligations, as well as the productivity imperative.

Importantly, it shared case studies of the activities and efforts of industry leaders in the space.

"It showcased all these businesses that are onto this, it acknowledged that this is a movement that's happening in the industry," said Ms Grayson. "One of the things we're always talking about in our sector is how scarce people resources are and the systemic skill shortages in certain parts of businesses; if you want to attract the best people you need to show you have a culture that is open, inclusive and supportive."

The association reinforced the paper with the launch of a knowledge hub for members, which provides relevant information, resources and videos of leaders sharing their personal experiences. In mid-2019, an ambassador group of industry leaders and senior executives was established to help raise attention and action on the issue. "While the working group looks at the guidance, evidence and research, the ambassador group is providing a forum for senior leadership to champion change," Ms Grayson said.

Meanwhile, Mr Doyle undertook a roadshow where he visited most states to speak with members about his experiences and the importance of taking action to support mentally healthy workplaces.

The group's activities have led to greater awareness of mental illness, and change within businesses to better respond to the issue. "We still have a long way to go, but we're certainly making progress," Mr Doyle said.

Importantly, in addition to helping organisations ensure people experiencing mental ill-health are better supported, the group is also looking at how the industry can create work environments where hazards and risks to mental health are addressed and issues are prevented in the first instance.
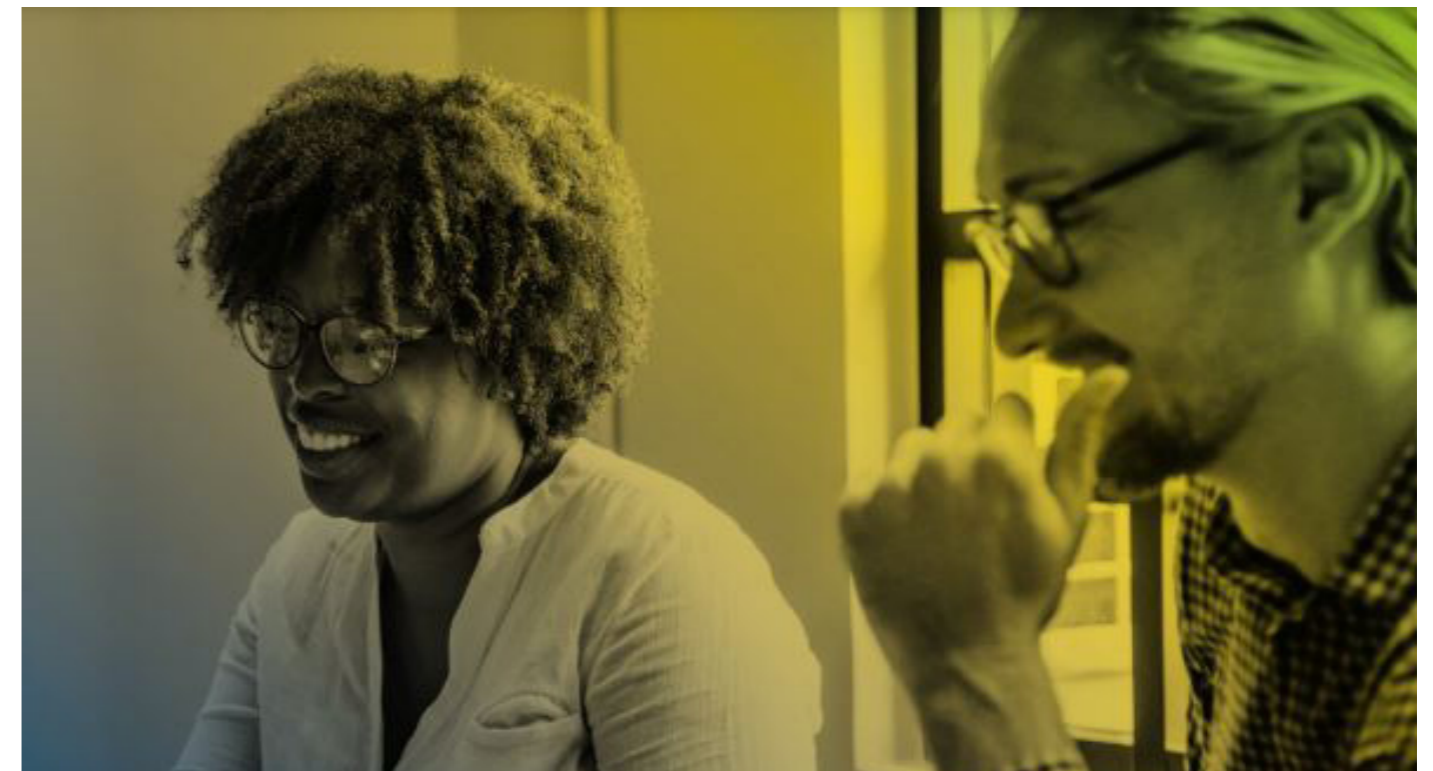
Similarly, given the nature of consultancy involves working closely with clients, often in external sites or clients' offices, the group is also exploring how it supports partner organisations to ensure their work environments are mentally healthy.

Advice for others

Mr Doyle advised groups look to other sectors and initiatives to see what has been tried, what is working and what has needed iteration. "There is so much to learn from what others have done… We're really keen to share with others who are not on this journey yet," he said.

Mr Doyle also suggested groups engage leaders early on. "That is something we would do differently – we had excellent support through the working group but wanted more of the business leaders to step onto the ambassadors' group. You have to make sure you have those leaders brought in on the journey, as early as possible."

Ms Grayson said having the right partner to guide industry efforts was also recommended. "Having someone that is willing to share and teach you as you go, especially with how to build awareness and how to bring groups on the journey."

Resources and Energy

Lessons learned

- The importance of being industry led. Take into consideration the needs and wants of employers and their workforces when designing and delivering initiatives.

- The value of industry being on the front foot and leading on the issue. This involves a proactive stance meaning employers can act in a strategic way, informed by industry research.

- The necessity of finding people who are passionate about mental health in your industry and will advocate for collective action.

- It can be a slow burn. Initially people were slow to become actively involved in the advisory board but now there are more volunteers than positions available.

For more information:

Visit	www.amma.org.au/workforce-mental-health
Email	tom.reid@amma.org.au
Twitter	@AMMAnewsroom

At a glance

- Companies in the resource and energy group were struggling to find relevant information around mental health at work and turned to their peak body for a collective response.

- A mental health advisory board has helped steer initiatives that include the development of a framework, knowledge hub, webinars and industry-specific research.

- The approach has increased awareness of mental health at work and is producing tailored supports for employers to address the unique workplace issues in the industry.

'Do something that gets people together'

Sharing progressive practices and launching a new program of research are among the Australian Resources and Energy Group AMMA's activities to support its members in acting on mental health at work.

"The mental health maturity of a company is fluid; it can move back and forth. There might be an event like COVID or something specific to the company that means they are no longer as progressive as they thought they were."

Employers in Australia's resource and energy industry were keen to better understand mental health at work and the kinds of actions they could be taking, but finding the right information and guidance was proving illusive.

Soon they started raising the issue with their peak industry body the Australian Resources and Energy Group AMMA, which identified the need for a collective approach on an issue that was becoming a high priority for many.

"There is a lot of information out there but employers were saying they don't know who does what, or what is best for them to access," said Tom Reid, Head of Policy and Public Affairs. "They also wanted help dealing with industry specific issues as much as possible given the different workplace arrangements and considerations that we have, such as remote operating locations and fly-in fly-out workforces."

In raising the issue of mental health at work with AMMA, member companies were also highlighting a desire for greater sharing of different approaches in the industry and reflections on instances of success and opportunities for learning.

Getting off the ground

Drawing on an earlier model it used around diversity and inclusion, AMMA established a Mental Health Advisory Board in 2018 to bring together employers from different parts of the industry to tackle the mental health challenges facing the industry.

The Mental Health Advisory Board comprises a range of professionals in different roles such as human resources and occupational health and safety, and independent contractors and service providers, all with a passion for mental health.

To help inform the Mental Health Advisory Board's establishment, AMMA researched members' existing approaches and activities around mental health. It also looked at others who were involved and could offer guidance, such as an industry wellness and prevention engagement expert from Beyond Blue.

Since its inception, the Mental Health Advisory Board has assisted resources and energy employers by developing and delivering industry-specific programs and identifying best practice mental health and wellbeing initiatives, said Mr Reid.

Activities and outcomes

Based on a scan of available evidence and existing approaches, the Mental Health Advisory Board has produced a framework outlining the key areas that contribute to mental health at work in the industry. The Resources and Energy Industry Workforce Mental Health Framework[11] is supported by a scale that illustrates what employer action looks like at five different stages of maturity. These range from compliant through to progressive. Members will be encouraged to benchmark themselves in terms of current activities and capacities.

"An important point to note is that the maturity of a company is fluid, it can move back and forth. There might be an event like COVID or something specific to the company that means they are no longer as progressive as they thought they were. When things happen or circumstances change, companies are going to move across the framework's scale," said Mr Reid.

AMMA is also undertaking a scan of potential activities and programs and mapping these to the different areas of the framework to help companies understand the tangible actions they can take. Mr Reid said this approach reflected the preference of member companies for clear and practical resources and guidance.

A knowledge hub to sit on the AMMA website will provide a library of curated relevant information for member companies around mental health at work. This will help address the current challenges in finding relevant guidance.

AMMA also runs monthly webinars that seek to share insights and guidance from experts, researchers, mental health leaders and companies in the industry undertaking initiatives to support mental health at work.

In addition, AMMA is working with a mental health research team to undertake national research into mental health in the industry. This involves identifying the kinds of interventions that employees and companies are currently using and their effectiveness. The research will then examine how middle managers and supervisors in the industry deal with mental health issues and develop and trial customised supports for this group. Finally, an industry-level report will be produced with the aim to help guide future activities and areas of focus.

As well as raising general awareness of mental health at work, these activities are helping clarify key concepts for employers in the industry. Smaller organisations and those with limited internal resources are especially benefitting. AMMA also highlights emerging good practice to mental health of member companies through its annual industry awards.

Advice for others

"Make a start somewhere," said Mr Reid of his advice for other industries considering collective action on mental health at work. "Whether it's setting up an advisory board, working group or steering committee – do something that gets people together. People sometimes feel like they are doing it on their own, they don't know where to go, and they don't know where to start. If people are at least coming together and talking about it, that's a really good place to start," he said.

Case study 8

Public sector

At a glance

- Public agencies in South Australia were increasingly interested in mental health at work but were struggling to find relevant information and guidance.

- The state's public service commission convened a working group to develop a new framework and toolkit for mental health in the public sector, promoted training and peer support.

- Most agencies took the advice to establish a committee with representatives across the organisation to lead action, while a minority are yet to give the issue sufficient attention.

Lessons learned

- The value of encouraging action on one area at a time to help focus efforts and ensure a sense of progress.

- The importance of ongoing communication around the framework, including with the sector's Senior Management Council, to help maintain momentum among agencies.

- Creating an approach that recognises the diversity of work contexts and organisational needs and enables agencies to adapt guidance to suit their issues and priorities.

For more information:

| Visit | www.publicsector.sa.gov.au/hr-and-policy-support/work-health-and-safety-and-injury-management/mentally-healthy-workplaces |
| Email | caroline.dingle2@sa.gov.au |

'People reported being overwhelmed'

A framework and set of supporting actions is helping public sector agencies in South Australia tailor guidance to meet a diversity of needs.

With an increasing focus on mental health at work, including around psychological injuries among staff, advisors in South Australia's public service commission saw the need for a new initiative to support agencies in creating mentally healthy workplaces.

The Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment (OCPSE) also recognised that while there was general interest and awareness, few agencies appeared to be actively implementing the existing framework guiding mental health at work.

In addition to producing a high-level framework based on more contemporary research evidence and practice, the OCPSE saw the need for practical guidance that could actively support leaders and managers across the 81 agencies in the state's public sector.

"Our office is sitting in a really good space to do this work because we have a role to support all different agencies across the public sector in how they deliver their services and support their staff," said Helen Galindo, Principal Consultant with OCPSE.

"A lot of people were reporting being overwhelmed by the amount of information coming out and not knowing where to start."

Getting off the ground

The OCPSE had a "tried and trusted method" for undertaking such work, which included bringing together different agencies to ensure the multitude of work contexts were considered, said Ms Galindo.

"However, what was a bit different about our approach this time was that instead of just requesting a representative from each area, we specifically chose people with particular skills to sit on a working group to develop the new framework. We had a range of people from human resources, organisational psychology, rehabilitation and injury management expertise, and consulting," Ms Galindo said.

The team in the OCPSE developed a matrix to ensure this skill mix was sourced from within the state's 20 major public agencies to ensure key bodies were included in the group.

Activities and outcomes

The group got underway in September 2018 with its initial task of developing the new framework for mental health at work in the public sector.

Given the diversity of agencies represented, from health and education to emergency services and primary resources, negotiating a consistency of language became a key activity during the framework's development, said Caroline Dingle, Principal Consultant – Wellbeing Programs in the OCPSE.

"There was a lot of debate about the wording we used, such as mental health versus mental illness, but through that process we managed to produce a document that addresses the issues the working group wanted to have identified in our framework," said Ms Dingle.

Mentally **HEALTHY** WORKPLACES

What can I do to
MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

The South Australian Public Sector is committed to mentally healthy workplaces where people feel supported so that they can deliver for the SA community.

Government
of South Australia

Raise AWARENESS

Building a common understanding of mental health and mental illness to reduce stigma, help people recognise signs of mental illness and have the skills to respond appropriately.

Agency
Make talking about and supporting mental health part of workplace culture so that it's 'how we do things around here'.

Managers
Lead a team that can talk openly and learn more about mental health and mental illness in the workplace.

Employees
Learn more about mental health and mental illness so you can support your own and others' wellbeing.

Build THE POSITIVES

Create a culture of care where people feel supported at work, to enhance mental health and reduce the impact of stressors in the workplace.

Agency
Develop a positive organisational culture with well-designed jobs and supportive relationships that promote good mental health.

Managers
Be clear about what the team needs to achieve, get to know the individuals in your team and lead by example with care and respect.

Employees
Behave respectfully towards others and make connections with people in the team. Participate in physical and mental wellness programs that promote good health.

Prevent HARM AND MANAGE RISK

Identifying psychosocial hazards and control the risks they pose. Preventing harm is a key component of creating a mentally healthy workplace.

Agency
Understand psychosocial hazards to mental health, assess the risks in the agency and ensure there is a plan to protect mental health by systematically reducing the risks.

Managers
Identify psychosocial hazards and control risks to reduce stress for you and your team.

Employees
Recognise psychosocial hazards in the work environment. Take steps to control risks by discussing options with colleagues and managers and contributing to change.

Intervene EARLY AND SUPPORT RECOVERY

Encourage people to seek support for mental health concerns by addressing stigma relating to mental illness and increasing people's capability to respond supportively.

Agency
Ensure everyone understands that mental illness is common, treatable and can be discussed openly. Support employees to seek help and stay at work whenever possible.

Managers
Know how to recognise the signs of mental illness and offer support to employees who you are concerned about.

Employees
Seek help early to support your own mental health and encourage others to do the same.

For more information: about how to play your part in creating a mentally healthy workplace where you work, go to **www.publicsector.sa.gov.au**

The group based its framework on the integrated approach to workplace mental health[8] which was helpful in reflecting the different expertise assembled in the working group. "It has been a bit of a struggle for people to get their head around the fact there are so many factors at play – there is organisational culture, workplace safety, human resources. That is the hard bit," said Ms Dingle.

The working group produced a one-page framework[12] outlining key high-level concepts, which is supported by a lengthier toolkit containing further information and guidance on activities, implementation and a group of critical success factors.

"A lot of people were reporting being overwhelmed by the amount of information coming out and not knowing where to start. There was this drive to link specific resources to the specific outcomes you wanted, and attaching them to the components of the framework was really important," said Ms Galindo.

Supporting the framework, the group also drew on an existing provision in the public sector's workplace agreement to enable 5,500 staff to undergo Mental Health First Aid Training. It then developed content and guidelines for agencies to establish peer support programs for those staff who wanted further training in supportive listening and referral to act as peer supports in their workplaces.

Ms Dingle said the team is also helping agencies navigate issues in identifying and managing risks to mental health at work, which will include hosting a series of workshops to interpret the results from their own sector-wide survey undertaken every two years. The OCPSE is also considering how the various available workplace mental health tools can provide additional information to agencies between sector-wide surveys.

"One of the major challenges for everyone is what you do with survey results – it takes time to unpack results and make changes to the organisation to improve things. It's recognising that this straddles your work health and safety people, human resources, and organisational development. You can't just leave it to one team to implement necessary changes that come out of results," Ms Dingle added.

Since the release of the framework, the team has interviewed 20 major agencies to determine how the framework and toolkit are being used and what supports are needed next.

Ms Dingle said most agencies had taken a multidisciplinary approach and established working groups with different business functions represented, though a few are yet to fully engage with the framework and toolkit.

Advice for others

Ms Dingle advises industry-led initiatives should ensure a certain level of mental health literacy before delving into big activities. "If you don't have leadership who recognise mental health as important, it's very hard to get anything else to run smoothly. That's probably where COVID helped us in that it increased the general understanding of mental health in work being important," she said.

Establishing a multidisciplinary working group or committee is recommended to include different expertise and build shared understanding of the problem, said Ms Galindo.

"It's about bringing people together because they tend to be siloed, keeping them connected and helping them understand they're actually looking at the same thing, just with different perspectives, and they can all contribute," she said.

Retail, fast food and warehousing

Lessons learned

- The value of data and a willingness to share research in the interest of creating trust and facilitating a shared understanding of problems and potential solutions.

- In addition to data, personal stories (that can be captured through qualitative research) add weight and help people understand the human impact of issues.

- True collaboration involved the union and association giving each other access to members (workers and employers) to share frontline experiences and current approaches.

- The importance of thinking outside the box when it comes to which groups to engage. For example, the SDA identified the Shopping Centre Council of Australia as important given its role in supporting the conditions in which retailers work.

At a glance

- Both the SDA union and the National Retail Association were hearing about the impact of customer aggression and violence on workers and employers, and the related impacts on mental health. This would increase dramatically during COVID-19.

- The two collaborated on a range of initiatives including jointly hosting an industry forum, creating an industry statement, and creating tailored training to support workers.

- The No One Deserves a Serve campaign led to increased awareness of the issue. A partnership with icare led to the Respect and Resilience program that produced new resources, training and supports.

For more information:

Visit	www.noonedeservesaserve.com.au
Email	general@sda.org.au
Facebook	@SDAunion

'We needed a much broader response'

The efforts of a union, together with an employer association and work cover provider, are helping to tackle the mental health impacts of customer aggression and violence on workers and business owners.

"We identified early on with this issue that the union alone was never going to be able to solve this problem. We could provide advice to our members and tell them what do in those situations but we knew it needed a much broader response; we had to get industry onboard."

When workers in retail, fast food and warehousing were asked to talk about the issues that were impacting their health and safety at work, almost 5,500 of them raised abuse and violence from customers.

The work health and safety and women's committees of the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association (the SDA union), which had conducted the survey, realised the seriousness of the issue and made a joint decision to steer action.

By the end of 2016, the union had launched a survey canvassing the issue. It also began a customer-focused social media campaign to raise awareness around violence and aggression, and its impacts on mental health. The campaign also tested language and messaging that would become the SDA's No One Deserves a Serve campaign.

"We were kind of blown away by the response," said Katie Biddlestone, National Industrial Officer and National Women's Officer at SDA. "It was by far the biggest campaign that we've had in terms of member and public engagement."

The survey, completed by more than 6,000 members, found that 85% said they had experienced customer abuse and violence at work in the previous 12 months. Almost 13% of reports were of a sexual nature.

"That's what we used to get industry on board. We identified early on with this issue that the union alone was never going to be able to solve this problem. We could provide advice to our members and tell them what do in those situations but we knew it needed a much broader response; we had to get industry onboard... We also needed to engage with regulators and a whole range of different groups," said Ms Biddlestone.

The first industry group the SDA reached out to was the National Retail Association, which represents retail, fast-food and broader service sector businesses. Similarly, it had been hearing concerns from employers of customer aggression and violence, and impacts on workers' mental health, through inquiries to its in-house legal advisory service and workplace relations hotline.

"There was this growing demand from members around how do we support people, how do we train people to deal with this aggression," said Dominique Lamb, CEO of the National Retail Association. "It also showed up in our mental health statistics and demand for training, awareness and support, particularly for millennial workers. We employ 1.2 million people but a third of them are young people."

Getting off the ground

The union and employer association organised a joint industry forum on customer abuse and violence in March 2018. Employers of different sizes were encouraged to send delegates from a range of areas such as human resources and occupational health and safety. The purpose of the forum was to go through the survey data, make everyone aware this was a problem and collectively look at potential solutions, said Ms Biddlestone.

"That forum was really critical in raising awareness of the issue and its impacts. It was a real wake up call for industry broadly and everyone was very supportive about making sure we started to work together to solve the problem," she said.

Participants identified four areas for action: a customer focused campaign to aid behaviour change; training to support workers; environmental deterrence measures such as CCTV and signage; and research to guide action and monitor change.

Groups left the forum with their lists of follow up actions. SDA progressed the customer facing No One Deserves a Serve campaign, which ran across TV, radio and shopping centre billboards. The SDA and the NRA continued to engage on issues such as facilitating greater reporting of incidents in work so employers could better track the issue.

Activities and outcomes

The SDA and NRA, along with other industry groups such as the Australian Retailers Association, subsequently came together for a second forum. This gathering led to the release of an industry statement in support of zero tolerance of customer aggression and violence, given its impacts on mental health.

Through a partnership with Insurance and Care NSW (icare), a literature review was conducted into best practice for managing customer aggression and violence. This informed the development of icare's Respect and Resilience program, which was trailed by the Reject Shop and KFC and evaluated by Griffith University. The program included training, environmental measures such as signs, and new badges, displayed under a name badge, that helped humanise workers in the eyes of customers (e.g., 'I'm a mother').

An evaluation of Respect and Resilience released in late 2019 found the program led to a 47% reduction in customer abuse incidents.

More recently, COVID-19 saw an escalation of customer aggression and violence, which brought the issue to greater public attention. A survey conducted by the SDA in November 2020 found than more than a fifth of the 2,000 workers who responded said they had been deliberately spat or coughed on by a customer during COVID-19.

Ms Lamb said crime had increased by 100% in some retail locations. "Theft, assaults and violence all increased during that period, particularly in groceries and in services. With panic buying, we saw a massive spike in thefts, and of course panic around cashflow for small business."

"Most companies really pushed on at that point with the work they were already doing around customer abuse and violence," said Ms Biddlestone. During the pandemic, the SDA provided 500,000 under-badges to help humanise employees, which have been taken up by chains such as Woolworths, OfficeWorks and Priceline.

The SDA and NRA also collaborated on tailoring new content on customer aggression and violence to be embedded in certificate level courses for retail, fast food and warehousing workers.

Advice for others

Setting up a process for facilitating regular discussions is recommended, Ms Biddlestone said. "We probably should have set up a more regular working group to meet between those industry forums to look at advancing some of that work in a collaborative way. If I was going to do anything again, it would be that."

"Be open to engaging with others," said Ms Biddlestone. "Reaching out to peak organisations first and getting them to give their support really helps. Whoever you can engage in those early steps to lend you some credibility to what you're trying to achieve."

She also advised groups have a plan and take a methodical approach to their activities. "We did map out what we thought we needed to do before we made contact with anyone and put those things in place first."

Ms Lamb suggested groups seek to have open engagement where the focus is on solutions. "Try to have conversations where it's not a blame type scenario – it's no one's fault, it just exists and there are concerns on all sides. The focus is identifying it as an industry problem as whole and working to address it collaboratively."

Commercial seafood

Case study

10

At a glance

- Research highlighted the high prevalence of mental ill-health in commercial fishing, confirming industry concerns and prompting two groups to seek funding for a pilot program to address these issues.

- Stay Afloat is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and run through Seafood Industry Australia (SIA). It aims to increase awareness and supports in three fishing communities, deliver Mental Health First Aid training across the country and provide grants to enable community action on mental health.

- Preliminary evaluation findings indicate that the program is delivering its planned activities, conversations about mental health are occurring in the communities, and there is strong industry and community interest in the program.

Lessons learned

- Link in with existing networks and industry infrastructure where possible to build on current activities and avoid duplication of effort and resources.

- The importance of tailoring language and messaging to suit industry context and issues. This may involve research into current issues and ways of thinking and talking about mental health.

- Carefully targeting when and where you undertake activities will help ensure greater return on effort. For instance, choosing a place where many in the industry congregate as a venue for distributing messages or materials.

- The initiative extended the program to family and friends of industry but this has not yet been successful. Thought needs to be given as to how to actively promote engagement beyond immediate employees/members of industry.

For more information:

Visit	www.stayafloat.com.au
Email	jo@seafoodindustryaustralia.com.au
Facebook	@StayAfloatAustralia

'Conversations at the wharf or on the boats'

Two commercial seafood industry groups collaborated to establish a new pilot program, Stay Afloat, to improve mental health for fishers and their communities.

"They have worked to ensure the trusted advocates have somewhere they can refer people to that understands the particular challenges of the fishing industries, by building relationships with certain GPs or health service providers."

When a national survey in 2017 identified issues with mental and physical health among Australia's fishers, few in the industry were surprised. Many of the seafood women and partners of fishers who were members of Women in Seafood Australasia had been concerned about mental health in the industry for some time.

The research[13] found 22% of 872 fishers surveyed had reported high or very high rates of psychological distress. Almost a third said they experienced symptoms such as fatigue and trouble sleeping. The study noted that isolation, financial burdens, stress caused by regulation and livelihood insecurity could all affect mental health of fishers.

Drawing on the findings, Women in Seafood Australasia and Seafood Industry Australia secured $600,000 for a mental health pilot program through the Commonwealth Government Department of Health's Mental Health Program. The program, Stay Afloat, developed by industry for industry, was launched in November 2020.

Getting off the ground

Jo Marshall, Program Manager for Stay Afloat, said that the steering committee, established by the industry bodies to guide the program's content and rollout, has been pivotal to the work of engaging industry and communities.

"We estimate there are about 100 seafood communities around Australia, and there's probably that number again of associations, which are usually based around the type of fishing," said Ms Marshall. "I have been working to get into as many of those groups as I can to speak with executive officers who could then share with me the experiences of their members and point me to people that might like to get involved."

This broad industry and community engagement has been pivotal in building support for the program and finding locally-based advocates to help implement its key elements.

Activities and outcomes

Stay Afloat has four pillars to the program. The first is building supports in three focus fishing communities – Darwin, Newcastle and Lakes Entrance – through the appointment of 'trusted advocates.' These advocates raise awareness of mental health and act as sources of support for fishers who are struggling. Three trusted advocates in each of the focus communities completed training, including Mental Health First Aid. They also receive ongoing support that includes a monthly forum facilitated by a clinical psychologist.

To support the role of trusted advocates and ensure support is available for fishers who seek treatment for mental health issues, the program's second pillar involves outreach to local services, such as GPs. The aim is to raise their awareness of mental health challenges in commercial fishing.

"The idea of the focus community is that you have these people who you can speak to, which gradually brings about conversations about mental health at the wharf or on the boats. And then, if you do seek help, there are GPs and providers that have been briefed about our industry and understand some of the issues," said Ms Marshall.

Under the third pillar, Mental Health First Aid training that has been modified to include scenarios relevant to the fishing industry, will be delivered to 300 people in 15 fishing communities around Australia. In addition, a range of conversation starter resources, including postcards and social media videos, has been tailored for the industry.

The program's fourth pillar will see $70,000 in community resilience grants awarded for local events and initiatives to support mental health. Applications have ranged from BBQs with a mental health speaker to community walks, workshops and art-based wellbeing projects.

Dr Kate Williams, a senior research fellow at the Australian Health Services Research Institute, who is evaluating Stay Afloat for the Department of Health, said the program had taken a holistic approach to mental health in the communities.

"They have worked to ensure the trusted advocates have somewhere they can refer people to that understands the particular challenges of the fishing industries, by building relationships with certain GPs or health service providers. They have actually thought about that whole sequence from how you get someone to engage about their mental health right through to what happens when they seek help," Dr Williams said.

Dr Williams said that interviews with the trusted advocates showed that the training and ongoing support they had received was proving very important. "They felt that the training prepared them very well and that it was delivered well."

While the evaluation is largely focused on the activities and outputs of Stay Afloat, Dr Williams said the program appeared to have potential to influence longer-term outcomes. These may include helping to improve the morale and self-esteem of fishers.

"For instance, one of the applications for the community grants was a restaurant running a 'meet the fisher' session so customers could come and meet the people who caught the fish they're eating. You might have some of these side benefits, though these are longer term and harder to measure," Dr Williams said.

Advice for others

"Engage broadly with an open mind to learn from people in and around your industry," said Ms Marshall. "A loose networking approach has been really helpful; make as few assumptions as you can and let the industry really drive it."

She also advised that learning from colleagues and other industries is helpful in discovering what others have tried and what is working. "Look for other industries that have similar issues or things in common and build that network."

AFL

At a glance

- The AFL Players' Association consulted with external experts including Beyond Blue to shape the proposal of independently led mental health research project, spanning the landscape of 18 AFL clubs and key industry stakeholder bodies.

- The AFL Industry Governance Committee for Player Development endorsed the proposed approach, commencing with an eight-club pilot, prompted by awareness of some inherent mental health and wellbeing risks present within the industry.

- The research conducted with all 18 clubs led to a best practice framework to guide industry action, enable clubs to benchmark their efforts through the process of gap analysis and support aligned industry approaches. Some 29 key findings have supported increased awareness, resourcing and activities, along with improved mental health and wellbeing strategies, service models and governance of associated practices.

Lessons learned

- Aligned and sustained commitment to resources and leadership at the industry level, along with prioritising and mitigating areas of identified risk, are essential components for gaining and maintaining momentum.

- Effective engagement with stakeholder groups with interest and roles connected to such initiatives cannot be understated, including consulting at both representative and organisation levels (not just individuals).

- Providing opportunities for consumers, passionate advocates and those with strong voices who can champion the initiative across an industry and garner and maintain support are vital steps within the process.

For more information:

| Visit | www.resources.afl.com.au/afl/document/2020/12/16/49fbf87a-7290-4a88-a0a3-5c98c79e6e4a/AFL-Mental-Health-Wellbeing-Strategy_2020_2022.pdf |
| Email | wellbeing@aflplayers.com.au |

'Everyone wanted to do better'

Research and collaboration have underpinned industry initiatives to improve mental health in Australian Rules Football.

"The findings showed there was a deficit approach in the industry, with mental health being considered universally important but something that needed to "be fixed". A limited understanding of the stepped-care model highlighted the need to place greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention approaches."

Through an industry-level committee, key groups including the AFL Players' Association, AFL Commission and the AFL clubs came together to align collective efforts to deliver optimal mental health care.

The AFL Players' Association was aware of the mental health risks inherent to AFL and AFLW players, such as job insecurity and media and public scrutiny. It sought to better understand the impacts of these issues and shape a potential industry-wide response to best managing them. Gaining industry support through the AFL's Industry Governance Committee for Player Development, research into mental health in the AFL was endorsed and funded.

"Along with increasing recognition of mental ill-health and wellbeing risk factors, we'd also long identified the impact of industry misalignment in terms of the practice and management of this space," said Brent Hedley, former Head of Mental Health & Wellbeing at the AFL Players' Association.

"In both a strategic and operational sense, we as an industry weren't necessarily as coordinated as we needed to be in terms of how we plan, approach and respond to mental health care and the support systems we place around players and staff.

"Challenges were also presenting in relation to gaps in governance, policies and protocols. Pleasingly, we knew from stakeholders that there was terrific intent, everyone wanted to do better, though some just didn't know how. We needed to take a deep dive to get a true understanding of the landscape and map a clear way forward from there."

The intent was to develop a framework that could provide high-level guidance for the groups in aligning activities, while also acting as a benchmark for clubs to measure and guide their activities, Mr Hedley added.

Getting off the ground

The first phase of the initiative was a research pilot conducted with eight clubs, which later expanded to include all 18 clubs and ultimately helped inform the AFL industry's mental health framework.

A principal researcher conducted interviews with around 10 individuals at each club, from CEO's and administrators to players and medical staff. The goal was to ascertain clubs' current awareness and existing approaches and programs. By the end of the project, over 500 qualitative interviews had been conducted.

Through a debriefing process, each of the clubs received a personalised report highlighting their current standing and areas for improvement, tied to a three to four-year implementation plan.

The research led to a series of 29 recommendations for the industry across a range of areas. The industry groups then formed a steering committee to categorise the recommendations by importance and to support their implementation.

"The findings showed there was a deficit approach in the industry," said Mr Hedley. "Mental health was considered universally important but something that needed to 'be fixed'. A limited understanding of the stepped-care model highlighted the need to place greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention approaches.

"Strategic clarity, improving industry alignment and resources, and mitigating identified risks through enhanced governance practices were pegged as our industry's new top priorities," he said.

A key finding was the gap in availability of appropriate resourcing and internal expertise. While all clubs saw the importance of understanding, recognising and managing mental ill-health, many had a shortfall in appropriate internal resources to best respond, Mr Hedley said.

Activities and outcomes

"Pilot clubs were incredibly appreciative of the value of their participation and advocated that all clubs deserved the opportunity to participate. Through the AFL Industry Governance Committee, funding was extended beyond the pilot phase to all clubs to support actions.

"This funding saw many clubs increase their employment of Club Psychologists, who were identified as key mental health supports. With this expertise in place, new commitments were made to governance in terms of club and industry policy and planning," said Mr Hedley.

The resulting AFL Mental Health Framework outlined three core objectives: promoting the importance of mental health within the industry, educating and raising awareness within club environments, and building capacity and practical skills to optimise appropriate response when required. The framework also outlined core roles and responsibilities of each of the groups in the industry.

Mr Hedley said that the industry efforts had helped improve mental health outcomes, increased confidence and ability to manage mental ill-health, increased player and staff longevity, and improved transitions for players as they leave the code.

More recently, the AFL Industry Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2022 outlines the principles and strategies for improving mental health in the industry[14]. Key approaches include alignment of industry stakeholder activities, better efforts to promote mental health and respond to mental ill-health, and collect and analyse data to guide strategic action.

Based on a key recommendation of the Mental Health Industry Review, the AFL also made two senior appointments in 2019 – Dr Kate Hall as the AFL's Head of Mental Health and Wellbeing and Dr Ranjit Menon as the AFL's Chief Psychiatrist.

Advice for others

Mr Hedley recommends that the success of industry initiatives such as this rely on a number of key ingredients. The vision, leadership and genuine collaboration of key organisations, supported by capable and passionate individuals who are prepared to take ownership and drive the process, are all critical.

Mr Hedley acknowledges that competing challenges, priorities and demands are common across all industries. He suggests that an effective strategy can be beginning with a primary focus on clearly identified risks and the roles and responsibilities that groups play in relation to these.

Large employers

At a glance

- Leaders from some of Australia's largest employers were inspired by a UK business alliance on mental health and formed the Corporate Mental Health Alliance Australia (CMHAA).

- The premise of CMHAA is that when businesses pool resources, share openly and work collaboratively towards a common goal, then improved mental health outcomes will be achieved for more people, sooner.

- The group is focusing on key areas to improve mentally healthy workplaces such as engaging Australia's business leaders and tackling work-based risks to mental health.

- While still a relatively new organisation, the Alliance has held several events and is planning a CEO's forum in October.

Lessons learned

- The importance of engaging in an open and collegial way. Some members of the CMHAA members are direct competitors, but the non-judgemental atmosphere has enabled honest and helpful conversations and collaboration.

- It's alright if you fall; as a recently established alliance, the CMHAA is discovering that the occasional stumble is part of learning, refining and stretching yourself as a group.

- Being clear on who you will collaborate with as a group and why. There are many organisations and groups doing good work, so understanding your goals and values is important to help you decide on collaborations.

For more information:

Visit	www.cmhaa.org.au
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Twitter	@CMHA_Aus

'A commitment to take collective responsibility'

From engaging leaders to tackling work-based risks to mental health – the Corporate Mental Health Alliance Australia has an ambitious agenda.

"It was very much a coalition of the willing… There was a real commitment to take collective responsibility to create mentally healthy workplaces."

In 2019, a group of leaders from some of the country's largest employers came together to talk frankly about mental health at work.

The leaders came from top-tier law firms, global consultancies, banking, retail and insurance. While some were direct competitors, they were all drawn together by a common concern.

"There was a level of fatigue at senior levels that we weren't actually impacting mental health at work the way we had hoped," recalled Mel Upton, one of the participating leaders.

"Safe Work Australia was still reporting that 92% of work-related mental health condition claims could be attributed to work-related mental stress. That was putting the focus on things like work pressures, harassment and stress in the workplace."

Some of the leaders had been engaging with the City Mental Health Alliance in the United Kingdom, an alliance of businesses working with mental health experts. These leaders, who included Ms Upton and Steven Worrall, Managing Director of Microsoft Australia, suspected that corporate Australia could play a stronger role in creating mentally healthy workplaces.

Steven Worrall, chair of the Corporate Mental Health Alliance noted: "Mental health is one of the greatest issues of our time. One way to support better, more sustainable mental health outcomes is through leaders and organisations sharing openly, learning from each other and working collaboratively."

They reached out to other business leaders who they thought collectively could influence corporate Australia to help progress mentally healthy workplaces.

Getting off the ground

A group of 15 founding members of what became the Corporate Mental Health Alliance Australia met in November 2019. "It was very much a coalition of the willing… There was a real commitment to take collective responsibility to create mentally healthy workplaces," said Ms Upton.

The group quickly identified it needed to appoint expert advisors to guide its agenda. The initial strategy session, which was independently facilitated, helped the members get to know each other and openly share their challenges and current activities. The session was also an opportunity for the group to explore the kinds of changes it wanted to see and how best it might go about them.

"Immediately there was this coming together and sharing practical steps that people were taking, which set the standard for how the Alliance would work," said Ms Upton. Activities and outcomes

By January 2020, the group came together again for a strategy day, which set a direction for the CMHAA and narrowed in on key areas of focus. These included developing a vision statement for mentally healthy workplaces and primary topics of activity, such as leadership, use of data, and tackling psychosocial risk factors in work.

The arrival of COVID-19 to Australia months later highlighted the potential of the CMHAA as a venue for members to openly discuss how their workers and workplaces were being affected and how they were responding to issues like restrictions and remote work.

Other early activities included collecting leaders' stories to help humanise the new group and start the process of engaging corporate Australia with personal reflections on mental health at work.

"Those personal reflections were people prepared to talk about their own experiences, whether it was with family members, themselves, employees. The power of that story telling cannot be over-estimated," said Ms Upton.

Significantly, there is an emerging appetite within the CMHAA to tackle systematic and structural factors impacting mental health at work. "How do you actually build a strong foundation for your organisation by dealing with some of those harder issues? I think as an organisation we don't want to shy away from some of those tough questions," said Ms Upton.

By October 2020, with its strategy developed and goals in focus, the CMHAA was officially launched by Federal Minister for Health, the Hon Greg Hunt MP.

Meanwhile, the Alliance was also establishing the organisational structure that would help it operate efficiently and effectively and undertake the kinds of activities required to achieve its strategic aims.

The current board consists of founding member organisations, however as membership has grown governance arrangements will transition in 2023.

As part of the membership model, Dr Hamrosi works closely with a group of senior leaders from member organisations to progress the annual program of work and key activities.

"Key to the success of this model is a deep-seated belief in the importance of workplaces supporting mental health, strong internal support of an executive-level sponsor from each member organisation and commitment to engaging with member events and forums to share insights," said Dr Hamrosi.

"I think what makes the Alliance unique is that we see it as a valuable forum for members to come together to learn from each other and to engage with experts in the field to help continue to raise the bar on the psychological safety of workplaces," said Mr Worrall.

"We aren't a typical membership organisation to the extent that we don't see our role as simply serving our members …to borrow a term from the tech industry we take an 'open source' approach in that everything we learn is made freely available through our website and events. We believe these conversations and discussions by our members do make an impact."

Dr Hamrosi meets fortnightly with the chair and a steering committee to discuss high-level operational matters. The CMHAA also relies on the guidance of an expert advisory board, which aligns with its aim of being "business led and expert guided."

While the CMHAA is still in its early stages, Dr Hamrosi said early outputs are promising. "We have delivered now on a couple of events that facilitated good conversations – one on leadership and one recently on psychosocial risk."

She also pointed to a highly successful CEO forum the CMHAA held in conjunction with the Business Council of Australia recently.

Advice for others

"Be realistic," Ms Upton said when asked of advice for others starting industry-led initiatives. "It is easy to get disheartened at times, so I think being clear on what you can deliver and achieve is really important."

Investing in the organisational structure was also essential to ensuring everyone's time and resources are used wisely. "It's important to build things sustainably, which means looking at governance, funding and membership," said Dr Hamrosi.

Veterinary services

Developing an initiative

At a glance

- The Australian Veterinary Association is in the early stages of leading a profession-led response to mental ill-health and suicide in the veterinary profession.

- It has commissioned research and stakeholder engagement to inform recommendations for a profession-led initiative to support mental health in the profession.

- The work so far has illustrated the importance of protective factors in a profession and considering needs at different career stages.

'The profession owes it to the next generation'

Groups from across Australia's veterinary profession are helping to shape a comprehensive approach to mental health.

"I was still having to write condolences letters to the families of young vets and others dying by suicide."

Soon after Dr Warwick Vale was appointed president of the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) last year, he began to question why mental ill-health and suicide were still afflicting the veterinary profession despite a proliferation of resources and training in recent years.

Research[15] has previously suggested that vets have suicide rates several times higher than the adult population. The AVA has highlighted long work hours, challenging clients and interpersonal relationships as key causes of stress for vets.

"I reflected on the fact we are still having vets die by suicide at rates that are too high. I was still having to write condolences letters to the families of young vets and others dying by suicide," said Dr Vale, who has 30 years' experience in the industry.

"I started to ask whether we were missing something; were more resources needed or were current approaches just off the mark? How could we refocus our association and the profession to deliver a better outcome?

Image credit: Courtesy of the AVA and Austinmer Veterinary Hospital.

"I set an audacious goal in my first year as president to put the association on a path to reduce suicide in our profession by at least 50% over the next five years," he said.

Dr Vale said he recognised the AVA likely needed expertise to help identify where collective action was needed to deliver meaningful results.

"I wanted an audit of what we were doing along with some tangible feedback from the profession to give us key deliverables, which hopefully would set us on a pathway to achieving our goal."

The AVA commissioned SuperFriend to undertake this research and provide guidance on a possible profession-led initiative.

Carly Webster, Workplace Mental Health & Wellbeing at SuperFriend, said the work has included mapping existing profession initiatives against the integrated approach to workplace mental health. This mapping has found that many current initiatives are focused on providing support to individuals in need, rather than addressing the work-based risks of mental ill-health.

SuperFriend has also conducted focus groups and interviews with groups and a profession-wide survey. The aim is to canvass both the work-based risks for mental ill-health and potential protective factors that can mitigate them. The findings will inform recommendations to the association on potential activities to improve mental health and models for undertaking them.

The work so far has identified that while risks to mental are well acknowledged, the protective factors within the vet profession are less recognised. These include a feeling of public service and a strong professional identity.

"There's quite a big sense of community, the idea that vets belong to a profession and they are like minded; they're there to support each other," said Ms Webster.

Ms Webster, who conducted the research, said a range of business owners, professionals, suppliers and educators attended focus groups and shared their views.

"We want to make sure we draw out the commonalities, regardless of which part of the profession you work in, so that any initiatives or recommendations will have a broad reach," she said.

While there already appears to be a healthy level of interest within the profession, Ms Webster said the challenge for an initiative in the vet profession will be to shift perceptions of mental health. "It has been a negative story for a long time. The challenge will be communicating that we are not just talking about illness; we are talking about wellness and what thriving can look like in the profession."

Ms Webster said educators and accreditation providers were being included to help better inform new entrants to the profession. "A lot of people start veterinary work and don't last very long in the industry. The lack of alignment between expectation and reality causes a lot of problems from a mental health point of view," he said.

"We wanted to make sure we looked at the whole career lifecycle from student through to retirement because there are quite unique risks that sit under each profile," added Ms Webster.

SuperFriend is planning to provide recommendations to the AVA later this year. It will then facilitate a process of co-designing possible implementation of approaches.

Dr Vale said the AVA was open to what form the profession-led initiative would ultimately take, and the association's role in facilitating it.

"There was no one else in the profession who was going to take this leadership role other than the AVA. It is up to us to try and do something... I think the profession owes it to the next generation."

Read more in this series

Creating a collaborative: How to build an industry-led initiative

Industry-led initiatives: Plan on a Page

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Click here to learn more about the National Workplace Initiative

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Inspiration

The case studies included this resource are only some of the ways that industries are leading the creation of mentally healthy workplaces. Details of other activity at the industry level are listed below.

Let us know about your industry-based initiative:
nwi@mentalhealthcommission.gov.au

Initiative	Details	Visit
Mining		
Blueprint for Mental Health and Wellbeing – Industry guide	Describes the key elements of effective mental health programs that the industry, sites and partners can adopt to improve the mental health and wellbeing of the workforce. Provides a framework to promote wellbeing, reduce the risks and impacts of mental illness. It identifies key directions for the industry and recommends evidence-based strategies which can be applied at company and site level.	Blueprint for mental health and wellbeing
Resource Minds	Resource Minds raises awareness and understanding, reduces stigma, helps people to recognise problems in themselves, family and workmates.	Blueprint for Mental Health & Wellbeing (SACOME)
Legal		
Minds Count	Charity promoting workplace psychological health and safety in the legal profession. Promotes sharing information, resources and research, and facilitating conversation on mental health in the profession	Minds Count

Inspiration

Initiative	Details	Visit
FIFO		
Mentally healthy workplaces for fly-in fly-out (FIFO) workers in the resources and construction sectors	Provides guidance on promoting good health and wellbeing, avoiding or minimising psychosocial hazards and providing an environment that supports recovery.	Mentally healthy workplaces for fly-in fly-out (FIFO) workers
Energy		
Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy	Provides a vision for the future of mental health for the sector and communities, including key principles and objectives.	Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy
Police		
Blue Hope Australia	An external, anonymous source of mental health support for current and former Police Officers and their immediate families.	Blue Hope Australia
Water		
Water industry mental health framework	Framework to drive a change in mental health awareness and management in the water industry.	Water industry mental health framework

Inspiration

The case studies included this resource are only some of the ways that industries are leading the creation of mentally healthy workplaces. Details of other activity at the industry level are listed below.

Let us know about your industry-based initiative:
nwi@mentalhealthcommission.gov.au

Initiative	Details	Visit
Retail		
Essential Retail	Highlights issues impacting the health and wellbeing of Australia's retail workers and changes needed to support them.	Essential Retail
Vets		
Love your Pet, Love your Vet	Charity raising awareness of wellbeing in the Australian veterinary industry.	Love Your Pet, Love Your Vet
Australian Public Service		
APS Mental Health Capability Project	Integrated health and wellbeing strategy	APS Mental Health Capability Project
Music		
Support Act	Charity providing crisis relief services to artists and crew as a result of ill-health, injury, mental ill-health or other crisis that impacts the ability to work.	Support Act

Initiative	Details	Visit
Architecture		
Longitudinal study into architecture mental health	Monash University researchers are investigating the wellbeing of architects and students funded by an Australian Research Council grant.	Wellbeing of Architects
Housing		
HIA making mental health a priority	HIA and the HIA Charitable Foundation have teamed up with Beyond Blue to provide resources to help people to manage their mental health in the building industry.	HIA making mental health a priority

Australian Government

National Mental Health Commission