

Small Business Guides
to Mentally Healthy Workplaces

Protect



Australian Government
National Mental Health Commission

A practical guide for small business owners and sole traders to identify and protect themselves and others from work-related risks to mental health.

About

Small businesses are the backbone of the Australian economy. Creating mentally healthy small businesses helps individuals, businesses, communities, and the economy. Your small business can play an important role in promoting mental health by providing opportunities for people to connect, learn and make a positive contribution. Work can also be a source of comfort and support during times of mental ill-health or stress. However, without planning and consideration, work also has the potential to result in negative outcomes such as stress, burnout or injury.

The pressures of running a business, finding work-life balance, and adapting to external changes can be challenging. Finding effective ways to look after mental health in your business is important for keeping things running smoothly. Looking after mental health means investing in yourself and the people working with you to support customers, fulfil orders, respond quickly and represent your business.

This series has been specifically designed to help people in small businesses create a mentally healthy workplace. The guides are based on the [Blueprint for Mentally Healthy Workplaces](http://www.haveyoursay.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/blueprint-for-mentally-healthy-workplaces) (www.haveyoursay.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/blueprint-for-mentally-healthy-workplaces) as part of the National Workplace Initiative.



This resource focuses on one of the 3 pillars of the Blueprint for mentally healthy workplaces – Protect: protecting yourself and others from work-related risks to mental health.

Two other resources in this series focus on responding to mental ill-health and promoting mental health in the workplace.

Key takeaways

- All small business owners have legal obligations related to workplace health and safety, which includes psychological health.
- There are many hazards and risks in the workplace that can negatively impact mental health.
- By identifying hazards and risks in your workplace, you can put plans in place to manage and minimise them, creating a better work environment for yourself and your team.

[Click here](#) to read the other resources in the Small Business series

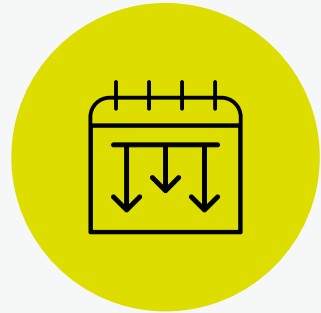
Benefits of a mentally healthy workplace



Thriving workers and owners



Increased productivity



Decreased unplanned leave



Decreased occupational injuries and illnesses



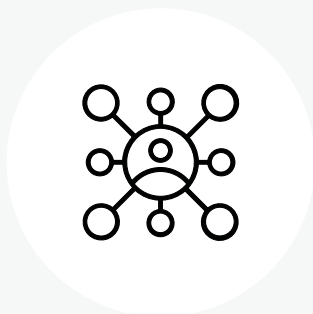
Decreased workers' compensation claims



Increased engagement and job satisfaction



Decreased turnover and re-hiring costs



Increased employee loyalty



The return on investment of a mentally healthy workplace is \$2.30 for every \$1 invested*

*<https://www.pwc.com.au/publications/pdf/beyondblue-workplace-roi-may14.pdf>

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Using this guide

Some content in this resource may be more relevant to small businesses with employees than those who are self-employed. However, most of this information is relevant and helpful to all small business owners. These icons can show you which content is most relevant for you.



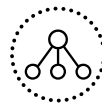
Very relevant to sole traders



Somewhat relevant to sole traders



Very relevant to employers



Somewhat relevant to employers

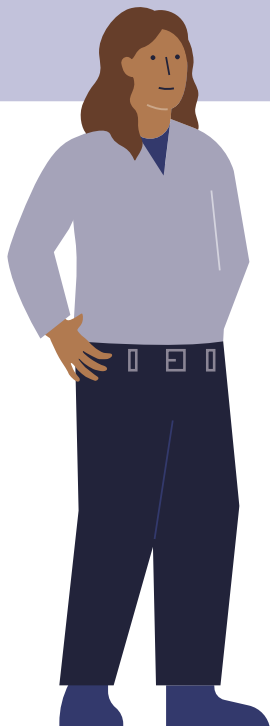
Quick tips

Meet Sarah and Ryan. Their stories will be used throughout the guide to show you how sole traders and small businesses may put information in these guides into action.

Meet Sarah



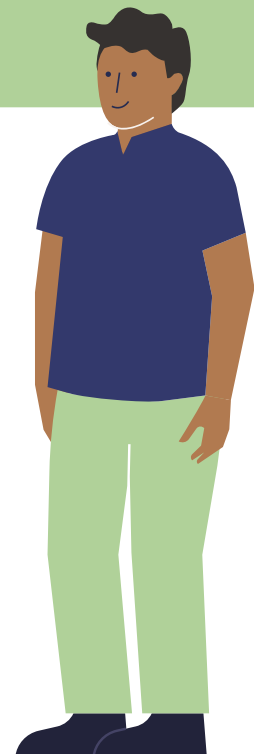
Sarah is a sole trader and has owned her cleaning business since 2009. Sarah takes responsibility for every aspect of the business, from scheduling, organising payments, doing the cleaning, and managing the finances. She works any day of the week to fit in with her clients' schedules. For example, she cleans a small office space on Saturdays so she does not disrupt their team. She has recently branched into sorting and organising people's homes and enjoys posting before and after pictures on social media. Now that her kids are a bit older, she no longer needs to work around school hours, and has been working longer hours for the past year.



Meet Ryan



Ryan runs a small café in the city and employs 7 staff, many of whom are university students who work casually. Ryan has owned the café for the past 6 years, and there have been many ups and downs, particularly during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Ryan loves interacting with customers, especially the regulars, and enjoys baking fresh treats to sell at the counter. However, he also finds it very difficult to do the rostering, with many of his staff wanting days off for exams, parties, or family events – it seems like there is something every week. Ryan does not think the café would function without him there and has barely missed a day since opening.



Key words and phrases

Small business owner

For this guide, a small business owner is someone who is the title holder of a business and employs fewer than 20 people. This includes sole traders who have no employees.

Mental health

A positive concept and more than just the absence of illness. In this guide, the term mental health is used to refer to a state of wellbeing where a person can realise their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to contribute to their community ([World Health Organisation](#)).

Mental ill-health

A term that encompasses both mental illness and changes in emotion or behaviour that can impact a person's cognitive, emotional, or social abilities but not to the extent that it meets the criteria for a mental illness diagnosis. These changes can result from life stressors and often resolve with time or when the individual's situation changes. These changes may develop into a mental illness if they persist or increase in severity.

Mental illness

A disorder diagnosed by a health professional that significantly interferes with a person's cognitive, emotional and/or social abilities. Mental illness can vary in both severity and duration. The term mental illness is used to refer to a wide spectrum of diagnosable conditions that affect how a person feels, thinks, behaves, and interacts with other people.

Psychosocial hazard

Hazards that arise from aspects of work such as the design or management of work, the work environment, equipment or behaviours and interactions in the workplace that may cause psychological harm.

Our approach to language has adhered to the conventions outlined in the [Life in Mind National Communications Charter](#), where applicable.

Pillar 1:

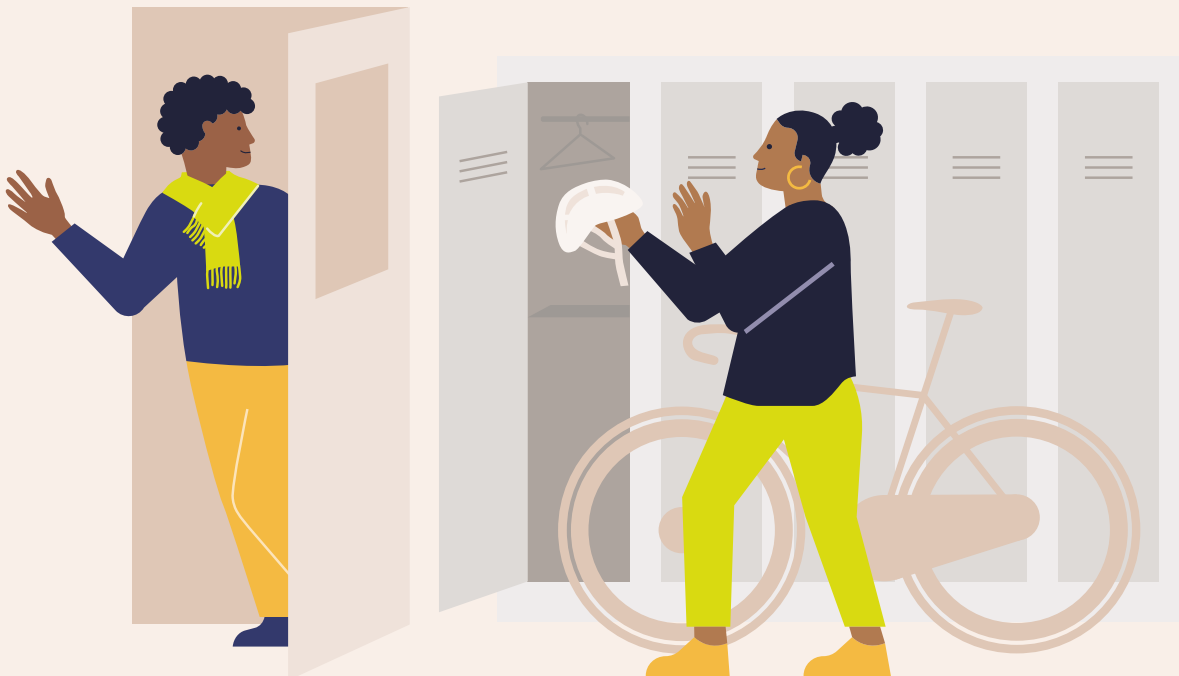


Our work is important to our wellbeing. It can provide purpose and make us feel fulfilled and challenged. This sense of purpose can be especially true for those who have built their business from the ground up. However, it is also possible that work can be a source of stress and strain. When stress becomes extreme or ongoing, work can cause mental ill-health or make existing concerns worse.

These work-related stressors can impact all people working in small businesses. Sole traders and small business owners can face the challenge of juggling multiple roles and responsibilities, attracting and retaining customers and feeling isolated or unsupported in their role. Employees can

also experience similar pressures of working with limited resources or having to help out where they are required. Many small businesses do not have access to human resource departments or Employee Assistance Programs to provide support.

An important part of creating a mentally healthy small business is having measures in place to protect people from work-related harm. This means taking steps to identify and manage any hazards in your workplace, including psychosocial hazards. Not only is this good practice, it is often the law.



Legal obligations related to mental health at work



- **Work, Health and Safety legislation, regulations and Codes of Practice.** These outline responsibilities related to providing a safe working environment. They include obligations to identify and manage hazards that may impact on health (including psychological health) and consultation with workers on matters that may impact health or safety. See [Safe Work Australia](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au) (www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au) for more details and to find your local jurisdiction.
- **Workers' Compensation legislation.** These outline responsibilities for supporting workers who experience injuries or illnesses related to the workplace. This includes psychological injuries. Your obligations may include things your business needs to have in place even if no one has needed to make a workers' compensation claim (e.g. having a return-to-work policy). See [Safe Work Australia](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/workers-compensation) (www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/workers-compensation) for more details and to find your local jurisdiction.
- **Anti-discrimination legislation.** These outline protections people have to ensure they are not discriminated against based on a range factors, including mental illness. This includes rights related to reasonable adjustments. Visit the [Australian Human Rights Commission](http://www.humanrights.gov.au) (www.humanrights.gov.au) for more information.
- **Privacy legislation.** Some small businesses have obligations related to privacy legislation. Understanding privacy is important when you are collecting or managing personal or sensitive information such as people's mental health status. [The Office of the Australian Information Commission](http://www.oaic.gov.au) (www.oaic.gov.au) has more information about privacy for small business.
- **Workplace relations legislation and agreements.** Small businesses have industrial relations obligations which detail things such as leave, unfair dismissal and consultation processes. [The Fair Work Ombudsman](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/tools-and-resources/best-practice-guides/small-business-and-the-fair-work-act) (www.fairwork.gov.au/tools-and-resources/best-practice-guides/small-business-and-the-fair-work-act) has resources for small business.



1

Identifying and managing psychosocial hazards



Section 1: Identifying and managing psychosocial hazards

Many small business owners are familiar with identifying and managing physical hazards in the workplace. Hazards are anything that can cause harm. You may be thinking about how to manage hazards by providing things like aides to lift heavy packages and ergonomic equipment for people working on computers regularly or limiting who can operate dangerous machinery.

Providing a physically safe environment is important for protecting mental health at work. Feeling as if you could be injured, abused or attacked at work can create an ongoing feeling of stress that can lead to mental ill-health.

There are also hazards in the workplace that are called psychosocial hazards; these are things in the workplace that can cause psychological harm. Under work health and safety legislation, all business owners have legal obligations to manage both physical and psychosocial risks in their workplace. This includes taking steps to identify and manage psychosocial hazards.



Psychosocial hazard:

A psychosocial hazard is a hazard that arises from, or relates to, one of the areas below and may cause psychological harm:

- the design or management of work
- a work environment
- workplace interactions or behaviours.

Psychosocial risk:

A psychosocial risk is a risk to the health or safety of a worker or other person arising from a psychosocial hazard.

See [Safe Work Australia](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au) (www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au) for more details or check what definitions, legislation and codes of practice apply in your jurisdiction.

To access more information about psychosocial hazards, see the [Model Code of Practice: Managing psychosocial hazards at work](https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/model-code-practice-managing-psychosocial-hazards-work) (<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/model-code-practice-managing-psychosocial-hazards-work>)

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Some examples of psychosocial hazards that may be present in a small business include:

Potential psychosocial hazard	Example
High workload and demands	After winning more tenders than expected, people need to work overtime for an extended period of time to deliver all the work on time.
Lack of role clarity	A team leader in the small business feels like it is their job to 'do everything' because they never had a specific conversation about what was expected of them when they were promoted.
Insecure work	Because cash flow is tight, people feel unsure whether their job will still be there next month.
Insufficient resources	Because cash flow is tight, there are not enough staff to cover the work required.
Lack of recognition or acknowledgement	People feel that even though they are doing their best work, all they receive are comments about what they could do better. They do not receive feedback about what is going well.
Workplace bullying	One person feels singled out through repetitive, unacceptable behaviour that makes them feel humiliated and unsafe.
Repetitive or unchallenging work	A person has to put thousands of letters into envelopes for a large mailout each month.
Low control over work	A manager starts micro-managing someone by telling them exactly how to do small tasks and checking in on them multiple times a day to provide direction.
Insufficient support	A junior staff member is left unsupervised for long periods, and they need to figure out how to complete specific tasks on their own without much direction.
Poor change management	The business is changing premises, however, some of the team members feel there is a lot of uncertainty and poor communication about what this means for them.
Being exposed to traumatic events of materials	A small legal practice takes on a case that involves looking through background materials such as statements and photographs that contain some distressing content.
Violence or aggression	Front of house staff experience customer aggression when they do not allow exchanges or refunds because it is not store policy.
Conflict or poor workplace relationships	Several team members cannot agree on how something should be done. They give each other the silent treatment when they are in the office at the same time and spread rumours to discredit others.
Sexual harassment	One colleague makes suggestive jokes about whether another colleague should go on a date with him, even though he has been told this makes her uncomfortable.
Remote or isolated work	A salesperson travels in regional Australia frequently. They can be on the road alone for days sometimes.

Section 1: Identifying and managing psychosocial hazards

Exposure to psychosocial hazards does not always result in a negative outcome. However, the presence of psychosocial hazards does create a risk that someone will experience a negative outcome such as stress or burnout. Psychosocial hazards can also cause psychological injuries, high turnover, time off work or other negative outcomes for both individuals and your business. If a worker experiences a psychological injury because of something in your workplace, you may be liable under workers' compensation legislation.

Reflection

What psychosocial hazards may be present in your workplace? What systems have you got in place to identify psychosocial hazards and any risks these may create?

Generally, legal obligations related to work health and safety focus on doing what is 'reasonably practicable' to minimise the risk of psychosocial hazards in your business. The actions you may be expected to take may depend on:

- the likelihood of the hazard or risk
- the degree of harm that might result from the hazard or risk
- what the person concerned knows, or ought to reasonably know, about the hazard or risk, and ways of eliminating or minimising the risk
- the availability and suitability of ways to eliminate or minimise the risk
- the cost associated with eliminating or minimising the risk, including whether the cost is grossly disproportionate to the risk.

You may not be able to control all the potential psychosocial hazards in your business, however, you do have obligations related to identifying and managing psychosocial hazards under work health and safety legislation.

Specific work health and safety requirements and regulators vary across different states. This means that if you have employees in different states, you may need to be aware of how requirements vary in different jurisdictions.

To access more information about your jurisdiction, visit [Safe Work Australia](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au) (www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au). [Business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au/risk-management/health-and-safety/work-health-and-safety#whs-requirements-in-your-state-or-territory) also has a [handy guide](http://www.business.gov.au/risk-management/health-and-safety/work-health-and-safety#whs-requirements-in-your-state-or-territory) (www.business.gov.au/risk-management/health-and-safety/work-health-and-safety#whs-requirements-in-your-state-or-territory) to understanding which work health and safety frameworks apply in your jurisdiction.



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Four steps for managing psychosocial hazards and risk

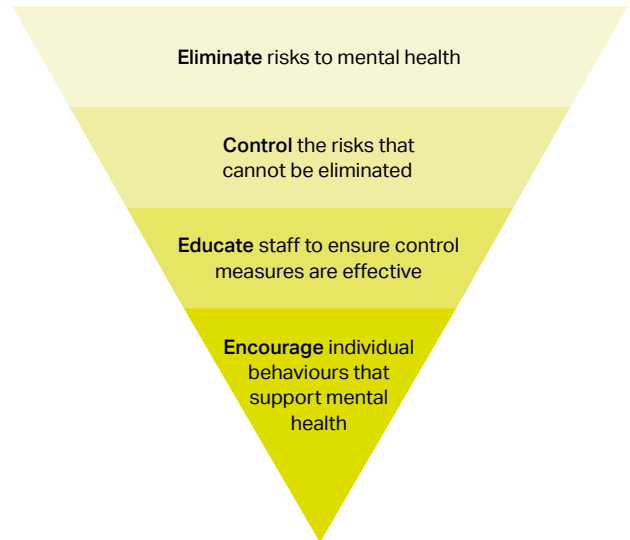


Mental health hazards can arise from three types of workplace factors – the way the workplace is organised (e.g. low job control or high time pressures), the physical work environment (e.g. dark or disorganised), and the way work is done (e.g. how time is organised or workplace bullying).

[Safe Work Australia](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-10/Managing_psychosocial_hazards_at_work_infographic.pdf) (www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-10/Managing_psychosocial_hazards_at_work_infographic.pdf) describes 4 key steps in managing psychosocial hazards and risks:

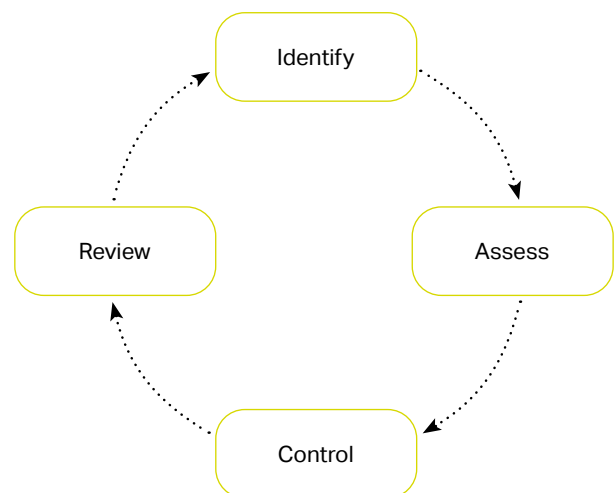
- **Identify:** This should provide you with an understanding of what types of physical and psychosocial hazards are present in your business. Identifying hazards can be done in a variety of ways, including inspecting your workplace, talking and listening to your workers, observing workers' actions and interactions, conducting a survey or providing an anonymous suggestion box.
- **Assess:** This should provide you with an understanding of potential risks and consequences associated with each of the hazards you identify. The level of risk or potential consequences may vary based on how often someone is exposed to the hazard, the scale of the hazard or other factors such as who is it occurring to or what other hazards are present at the same time.

- **Control:** This should help you identify ways to eliminate or minimise potential risks. Elimination is the best approach where it is possible. If you cannot eliminate risks, think about ways you can control the potential risk. This may be through changing the work environment or work duties, providing more support or training, putting policies and procedures in place or rotating people to minimise their exposure.



- **Review:** It is important to check that the controls you put in place are working as intended. This means checking that policies, procedures and other controls are being followed. It also means checking to see whether these controls appear to be reducing your risk.

This process is a continual process. You should always be aware of current and emerging psychosocial hazards, which strategies are in place to control risks and whether these are working.



Section 1:
Identifying and managing psychosocial hazards

Case Study 🔍



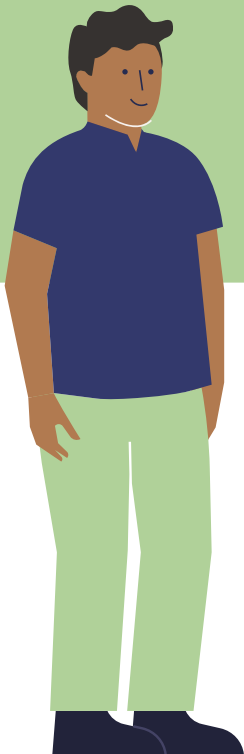
Ryan wants to make sure his business is compliant with work health and safety obligations. He regularly looks for potential physical hazards and consults with his staff about potential psychosocial hazards in 'teams talks' after the café closes for the evening. He also provides an anonymous suggestions box where people can raise concerns without being identified. Ryan is surprised to find that many of his staff are concerned about customer aggression and rudeness during the early morning coffee rush. This is why he had trouble filling the morning shift.

Ryan asks more questions to understand this from staff perspectives, and also makes a point to be on the floor during this period to observe. He identifies that many of these customers want take-away only during this period, meaning customers crowd into a small take-away area. It is hard to notice who has been served and who is waiting. Many people are getting angry at staff because they feel they were supposed to be served next.

Ryan worked with the staff to identify ways to control or address this risk. This included:

- Not setting up all the seated area until after the morning rush so there was more space for take-away customers.
- Clearly marking waiting areas so customers could line up and be served in order.
- Ensuring the staff set up the coffee station for take-away orders to process these orders quickly.
- Putting up a sign that stated aggression towards staff would not be tolerated.
- Providing training to staff about how to manage challenging customer interactions.

For the first few weeks of this new arrangement, Ryan stayed on the floor during the coffee rush to monitor how these controls were working. Overall, customers were happy to wait provided there was space and a clear order of service. Once he could see it was working, he did not remain on the floor during the morning shift but made a point to check in with the morning staff during weekly team meetings.



Section 1:
Identifying and managing psychosocial hazards

Managing bullying, harassment and discrimination at work



Bullying, harassment and discrimination can count as psychosocial hazards under work health and safety legislation. There are also additional legal requirements related to bullying, harassment and discrimination that all business owners should be aware of.

Bullying

Bullying occurs when one person repeatedly behaves unreasonably towards another person, and this behaviour creates a risk to physical or psychological health and safety. Bullying can also occur between groups of people, or between a group and an individual. Examples of bullying may include repeatedly:

- behaving aggressively towards someone
- teasing or playing practical jokes on someone
- pressuring someone to behave inappropriately
- excluding someone
- imposing unreasonable work demands.

Taking reasonable steps to manage poor performance or provide directions to workers is not bullying.

Harassment

Treating a person less favourably can also include harassing them. Harassment can include behaviour such as:

- telling insulting jokes about particular racial groups
- sending explicit or sexually suggestive emails or text messages
- displaying racially offensive or pornographic posters or screen savers

- making derogatory comments or taunts about a person's disability
- asking intrusive questions about someone's personal life, including their sex life.

Even as a once-off incident, these actions still can count as harassment.

Discrimination

Discrimination occurs when a person, or a group of people, is treated less favourably than another person or group because of their background or certain personal characteristics such as:

- sex
- sexual orientation
- age
- race
- disability.

Discrimination can be direct or indirect. Some examples of direct discrimination include:

- not employing the best person for the job because of a disability
- paying a woman less than a man to do the same job
- not employing a married woman because she may want to start a family
- not employing a person from a particular racial group because they will not 'fit in' with their co-workers.

Indirect discrimination can be less obvious. It can happen when organisations put in place conditions that seem to treat everyone equally, but that actually disadvantage some people. Some examples of indirect discrimination include:

- requiring a deaf person to attend a meeting without an Auslan interpreter
- not offering part-time workers the same opportunities for mentoring, training and promotion as full-time workers
- offering only married employees working in remote locations allowances and leave to visit their families (not those who are single or in de facto relationships)
- not allowing workers to wear hats or other headwear at work, which can affect people from some racial or ethnic backgrounds.

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Sex discrimination

Sex discrimination happens when a person is treated less favourably because of their sex, gender identity, intersex status, sexual orientation, marital or relationship status, family responsibilities, because they are pregnant or might become pregnant or because they are breastfeeding.

Some examples of direct sex discrimination include:

- not employing a woman because she will not fit into a 'traditionally' male workplace
- paying a woman less than a man for doing the same job.

Indirect sex discrimination can be less obvious. It can happen when organisations put conditions in place that seem to treat everyone equally, but that actually disadvantage some people.

Some examples of indirect sex discrimination include:

- not allowing workers to take short breaks at particular times (which may disadvantage women who are breastfeeding)
- offering only married employees working in remote locations allowances and leave to visit their families (not those who are single or in de facto relationships).

Sexual harassment

Treating a person less favourably can also include harassing them. Sexual harassment can include behaviour such as:

- staring, leering or unwelcome touching
- sending explicit or sexually suggestive emails or text messages
- displaying pornographic posters or screen savers
- asking intrusive questions about someone's personal life, including their sex life
- unwanted invitations to go out on dates or requests for sex
- unnecessary familiarity, such as deliberately brushing up against a person.

Even a once-off incident can be sexual harassment. Sexual harassment connected with employment can be considered serious misconduct and can be a valid reason for dismissal. To find out more, look at the [Fair Work Ombudsman Advice](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/employment-conditions/bullying-sexual-harassment-and-discrimination-at-work/sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace) (www.fairwork.gov.au/employment-conditions/bullying-sexual-harassment-and-discrimination-at-work/sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace).

Impact of bullying, harassment and discrimination on mental health

Bullying, harassment and discrimination can have negative impacts on individuals, including:

- feelings of isolation, social isolation or family dislocation
- loss of confidence and withdrawal
- stress, depression and anxiety
- illness such as cardiovascular disease, immune deficiency and gastrointestinal disorders (e.g. as a result of stress)
- suicidal thoughts.

They can also affect people economically if it results in limited career progression or having to leave the workforce.

Bullying, harassment and discrimination can also impact organisations and businesses through outcomes such as:

- loss of knowledge, experience and skilled staff due to staff turnover
- high costs of recruitment and training
- loss of productivity
- low morale and low levels of job satisfaction
- loss of diversity and its associated benefits in the workplace
- potential reputational damage.

Legal obligations related to bullying, harassment and discrimination



Legal obligations related to bullying, harassment and discrimination may fall under many different laws.

- Bullying, harassment and discrimination may be considered a psychosocial hazard under work health and safety laws. You must identify and control all psychosocial hazards and risks in your workplace so far as is reasonably practicable.
- If a worker experiences a psychological injury as a result of exposure to a hazard while working for your business, you may be liable under workers' compensation legislation.
- The Respect at work bill is now coming into effect - which means workplaces will have a positive duty for preventing sexual harassment
- Anti-discrimination laws in your jurisdiction create legal obligations to protect workers from discrimination and harassment based on certain characteristics.
- Certain activities may be prosecuted under criminal law, for example damage to property, physical assault, sexual assault or intimidation.
- In some circumstances civil action may be taken to claim damages that result from being exposed to these behaviours in the workplace.

This list of relevant legislation demonstrates the importance of protecting people from bullying, harassment or discrimination at work. It also highlights the importance of seeking advice if you believe this is becoming a concern in your workplace.

Preventing bullying, harassment and discrimination



As with many other work-related risks to mental health, prevention is the best approach, rather than intervening once bullying, harassment or discrimination has already occurred. Some ways you can reduce the risk of these behaviours in the workplace include:

- **Create a positive workplace culture:** Model behaviours that are respectful and make it known to workers that any behaviour that is bullying, harassment or discrimination will be taken seriously and could result in dismissal. Make all employees aware of this information to avoid singling anyone out.
- **Creating workplace policies:** You can outline policies about acceptable behaviour that include bullying, harassment and discrimination. These policies can include how to report these behaviours and potential consequences. These policies can be part of induction processes and be reviewed by staff on a regular basis.
- **Have clear procedures in place to respond:** Ensure you have a procedure in place for what to do if these behaviours do occur. This includes reporting, formal complaints procedures, conflict resolution processes and informal and formal warnings.
- **Address complaints early:** If an employee informally complains about the behaviour of another employee or contractor, address the issue before it goes further.
- **Reduce risk factors:** Many factors can lead to strained relationships, bullying and harassment in the workplace. Examples include high job demands, role conflict and ambiguity, lack of training or poor communication.

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- **Get legal advice:** Small business owners may be able to get free legal help on issues such as bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination through professional associations, insurers or the [Fair Work Commission](http://www.fwc.gov.au/apply-or-lodge/legal-help-and-representation/legal-advice-workplace-advice-service) (www.fwc.gov.au/apply-or-lodge/legal-help-and-representation/legal-advice-workplace-advice-service), including advice on bullying at work.

Reducing discrimination

Discrimination can occur even when you make well-meaning decisions about what is best for your business. Understanding ways to reduce the risk of discrimination can help you protect workers from potential discrimination.

Discrimination can occur because people believe false information and stereotypes about particular groups or have a one-off negative interaction. You may not even realise some of the small prejudices you have towards certain groups until you are in a particular situation, or someone points them out. One of the best ways to stop your own biases is to get your facts right by doing research and interacting with members of other groups.

Case Study 🔍



Sarah has a plan in place for if she is bullied in the workplace by a client. Sarah has past experience of a client who called her 'cleaner' rather than her name, set extremely unrealistic expectations, and criticised minute details of Sarah's work. This was a rough few months for Sarah, who became extremely anxious about this job. Sarah dropped the client and decided she would not let things get that bad again with other clients. She now sets realistic expectations upfront with clients to avoid criticism and confronts any inappropriate comments immediately.



Case Study 🔍



As part of the induction into Ryan's café, staff receive an anti-bullying and harassment policy, so expectations are clear from the beginning. However, Ryan catches 2 employees making sexually suggestive comments about another employee behind their back at work. To prevent this behaviour going any further, Ryan intervenes and tells the employees their behaviour is unacceptable, and he does not want to see it again. He has them read and sign the harassment policy again, so they are aware of the consequences if any complaints are made against them in the future.



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You can also reduce the risk of discrimination by having a clear understanding of the key job criteria and considering who is best to do this based on these criteria. For example:

- When hiring new employees, base your selection criteria and interview questions on key areas of the job, for example, being proficient in Microsoft Office or being able to work in a fast-paced environment. You may only mention personal characteristics – such as age, sex or race – if they are part of the genuine requirements of the job.
- When shortlisting job applicants, look at how their skills and experience match the criteria for the role.
- Assign tasks to employees based on their skills and demonstrated abilities, not what you assume they can do or would like to do.
- Allow the same opportunities to all employees, for example, training and learning new skills, consideration for promotions or pay rises, or autonomy to lead on certain tasks or projects.
- Discrimination can also occur towards your customers, suppliers, contractors or clients, for example, not serving a person because of a particular characteristic.

You can find out more about managing bullying, harassment and discrimination at:

- [Guide for preventing and responding to workplace bullying | Safe Work Australia](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/guide-preventing-and-responding-workplace-bullying) (www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/guide-preventing-and-responding-workplace-bullying)
- [Good practice good business factsheets | Australian Human Rights Commission](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/employers/good-practice-good-business-factsheets) (www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/employers/good-practice-good-business-factsheets)
- [Bullying in the workplace - Fair Work Ombudsman](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/employment-conditions/bullying-sexual-harassment-and-discrimination-at-work/bullying-in-the-workplace) (www.fairwork.gov.au/employment-conditions/bullying-sexual-harassment-and-discrimination-at-work/bullying-in-the-workplace)
- [Sexual harassment in the workplace - Law Council of Australia](http://www.lawcouncil.asn.au/policy-agenda/advancing-the-profession/equal-opportunities-in-the-law/sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace) (www.lawcouncil.asn.au/policy-agenda/advancing-the-profession/equal-opportunities-in-the-law/sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace).

Case Study 🔍



Ryan is hiring a new employee as an all-rounder in the café and has narrowed it down to 2 options. One is a young university student with the right qualifications but little practical experience, who must fit shifts around their university schedule. The other is an older man who has lots of experience in the hospitality industry and full availability. Ryan knows the older man is better suited for the job but is worried he may not be able to handle the fast pace of the café or learn how to use their systems, despite his assurances that he can. If Ryan chooses to hire the younger candidate, regardless of their lack of experience and limited availability, he will be discriminating based on age which is unlawful.



Section 1:
Identifying and managing psychosocial hazards

Understanding work design



Work design can reduce health and safety risks and enhance productivity, job fulfilment and wellbeing at work. Work design refers to the tasks and duties completed as part of your role, how you undertake them, and what resources are needed to complete them.

To improve work design for yourself or people who work with you, you may want to consider things such as:

- defining clear roles and responsibilities
- ensuring people have the right skills and training for the role
- assessing whether people have the right technology, software, equipment and information to do their job properly
- considering whether people have got enough variation or diversity to keep their work interesting
- making sure people feel supported in their work and able to influence how they do their work.

You can read more about good work design at [Safe Work Australia Good work design](https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/managing-health-and-safety/good-work-design) (www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/managing-health-and-safety/good-work-design).



Section 1:
Identifying and managing psychosocial hazards

Case Study 🔍



Sarah is often driving from one end of the city to the other and back to clean her clients' houses. This feels like a huge waste of time and petrol, so she decides to review her scheduling procedures. She wants to try 2 methods to see what works best for her and her clients: grouping suburbs together and allocating days of the week for each group, allowing flexibility with time; or doing customers in one part of the city in the morning and one in the afternoons, accounting for day of week preferences. This will save her travel time and create shorter and more efficient days.



Case Study 🔍



After hearing feedback from his team that they felt 'run off their feet' all the time, Ryan considered things he could change to help. After observing a few shifts, Ryan realised staff tended to do the most urgent tasks, even if it was not their job. This was particularly true of more senior staff members who had skills and confidence across multiple areas of the café. So, Ryan grouped together tasks that could be completed by one person and assigned those tasks each shift. He also realised some staff may not have the confidence to complete certain tasks, so he ran some refresher training with everyone. Having select tasks meant staff knew exactly what they were responsible for and could easily see the outcomes of their work. Ryan allowed some flexibility with this model, so that if a staff member was not busy, they could check whether any of the team needed help.



2

Protecting my own mental health at work

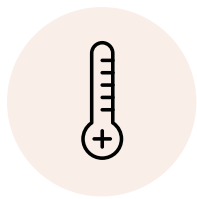


Section 2:
Protecting my own mental health at work

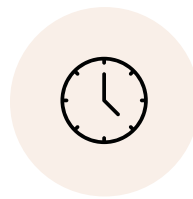
Much of this resource has focused on creating an environment that protects everyone's mental health at work. If you are a small business owner, or someone who has a lot of responsibility within a small business, there are some additional things you may wish to consider.

Proactively managing things that can cause stress means that you are in a better position to manage stressful situations when they arise. This section focuses on the importance of a proactive approach, and ideas for managing common small business stressors.

Research conducted by Everymind (www.everymind.imgix.net/assets/Uploads/PDF/Small-business/SmallBusinessWhitepaperFINAL.PDF) suggests that some of the most common strains on small business owners include:



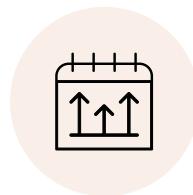
Feeling obligated to work when sick



Working long hours



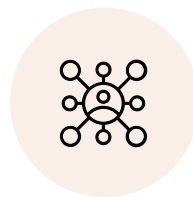
Financial stress and maintaining cash flow



Ongoing profitability and survival of business



Having multiple responsibilities



Attracting and retaining customers



Being responsible for employees



Reflection

What are some of the things that create stress for you at work? What have you got in place to manage these stressors?

While you may not be able to prevent these from happening, you can prepare for and manage the risk associated with them to help mitigate their negative effects.

Section 2: Protecting my own mental health at work

The stress bucket is a great way to explain the importance of looking after yourself, and promoting wellbeing in your business:

- Imagine your ability to cope with stressful events as a bucket. Everyone has a different sized bucket depending on things like genetics and life experiences.
- Water added to the bucket represents stressful events, for example, financial difficulty, facing a stressful deadline, uncertainty about your business, not getting enough sleep or relationship strain. The more something contributes to your stress, the more water it adds.
- Usually, one stressful event will not fill your bucket. But having too many unmanaged stressors or risks at once can cause your bucket to overflow.
- So that our bucket does not fill up with water and overflow, we can add taps to the bottom to drain the water. These taps represent the factors that enhance your wellbeing.
- Unhelpful strategies for managing stressors (e.g. using alcohol to cope or withdrawing from your supports) only add extra water to your bucket.
- By keeping water out of your bucket, you have room for unexpected or uncontrollable events, such as COVID-19 impacts, natural disasters, a personal loss such as a break-up or death of a loved one, or something smaller like a bad customer review or looming deadline.
- If you do not look after yourself, the water levels in your bucket will remain constantly high, and stressful or upsetting events can cause your bucket to overflow more easily. When your bucket is overflowing, it is more difficult to find the energy and resources to run your business.
- Some things are outside of your control, but you can control some factors that add or empty water from your, and your team members' buckets. This puts everyone in your business in a better position to manage stressful or difficult situations.



What helps you
ease the pressure?

Planning for unexpected events



- Think about what you will do if you can no longer run your business and who will take over. Developing a succession plan will ensure the transition out of your business is easier. Visit [Business.gov.au](https://www.business.gov.au) for more information and templates [Develop your succession plan | business.gov.au](https://www.business.gov.au/planning/business-plans/develop-your-succession-plan) (www.business.gov.au/planning/business-plans/develop-your-succession-plan).

Unexpected events can have a large impact on our lives and be extremely stressful. However, this stress can be reduced if you have some plans in place. An unexpected event might have a direct impact on your business such as taking extended leave due to illness, natural disasters or a global pandemic. They could also be something more indirect such as supply shortages due to situations in other countries.

It is difficult to plan for every situation but having some plans in place will help you kick into action when you need to, rather than panicking or becoming overwhelmed by the situation. Here are some tips on planning for unexpected events:

- Back up all your business information and keep it in another location such as a password-protected hard drive or a secure cloud service. Moving all your systems and documentation online can make this easy.
- Plan your emergency procedures such as what you will do in a robbery or a fire. Having pre-prepared steps to follow in these situations can make it easier to respond under pressure.
- Save all your insurance documentation in one place that can be easily accessed by you or someone else.
- Create a list of alternative suppliers so that if something happens, you know who might be available as a quick replacement.
- Train employees in important procedures so they can step in if you need to take unexpected leave.
- Plan an alternative location that you can run your business from, and how your business might adapt if you can no longer use your regular premises.

Case Study



Sarah uses natural cleaning products that will not damage her skin or create toxic fumes, helping her avoid any medical emergencies for herself or her clients. She also keeps all her appointments synced across her phone and online calendars to ensure she can access it anywhere, without losing records. She has a list of a few trusted cleaners she is happy to recommend to her clients if she cannot work.

Case Study



Ryan has plans for what he and his team should do with aggressive customers, during a robbery and if they have to evacuate the café. He ensures staff know these plans during their orientation and training and reminds staff each year in an informal chat. Having been in the business a while, Ryan knows many alternative suppliers for things like coffee beans, cups and produce, as well as another coffee machine repair person so he is ready if there are any issues with his existing network. Ryan knows his business would not do well if he took time off, so plans to train some of his employees in his essential tasks.

Section 2:
Protecting my own mental health at work

Reducing financial stress



Business finances may cause you stress at some point. Small business owners face a lot of uncertainty around where their income comes from, managing cash flow and wages, and following up payments from clients. While it can be difficult to control how much money comes into your business, creating good financial habits is one way to help relieve some pressure, especially through periods of uncertainty. Putting strategies in place now means you will be in a better position to manage through off-seasons, adverse events or the unexpected.

- **Keep good records:** Keeping receipts, invoices and other payment records well organised makes it easy for you at tax time. Try taking a picture of these on your phone and saving them to a special folder or spend some time at the end of each week entering these details into your management software.
- **Prioritise your debt:** Identify what needs to be paid, how much and when. Create a payment plan that directs your money to where it is needed most, for example, loans with the highest interest rate. If you are experiencing financial hardship, try talking to your creditors to see if you can extend due dates or make partial payments instead.
- **Set up a detailed budget:** A budget is a really important tool for business owners; it will help you allocate funds to ensure your business is running smoothly. Factor a 'rainy-day' account into your budget to ensure you have some money set aside if you need to take time off. [Business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au/finance/accounting/create-a-budget) (www.business.gov.au/finance/accounting/create-a-budget) has some great advice, tools, and templates to help with your budget.

- **Make sure you are getting paid:** Ensure you send written invoices to customers that specify amounts and payment dates or events. This makes it easier to recover money when needed. Charge a deposit or upfront payment to cover out-of-pocket expenses and pursue overdue payments promptly.
- **Get professional help:** If numbers and budgeting are challenging for you, enlist the help of an accountant or financial advisor who can help. If you are in debt and need help, you can reach out for help through the National Debt Helpline on 1800 007 007 or visit their website for information and assistance (www.ndh.org.au).
- Explore the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman's My Business Health website to find financial tips relevant to your situation [My Business Health | ASBFE0](http://www.asbfeo.gov.au/my-business-health/home) (www.asbfeo.gov.au/my-business-health/home).

Section 2:
Protecting my own mental health at work

Case Study 🔍



Sarah is disorganised and hates the financial side of the business. She barely manages her tax return each year. Due to the stress it causes her, she decides to hire a bookkeeper to help, who discovers several late payments from clients Sarah had forgotten about. Sarah sends out late payment notices to these customers and receives several payments and apologies. However, she also needed to send some warning emails and have some awkward conversations. Eventually Sarah recovered all the money from her late payments. Hiring the bookkeeper made tax time easy and Sarah could focus on the parts of her business she enjoyed.



Case Study 🔍



Ryan is very organised and loves keeping detailed records, so he always has great financial information about the café. However, he does not have a detailed budget, so he often overspends and ends up short. He decides to make a detailed spreadsheet of his weekly spending for 3 months, so he can identify areas he could save some money. While many of his expenses are essential, like rent and staffing, he finds his fresh produce is a significant expense. After doing some research, Ryan finds another supplier who can cut 15% off his weekly produce bill. Ryan puts the majority of this money in a rainy-day fund, so he is ready for any emergencies.



Managing competing priorities



Juggling multiple responsibilities and wearing multiple hats is an inevitable part of running and working in a small business. However, if these responsibilities are not managed effectively, it can be easy to become overwhelmed and stressed. That is why it is important to have a plan about how you will manage each of your responsibilities, and how much of your time and effort should be allocated to each. Having proper time management strategies is a great way to tend to your many responsibilities efficiently.

While different strategies work for different people, you could try these strategies:

- **Focus on one task at a time:** While it may be tempting to work on something else or quickly reply to an email, switching tasks can decrease your productivity. Instead, stick to your schedule, and perhaps add timeslots in the morning, midday and afternoon to reply to emails or complete smaller tasks, rather than addressing them as soon as they arise. Write down anything important that comes to you while working so you remember to come back to it later.
 - **Work to time limits:** Rather than working indefinitely on a task, estimate its duration and schedule it. If it is a longer activity, try working on it in time blocks and taking small breaks between blocks. For example, try a short 5-minute break after 30–45 mins worth of work.
 - **Prioritise your tasks:** Tasks should be prioritised based on both urgency and importance. Focusing on completing urgent tasks may seem like a good use of time, but not if it comes at the expense of important tasks that contribute to your business goals.
 - **Be realistic and set boundaries:** Once you have been running your business for a while, you will have an idea of how much you can achieve in a day. Make sure you are realistic with your time and provide clients with realistic timeframes to avoid working to tight deadlines. It is also important you know when to say no, so that you are not taking on too much work at once.
- **Identify your daily tasks:** Start by looking at what you do each day at work. While each day might be slightly different, it is likely that there are a few tasks you need to do every day, for example, provide quotes or reply to emails. You should also identify any other regular tasks completed semi-regularly (e.g. weekly, fortnightly or monthly).
 - **Create a detailed schedule:** Keep an up-to-date daily schedule and stick to it. Make your schedule as detailed as possible, allocating time to all your daily tasks, no matter how small. This ensures you have enough time in the day to get everything done. At the start of each month, insert all your semi-regular activities into the schedule too, so you can plan your time around them when they come up.

Section 2:
Protecting my own mental health at work

Managing Sarah's competing priorities

Case Study 🔍



Section 2:
Protecting my own mental health at work

Managing stress and burnout



Stress is a normal part of life and can be helpful in keeping us motivated towards our goals, which is useful as a business owner. However, too much stress can make us feel overwhelmed, affect our quality of life and cause problems with physical and mental health. It is vital to look after mental health to help protect ourselves from the negative effects of stress. The best course of action is to put strategies in place to prevent stress whenever possible, instead of waiting until you are stressed and then responding. Look at the promote resource for additional information on looking after your mental health.

- Everymind's [Ahead for Business digital hub](http://www.aheadforbusiness.org.au) (www.aheadforbusiness.org.au) includes a variety of tools and resources specifically designed for small business owners.
- Find support for finances, business development, staffing, mental health and a whole lot more using the [My Business Health](http://www.asbfeo.gov.au/my-business-health/home) (www.asbfeo.gov.au/my-business-health/home) website.
- [Business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au/risk-management/mental-health/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support-for-business) (www.business.gov.au/risk-management/mental-health/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support-for-business) has developed some tips to help you manage your mental health at work.

More information about looking after myself



- For an overview of looking after yourself in your business, watch this [20-minute webinar](https://www.vimeo.com/638521639?embedded=true&source=video_title&owner=72284531) (www.vimeo.com/638521639?embedded=true&source=video_title&owner=72284531) by Ahead for Business.
- Take a look at the [Small Business Workplace Wellbeing Guide](http://www.business-sa.com/content-library) (www.business-sa.com/content-library) developed by Business SA.
- [5 Ways to Wellbeing](http://www.5waystowellbeing.org.au) (www.5waystowellbeing.org.au) has some simple tips around connecting, being active, learning, being aware and helping others enhance your wellbeing.
- Take a look at Beyond Blue's [Financial Wellbeing](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/staying-well/financial-wellbeing) resource (www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/staying-well/financial-wellbeing).
- Get involved with [New Access for Small Business Owners \(NASBO\)](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/newaccess-mental-health-coaching/newaccess-for-small-business-owners) (www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/newaccess-mental-health-coaching/newaccess-for-small-business-owners).

Mental health support services

If you or someone you know needs support, here are some support services you can reach out to now. In an emergency, please call 000.

Organisation	Contact	Description
NASBO	beyondblue.org.au/get-support/newaccess-mental-health-coaching/newaccess-for-small-business-owners	Beyond Blue's NewAccess for Small Business Owners provides a guided self-help mental health coaching program.
Head to Health	headtohealth.gov.au	Provided by the Department of Health to search free or low cost digital supports for mental health.
Beyond Blue	1300 22 4636 beyondblue.org.au	24/7 support for mental health and wellbeing via phone, web chat and online forum.
Lifeline Australia	13 11 14 lifeline.org.au	24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services.
Suicide Call Back Service	1300 659 467 suicidecallbackservice.org.au	24/7 telephone crisis support for people at risk of suicide, carers and bereaved, as well as online resources and information.
MensLine Australia	1300 78 99 78 mensline.org.au/phone-and-online-counselling	24/7 telephone and online support, information and referral service for men.
Kids Helpline	1800 55 1800 kidshelpline.com.au	24/7 telephone counselling for young people under 25 years.
headspace Australia	1800 650 890 headspace.org.au	Telephone and web chat for young people aged 12 to 25 years.
QLife	1800 184 527 qlife.org.au	Telephone and online chat support service for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and/or intersex (LGBTI) communities.
Relationships Australia	1300 364 277 relationships.org.au	Relationships Australia offers a broad range of services to individuals, families and communities throughout the country.

Mental health support services

If you or someone you know needs support, here are some support services you can reach out to now. In an emergency, please call 000.

Organisation	Contact	Description
Butterfly Foundation	1800 334 673 butterfly.org.au	Support for people affected by eating disorders via telephone, web chat or email.
Carers Australia	1800 422 737 carersaustralia.com.au	Carer gateway of practical advice and connection with local carer services.
SANE	1800 187 263 sane.org	Resources, forums and support for people affected by complex mental health issues.
National Debt Helpline	1800 007 007 ndh.org.au	Financial counselling advice for financial hardship.
Counselling Online	counsellingonline.org.au	24/7 support for anyone affected by alcohol and other drugs.
Gambling Help Online	1800 858 858 gamblinghelponline.org.au	24/7 support for anyone affected by gambling.
Wellmob	wellmob.org.au	Social, emotional and cultural wellbeing online resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.
13 YARN	13 9276 13yarn.org.au	13YARN (Thirteen YARN) connects mob who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Crisis Supporter.
Standby	1300 727 247 standbysupport.com.au	Provides free face-to face and/or telephone support for anyone impacted by suicide.
LivingWorks training	livingworks.com.au	Provides a range of online and in person training to help identify people with thoughts of suicide and connect them with life-saving first aid resources.
Mindspot	1800 61 44 34 mindspot.org.au	Providing assessment and treatments, including therapist support, accessible online.

Attributions

This resource was created by Everymind, under the Ahead for Business program, as part of the National Workplace Initiative.

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