

# A mentally healthy workplace for executives and decision-makers

How organisations can protect and promote the mental health of executives and decision-makers

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**Australian Government**

**National Mental Health Commission**

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## 1.1 About this guide

People in executive and decision-making positions can face unique pressures in their work. Examples include public scrutiny, moral injury when their decisions negatively impact others, decision fatigue and responsibility for the performance and wellbeing of others. These pressures can all influence the mental health of executives and senior decision-makers, and lead to loneliness and social isolation.

The ability to sustain high performance and maintain healthy and productive environmental conditions at work is intrinsically linked to mental health. For boards, executive teams and other key stakeholders, this means creating workplace conditions that enable optimal functioning of executives, decision-makers and workers; facilitating, encouraging and modelling behaviours that contribute to healthy workplace cultures; and taking reasonable steps to support the mental health of executives and decision-makers.

Executives and decision-makers need to be aware of their personal mindsets, skillsets, responses and habits, as well as their role in developing and maintaining workplace conditions (including culture) that protect, respond to and promote mental health. This includes organisational structure, performance management practices and workplace norms and rituals.

Guidance about individual mental health in the workplace is widely available as is information about creating mentally healthy workplaces (see: [Mentally Healthy Workplaces](#)). There is less information available about the unique demands, needs and strategies for those in decision-making roles.

The National Mental Health Commission is working with the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance to create a nationally consistent approach to mentally healthy workplaces through the [National Workplace Initiative \(NWI\)](#). The Commission developed this guide to support the mental health of executive leaders and decision-makers. This group includes leaders in C-suite or executive roles, board members, business owners and people in roles responsible for significant decisions such as high court judges, surgeons and airline pilots.

**The guide was developed in consultation with executives and decision-makers from across private and public sector organisations ranging in size and industry.**

It shares practical strategies, designed specifically for people in executive and decision-making roles and those who support them (for example, boards, executive teams, peak bodies etc.).

## 1.2 This guide can help you to understand how to create a mentally healthy workplace

This guide has 2 aims:

**Help organisations understand how they can support executives and decision-makers, and create environments for them that are mentally healthy**

This information is targeted at actors operating within the workplace system.

**Use the guide to help:** Contextualise the role-related stressors that executives and decision-makers face, such as increasing levels of uncertainty and complexity, constant and competing demands, and public scrutiny. This information supports institutions, boards and executive teams to consider how contextual factors can affect the mental health of decision-makers and to provide practical actions these bodies can take to support executives and decision-makers.

The guide highlights several cultural and structural initiatives that boards, executive teams and other key stakeholders (for example, peak bodies) can enact to improve the mental health of executives and decision-makers. It also considers executives' and decision-makers' individual actions, behaviours and social environment and provides useful actions they can take to protect, respond to and promote their own mental health.

**Help executives and decision-makers understand their workplace ecosystem, how that ecosystem can affect their mental health, and their capacity to lead and support the mental health of others**

This information is targeted at executives and decision-makers.

**Use the guide to help:** Understand your responsibility, as an executive or decision-maker, in creating a mentally healthy workplace. The information aims to promote awareness of the reciprocal influence a decision-making role has on culture and the relationship between your practices and habits, and the mental health of your team and the broader organisation.



### 1.3 A note on language

Language, and the way we use it, can affect how people think about different issues, experiences and perspectives.

These guides conceptualise mental health as a state of wellbeing and not solely the absence of mental illness, consistent with the definition of the World Health Organisation.<sup>1</sup> 'Mental health' refers 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, is able to contribute to their community and is flourishing at work.

- Executive and decision-maker**  
 Indicates those in decision-making roles, in executive level roles or those who have significant responsibility to influence and guide organisations or outcomes. The term includes people who work in teams and leaders who work autonomously in high-risk and/or high consequence professions (for example, high court judges, surgeons and airline pilots).
- Organisation**  
 Describes organisation-level actors, such as a board of directors or an executive team, responsible for establishing, overseeing and implementing the organisation's strategic direction and supporting and guiding executives and decision-makers.
- Workplace ecosystem**  
 Is used to situate the executive or decision-maker within a broader network of actors—both within and outside the organisation—responsible for supporting and guiding executives and decision-makers and the organisations they lead. This may include system-level actors, such as peak or industry bodies (for example, Business Council of Australia), business owners, shareholders, government departments, as well as organisational-level actors, such as a board of directors or an executive team, and the individual themselves. The operation of a workplace ecosystem is mediated by technology, processes and governance—it is not only about 'who' is in the ecosystem, but also 'how' actors in the ecosystem interact and operate that may affect wellbeing; for instance, how a board of directors interacts with an executive team.

[Appendix B contains a detailed Glossary of terms.](#)

### 1.4 Why invest in the mental health of executives and decision-makers?

There is both a social and economic case for improving the mental health of decision-makers and their workers. The 2020 Productivity Commission Inquiry on Mental Health found the typical compensation payment per claim for a mental condition was more than double the amount for all other claims, while the typical time off work for a mental condition was almost triple the amount for all other claims.<sup>2</sup> Investing in the mental health of decision-makers benefits individual decision-makers, the organisations they lead, the industry and/or sector they represent, and the economy more broadly.

Executives and decision-makers represent the apex of business and have a critical influence over the industry and/or sector they represent. If individuals are struggling to cope or no longer want to accept decision-making positions because they are too stressful or the role does not include the required support, then that can have significant ramifications for the industry and/or sector.

For boards and governing committees, the value proposition is slightly different. Turnover in these roles is disruptive and can negatively impact the organisation's performance and standing. There may also be legal ramifications for board directors. See the other guide in this series: [Executives and decision-makers' role in creating a mentally healthy workplace.](#)

At an organisational level, executives and decision-makers play a crucial role in shaping workplace culture around mental health. If they are supported to thrive then their actions, such as promoting and facilitating mentally healthy workplaces, can positively impact the mental health of their workers and the industry and/or sector more broadly. Conversely, not supporting executives and decision-makers to thrive at work can adversely affect worker stress and wellbeing.

At a personal level, executives and decision-makers who feel supported can better respond to excessive and compounding work-related stress, maintain high levels of autonomy and control (known to protect mental health) and benefit from increased competency and engagement at work, self-determination and motivation, and job satisfaction.<sup>3-5</sup> They will also benefit from enhanced personal health and work-life balance and be better able to perform at home and work.

## 1.5 Methodology

This guide is underpinned by information sourced through the following methods:

### Evidence review

- An extensive review of published evidence was completed in October 2022. Both peer-reviewed (academic literature) and non-peer-reviewed (grey literature) that:
  - identified the unique factors that enable and/or hinder executives and decision-makers from being able to effectively lead in high-performance and high-pressure environments, and the impacts this may have on their mental health
  - identified available tools, skills and habits that enable executives and decision-makers to sustain their physical and psychological wellbeing.

### Consultation

- Targeted interviews conducted with individuals who have experience in executive and decision-making positions were conducted in October 2022 and intended to encourage in-depth sharing of experiences and insights across a variety of private and public sector enterprises.
- Workshops conducted in December 2022 with an Expert Reference Group (ERG), comprised of representatives from a range of sectors and industries, to explore challenges and issues from the perspectives of executives and decision-makers from across small, medium and large private and public sector enterprises. The ERG helped to shape the direction of these guides.



## 2.1 Executive and decision-makers face unique challenges and therefore have unique mental health needs

The context in which executives and decision-makers operate is rapidly changing and evolving, with environmental disruptions, geopolitical instability, legislative reforms and the COVID-19 pandemic impacting when, where and how people work. Operating under such complex circumstances exposes executives and decision-makers to additional work-related stressors that can impact their mental health. These stressors can be associated with workplace performance but can also be specific to an individual's role and vary across sectors and organisations.

### 2.1.1 What the research shows about the mental health of executives and decision-makers

Being an executive or decision-maker can have many benefits:

- autonomy to make decisions and set values, vision and direction
- access to education, training and other additional supports (for example, coaches) and, in most cases, significant financial remuneration.

In fact, for many executives and decision-makers, their job has a relatively positive effect on their overall physical, mental, social and financial wellbeing compared with their workers.<sup>6</sup> However, these benefits are often commensurate with heightened demands and pressures.

Consultation with executives and decision-makers suggested a desire for greater wellbeing support. This result is supported by evidence that suggests an increase in resignation rates among executives and decision-makers who are seeking greater work-life balance and wellbeing.<sup>6</sup> Noting this evidence, the unique challenges and needs of executives and decision-makers requires more attention.

Having to constantly multitask, work at pace and quickly respond to unexpected demands can take its toll—even on those who actively try to improve their wellbeing. Many executives and decision-makers cope by working long hours. While this approach may work in short bursts, it is likely to lead to burnout, increase stress, contribute to loneliness and isolation and, ultimately, decrease quality of life. Substantial work demands—when coupled with overwhelming organisational expectations and inadequate organisational, social and emotional support—can have a compounding effect and result in work-related stress and/or poor mental health among executives and decision-makers.

### 2.1.2 What executive leaders have told us about their mental health challenges

#### Typical challenges experienced by executives and decision-makers<sup>7</sup>

Some challenges associated with being an executive or decision-maker can be considered typical or standard, in that most, if not all, people in these positions will experience these challenges in their routine, day-to-day work life. These challenges include the following:



#### Unprecedented events

Executive and decision-makers are often responsible for responding to unprecedented events. Several people highlighted this as a unique challenge of contemporary leadership, citing examples such as navigating the pandemic, operating in resource-constrained environments, the transition to hybrid ways of working and the emerging risk of cyberattacks. Executives and decision-makers described the difficulties of responding to unprecedented events, including rapidly pivoting operations as circumstances change, anticipating consumer expectations and navigating intense public scrutiny, while also upholding the health, safety and reputation of their organisation. Needing to remain flexible and resilient during unprecedented events can increase work-related stress.



### High workloads, demands and levels of responsibility

Executives and decision-makers often face high work demands and considerable time pressures, such as attending frequent and consecutive meetings, steering the performance and professional development of others, navigating organisational bureaucracy, dealing with interpersonal and intergroup conflict, and responding to unprecedented events. In addition to these pressures, executives and decision-makers are expected to portray an image of resilience and wellbeing (that is, the need to keep up appearances). This is often demonstrated through behaviours (such as the tendency not to seek help).<sup>9</sup>

Executives and decision-makers reported work-related stress and large workloads are a significant mental health challenge. They also agreed the capacity of organisations to support their workloads has diminished over time due to constraints, such as the demand to do more with fewer staff and resources. Executives and decision-makers described additional challenges, such as difficulty in saying 'no' to additional work demands and a shortage of time for self-reflection. These demands can result in executives and decision-makers taking on additional tasks that can negatively impact their work-life balance and wellbeing.

High levels of responsibility, when coupled with unrealistic organisational expectations or lack of social or organisational support, can result in higher levels of stress and burnout and experiences of poor mental health, such as anxiety.



### The responsibility to support others

As well as balancing considerable work demands, executives and decision-makers must take reasonable steps to prevent harm to workers in line with Australian work health and safety legislation. There are also social expectations for organisations to create workplace and occupational conditions (including culture) that support wellbeing, and to consider worker wellbeing implications in decision-making.<sup>9</sup> As a result, many executives and decision-makers are responsible for, and carry the burden of, workers' health and safety.

While executives and decision-makers recognised the need to challenge harmful cultural norms and behaviours and act as a role model for mentally healthy work practices, they were also uncertain about their responsibilities as a role model and where to seek support and guidance. These concerns underline the need for greater organisational governance and/or board-level support. Supporting others can deliver significant benefits (such as improved productivity, enhanced worker safety), but it can also be a significant source of emotional labour and stress, particularly without adequate support. Several negative mental health consequences can result from excessive emotional labour, including decreased job satisfaction, increased turnover and burnout.





### Public scrutiny

A leadership profile often means colleagues, workers, stakeholders and even the public have an interest in what executives and decision-makers say and do. The interconnectedness of technology, social media and the advent of the 24 hour news cycle means stakeholders have real-time access to decisions, outcomes and general news about executives' and decision-makers' successes, missteps and mistakes, exposing them to scrutiny and critical examination.

In some cases, public scrutiny can extend beyond an individual's actions to include personal or family-related matters that are not directly related to their role but that are nonetheless exacerbated due to their role. Leaders are also likely to experience heightened levels of scrutiny if they belong to a minority group.<sup>10</sup> For example, women and/or people of colour are more likely to be promoted during times of crisis when the risk of failure, and thus the appetite for public scrutiny, is highest.

Consultation highlighted public scrutiny as a significant issue, particularly for people who have increased accountability and public visibility. Executives and decision-makers also described how 'being the face of the organisation' was a unique feature of their role, noting the added pressure of being held accountable for the organisation's actions. There are implicit mental health costs associated with public scrutiny, such as work-related stress, burnout and, in some cases, secondary or vicarious trauma.

### Complex and compounding challenges experienced by executives and decision-makers

As well as the typical challenges described above, other complex and compounding challenges can negatively impact the mental health of executives and decision-makers. Other challenges include decision fatigue, moral injury, burnout and loneliness.<sup>11</sup> These challenges are not unique to executives and decision-makers, but how this group experiences them makes them complex. For example, the volume of decisions and the consequences of decisions are substantial. At the same time, executives and decision-makers are often isolated, unable to share decision-making, and may have few peers with whom they can discuss commercial-in-confidence decisions.

Given the compounding nature of these challenges, prolonged exposure can heighten the risk of psychological harm (such as depression, anxiety and exhaustion). However, the directionality and interaction between these role-related challenges and outcomes is complex, and other psychosocial determinants must be considered, such as an individual's personal experiences (childhood adversity, experiences of trauma or psychological distress), financial circumstances, physical health and/or social support and connection can influence their mental health (see [section 4.1](#))

### These challenges are bi-directional

The interaction between role-related challenges, like loneliness, and other forms of psychological harm is complex. For instance, a decision-maker with pre-existing mental health issues, such as depression or anxiety, may exhibit behaviours that result in loneliness.

Conversely, decision-makers in high-stress professions who experience professional isolation and intense public scrutiny are at particular risk of psychological harm.





### Decision fatigue and poor work design

Making decisions is a core function of executives and decision-makers. However, in resource-constrained environments, some executives and decision-makers are expected to produce more with less. They may not be supported, trained to make these decisions, know where to seek support and/or advice on decisions or how to cope with the consequences of these decisions.

Consultation highlighted being able to effectively manage time and priorities as a critical element for maintaining positive mental health. Poor role design and workplace resourcing can undermine executives' and decision-makers' ability to manage their time and priorities and may result in decision fatigue, extended working hours or burnout.<sup>15</sup> It may be difficult for an individual to identify this themselves, particularly if they are navigating internal and external pressure, complexity and scrutiny.

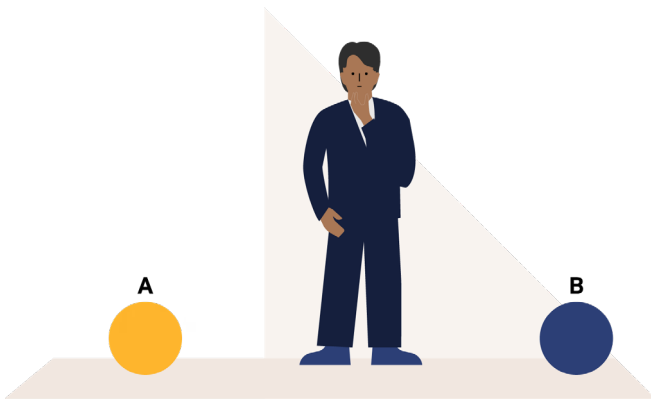
Too often, due to the influence of competing demands, significant time constraints and the needs of the business or team, wellbeing becomes a 'nice to have' rather than a 'must have'.

Chief Executive Officer, Private enterprise

### Burnout

Burnout is a form of psychological exhaustion that is closely linked with several of the role-related challenges that have been described, in particular high work demands, the responsibility to support others, public scrutiny, decision fatigue and loneliness. Burnout typically occurs when decision-makers do not have sufficient (perceived or actual) resources (social, emotional or organisational) to cope or function effectively under work-related stress. In some cases, burnout can occur when decision-makers are isolated from the organisation's resources. It may lead to a loss in connectedness, productivity and professional efficacy, and is typically characterised by exhaustion, cynicism, and a wide range of psychological and physiological harms.





### Moral injury

Executives and decision-makers identify moral injury as a unique challenge—often arising from a disconnect between beliefs and actions—which adversely affects wellbeing. When objectives, expectations and responsibilities are unclear, and the demands are incompatible with a person's values, they are more likely to experience moral injury within the workplace. Occasionally, an executive or decision-maker can be the 'meat in the sandwich', taking on accountability or blame to protect their board or their workers. If organisations do not take appropriate steps to minimise the likelihood of moral injury and/or support decision-makers who are dealing with moral injury, they are more likely to experience negative emotional, physical and work-related outcomes (that is, stress, exhaustion, absenteeism, impaired sleep and even poor mental health).

Taking care to be authentic while remaining mindful of power differences is a balancing act that can be exhausting. After a few missteps executive leaders and decision-makers can become self-conscious watching their words, which can have an impact on mental health, wellbeing and performance.

Chief Executive Officer, Public healthcare setting

### Loneliness

Consultation identified loneliness as a significant mental health challenge for executives and decision-makers. Many endorsed the phrase 'it's lonely at the top' and described how the role makes it difficult to connect with people and be part of a group. However, loneliness is not exclusive to work. Research suggests executives and decision-makers are often prone to relationship breakdowns with friends and family (that is, the spillover effects of poor work-life balance) and may experience loneliness outside of work.<sup>16</sup> Loneliness can erode confidence, self-efficacy and job performance, and is linked with burnout, anxiety and depression.



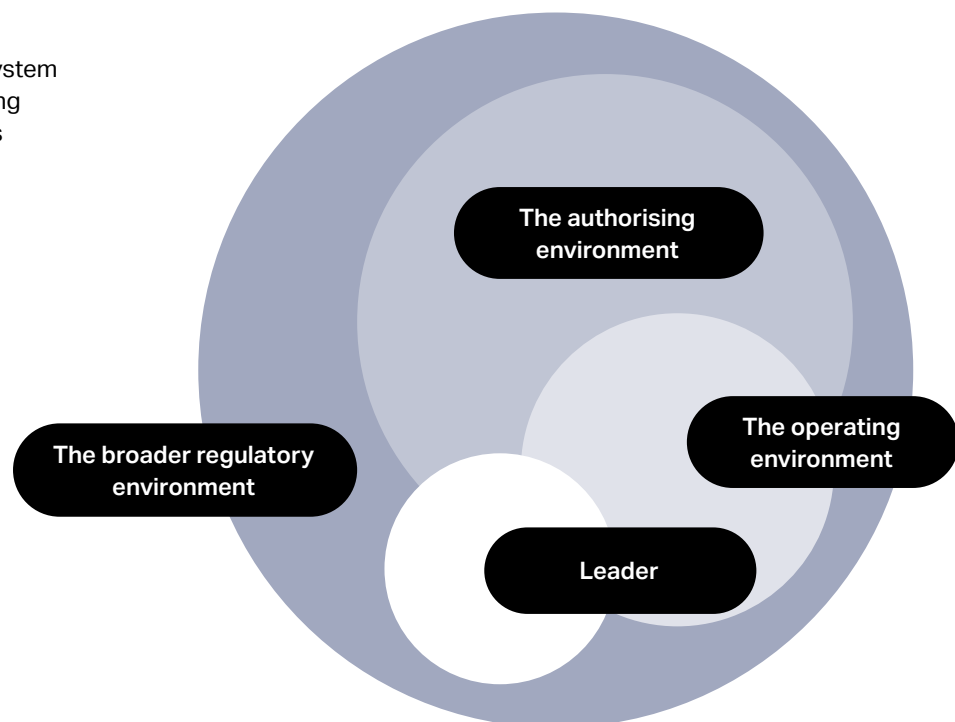
## 2.2 The workplace ecosystem

The mental health of executives and decision-makers is influenced by a range of actors within the workplace ecosystem:

- **The broader regulatory environment:** Organisations typically exist within a regulatory framework, so actors such as peak or industry bodies, government departments, regulatory bodies and associated commissions can influence how organisations operate and make decisions that impact decision-makers. Many of these actors may also contribute to the regulatory environments that determine and monitor how the organisation should and does behave or respond, including relating to legislative and health and safety responsibilities, and stigma.
- **The authorising environment:** Depending on the industry, the authorising environment could include boards, governing bodies and stakeholders. There may also be an additional layer of legal requirements, political or policy constraints or external regulatory or accreditation bodies.
- **The operating environment:** This is the environment in which executives or decision-makers lead the organisation by providing strategic direction and setting the tone for workplace culture.
- **The leader's individual actions, behaviours and interaction with their social environment.**

Each of these environments can influence the mental health of executives and decision-makers and can make their experience of work positive or negative (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The workplace ecosystem and the range of actors exerting influence on executive leaders



### 3.1 The workplace ecosystem for executives and decision-makers

When it comes to the mental health of executives and decision-makers, interventions typically focus on the actions individuals can take. While this guide explores how executives and decision-makers can protect their own mental health, it primarily considers the role of the workplace ecosystem in protecting, responding to and promoting the mental health of executives and decision-makers.

The workplace ecosystem will differ from individual to individual. Executives and decision-makers will have differing lines of accountability, levels of influence, autonomy and support. For instance, most executives in the private sector will have clear accountability to a board and identified stakeholders, whereas executives in the public sector will often steer decisions through an expert advisory committee and/or a hierarchy of delegations. Some may also have another layer of accountability with legal or compliance requirements, regulation, policy and even political system constraints. Organisations play a role in ensuring system-level supports are in place to protect, respond to and promote the mental health of executives and decision-makers, especially in times of heightened pressure, ambiguity and economic volatility

It is important to consider how the workplace ecosystem influences the mental health of executives and decision-makers, for example:

- What supports do system level actors (that is, peak bodies, boards, ministerial actors) provide?
- Does the board discuss and enable factors that protect, respond to and promote the unique needs of executives and decision-makers?
- How does the executive team contribute to an environment that supports executives and decision-makers, both individually and as a collective?

Organisations that equip executives and decision-makers with the skills, capabilities and capacity to operate through ambiguity and complexity protect against excessive stress. Many executives and decision-makers indicate that being able to set boundaries, build capable teams and effectively disconnect from work helps them deal with stress and protect their mental health.

Evidence shows that both cultural and structural initiatives are essential to safeguard the wellbeing of decision-makers and their workers, including balancing job demands, creating interdependent leadership teams, dealing with conflict as it arises and introducing policies and practices that support flexible work and good job design.

Engagement between executives and the authorising environment is important to support organisational strategies, decision-making and risk management and to safeguard the mental health of executives. This effective engagement relies on establishing a psychologically safe environment founded on integrity, respect, trust and openness.

**A key to success is being able to unplug and to rely on those around you. Executives and decision-makers need to be supported to create boundaries around workload. If not implemented well, there will be large personal consequences in the long term.**

Academic researcher, Leadership expert

## 3.2 Considerations for the regulatory environment

Executives and decision-makers typically operate within a complex workplace ecosystem involving a range of regulatory actors, including advisory groups, shareholder associations, business owners, peak or industry bodies, government departments, regulators and associated commissions. Supporting executives and decision-makers in this multifaceted system is an integral part of the role of peak and governing bodies.

This support may constitute a variety of initiatives, including promoting mental health of executives and decision-makers, advocating for system-wide monitoring and improvement of mental health, or providing or facilitating industry-level approaches to mentally healthy workplaces.

Industry and peak bodies could consider the following issues:

- How effectively is the industry body shaping the conversation about the demands and associated support that organisations need to provide to industry CEOs, executives and decision-makers?
- How vocal are professional associations about the mental health challenges executives and decision-makers face and are they engaging actively in the mental health support system for their profession's executives and decision-makers?
- What supports are in place to elevate the conversation to ensure executives and decision-makers can sustain their performance and mental health through challenging times?
- What processes are in place to evaluate the supports available for executives and decision-makers and how they are delivered in practice?
- How have peak bodies and associations worked to reduce the stigma of admitting to experiences of burnout and fatigue among executives and decision-makers?
- What role could peak bodies and associations play in normalising conversations about moral injury or social isolation?
- What role do networks play in creating safe places for executives and decision-makers to talk about their experiences?
- How common are these types of network opportunities for executives and decision-makers? How do individuals gain access to such networks?

## 3.3 Strategies to protect, respond to and promote the mental health of executives and decision-makers within the regulatory environment

### 3.3.1 Refer to trusted resources

#### Promote and refer executives and decision-makers to industry-specific mental health resources

Ensuring executives and decision-makers can easily access resources that promote and encourage workplace wellbeing and mental health will enhance their ability to provide organisational support. Linking them to industry-specific initiatives, peak or industry bodies and industry resources (See Mentally Healthy Workplaces platform) is a good place to start.

Peak or industry bodies could consider running mental health focused events, engaging a spokesperson who is respected in their industry and/or sector to talk to other executives or decision-makers, or showcasing testimonials and lived experience stories.



#### Take a moment to consider:

- Does your industry have a peak or industry body?
- Does the peak or industry body have an initiative or approach designed to support executives and decision-makers?
- What additional roles can the peak or industry body carry out to promote mental health?

### 3.3.2 Guide and support the workplace ecosystem

#### Provide guidance and support to organisations within the workplace ecosystem

Peak or industry bodies can guide organisations about best practice standards and guidelines, as well as innovative strategies and initiatives that support optimal functioning of decision-makers and workers in their industry. This might include guidance on flexible working arrangements, collective leadership and ways of working, and standard role descriptions that can be adapted for specific organisations.

Several inspiring examples of industry-led initiatives are already driving transformational change in mentally healthy workplaces. When setting up an industry-led initiative, it is important to consider what needs the initiative addresses for decision-makers and their organisations, how it is different from what is already available and how it will operate.

See [NWI's series on industry-led initiatives for information about how other industries approach mental health challenges](#).



#### Take a moment to consider:

- What are some best practice standards and guidelines that can be shared more broadly?
- Does the peak or industry body have examples of strategies and initiatives that work within the industry?
- Are there examples of standard role descriptions that can be shared?

### 3.4 Considerations for the authorising environment

Boards can play a significant role in supporting a decision-maker's mental health by providing the right level of support at the right time.

Many demands are beyond an executive's or decision-maker's control. Establishing appropriate supports, endorsed by the board, is essential to ensure a collective and comprehensive response to mental health.

For a board or governing body to fulfil its governance role—that is, managing risk and ensuring the sustainability and success of the organisation—it must prioritise the mental health of the organisation's executives and decision-makers. While boards play a role in setting expectations for executives and decision-makers to discharge the critical oversight responsibilities on behalf of the shareholders and stakeholders, they also play a critical role in providing moral support and a 'safe harbour' for executives and decision-makers to share concerns and seek guidance.

**Being 'in the tent' with executives and decision-makers while maintaining board independence is a balancing act worthy of regular discussion and focus among board members and in board meetings.**

Partner, Consulting firm

Boards play a role in promoting, responding to and protecting the mental health of executives and decision-makers. Considerations include:

- When the board appoints a new chair, CEO or leader, what role-related expectations are they setting (that is, performance and conduct expectations)? How do they support executives and decision-makers in terms of clarifying expectations and role, managing demands, freeing up identified constraints and promoting mental health?
- How do boards balance organisational governance and executive accountabilities with promoting, responding to and protecting the mental health of executives and decision-makers?
- Is the board confident the executive team's values or strategic objectives align with the organisation's? Has the board considered how to buffer and protect executives and decision-makers from moral injury? What processes are in place to build consensus when misalignment occurs?
- Does the executive or decision-maker have adequate personal support? Do they maintain professional and personal links with others?
- Is the board front and centre in supporting executives and decision-makers in times of challenging public scrutiny or responses to unexpected crises or ethically difficult decisions?
- Does the board monitor the wellbeing of executives and decision makers? Does the board know how an individual is coping? Has their behaviour or performance changed?

If an individual discloses concerns that are consistent with the behavioural changes outlined above, it is important to take appropriate steps to connect them with mental health supports. (See [section 4.2.3](#) for information on detecting signs of burnout and see [section 4.2.5](#) for information on mental health supports.)

## 3.5 Strategies to protect, respond to and promote the mental health of executives and decision-makers within the authorising environment

### 3.5.1 Design executive teams

#### Create an authorising environment that provides appropriate governance

While designing the executive team is not strictly the responsibility of an authorising environment, it must ensure frameworks (governance, structural and financial), risk management strategies and policies and procedures allow for the executive team to function optimally.



#### Take a moment to consider:

- Do delegations, decision-making processes and governance keep the executive team accountable?
- Is the mechanism between the authorising and operational environment appropriately designed and used to support executive and decision-maker mental health?
- Do the frameworks, policies and procedures make the executive team impactful and



### 3.5.2 Plan for succession of executive roles

#### Prepare individuals for new leadership roles

Succession planning allows individuals taking on executive and decision-making roles to be aware of the challenges associated with those roles. These challenges can include mental health issues such as moral injury or public scrutiny.

Introducing realistic job previews can help individuals prepare and assess whether an executive or decision-making position is right for them personally or professionally. Boards can also support executives in co-designing a role that suits both of their needs (such as including additional supports as part of the remuneration package or flexible work and leave policies).



#### Take a moment to consider:

- What supports are in place to prepare individuals for executive and decision-making roles?
- Do these supports specifically address mental health risks and needs?

### 3.5.3

### Promote positive board culture

#### Facilitate meaningful connection between the executive team and the board

Successful and well-functioning boards are driven by effective social systems, where board members and executives respect and trust one another, can share difficult information with one another, and can challenge one another's beliefs and assumptions.<sup>17</sup>

Boards can encourage positive board culture through ongoing team building and coaching exercises, routine training and group discussions. Annual board assessments can also help boards to examine the health of relationships with executives and decision-makers. Boards that foster quality and meaningful relationships with executives and decision-makers can better support their leaders' mental health needs and achieve mutual goals.



#### Take a moment to consider:

- How does the board promote and facilitate positive board culture and relationship dynamics between its members and its leaders?

### 3.5.4 Navigate moral injury

#### Equip executives and decision-makers to navigate moral injury

Organisations can introduce measures to support executives and decision-makers and ease the likelihood of moral injury. Clear and consistent communication from an authorising environment that takes responsibility to support individuals will foster trust across the organisation, which is an essential component of alleviating moral injury.

Further, the authorising environment should also appropriately resource any organisational priorities to minimise the individual's likelihood of compromising their own morals and values for the organisation. In scenarios where ethically difficult decisions must be made, such as allocating limited resources or laying off staff, evidence-based policies and guidelines must be in place to help executives and decision-makers make effective and fair decisions.

Beyond this, executives and decision-makers should feel empowered to make decisions and act in line with their values.



#### Take a moment to consider:

- Do the objectives, expectations and responsibilities from the authorising environment align with those for the broader organisation? Does everyone abide by them? Are organisational priorities properly resourced?
- Is a culture of trust established? Are the values and required obligations effectively communicated?

### 3.5.5 Navigate public scrutiny

#### Equip executive leaders to navigate public scrutiny

Organisations can introduce measures to support executives and decision-makers to navigate public scrutiny and buffer them from the potential negative impact to their mental health.

A sense of competency and self-efficacy is a personal resource that can buffer against the stressors of public scrutiny. Boards play a role in developing an executive's or decision-maker's competence and confidence in public relations, media literacy (that is, media training) and crisis management (that is, education about crisis management and developing crisis management plans).

Ensuring executives and decision-makers have practical supports may also be important, depending on the context. Examples include having access to speech writers and communication professionals who can help monitor and respond on an individual's behalf or having policies and practices to escalate public scrutiny to relevant authorities. Rather than facing public scrutiny alone, boards can help executives and decision-makers create and access peer support networks where group members pool their collective expertise and intelligence to share ideas and solutions about dealing with public scrutiny.

Additional strategies to support executives and decision-makers include the following:

- Outline potential challenges associated with public scrutiny in role descriptions and socialise them early through onboarding and induction.
- Give executives and decision-makers the knowledge and language they need to share concerns and challenges with their board, governing body or any other stakeholders in their authorising environment. An example is including mental health as a standing agenda item for board meetings or other informal discussions, with associated goals and reported progress metrics. Another example is integrating mental health when organisations need to respond to an unprecedented event.
- Strengthen the capacity of executives and decision-makers to deal with public scrutiny by creating a collective and distributed leadership culture and evenly distributing responsibilities across the executive team. For instance, boards, executive teams and decision-makers work together to develop a crisis management plan that considers the role of executives and decision-makers and their mental health needs.

- Help executives and decision-makers remain alert to local and national trends and issues and try to understand the environment in which they lead. This will strengthen their responsiveness to the needs and values of their workforce, their board and their external stakeholders, and help them to dispel public misunderstandings.

These opportunities could include:

- corporate memberships to relevant industry/peak bodies
- subscription to industry/peak body communications, including updates to policies and reform agendas
- someone to regularly speak with—a mentor or coach—who can help them maintain or regain perspective and make more informed decisions.



#### Take a moment to consider:

- Is the scrutiny a direct result of activities aligned with the organisation's strategic objectives?
- To what extent do these align (or misalign) with the executive's or decision-maker's personal values?
- Does the individual feel conflicted? If so, how are they supported to work through the conflict? To what extent does your organisation regularly 'pulse check' the mood of a wide range of stakeholders (not just customers and including workers) to test whether the organisation's promise aligns with stakeholder expectations?
- Do decision-makers lead these conversations and engage in discussions to maintain alignment and avoid breakdowns in trust?

### 3.5.6 Support the executive team

#### Support the executive team to take actions that benefit individual and organisational mental health

A board can take several actions to protect the mental health of executives and decision-makers. Successfully implementing these actions requires support from the authorising environment. This starts with boards understanding the specific support needs of executives and decision-makers, tailoring support to those needs, and endorsing ongoing investment in those supports.

Greater and more specific support further enables a mentally healthy workplace culture. Some individuals may benefit from executive courses, while others might benefit from a coach or from being part of a membership group (for example, a CEO circle).



#### Take a moment to consider:

- Are mental health support matters standing agenda items?
- Is the board expanding existing initiatives and support systems (for example, benefits, wellness programs, diversity initiatives) to support executives and decision-makers?

### 3.5.7 Promote external connection

#### Facilitate meaningful peer support for executives and decision-makers

The nature of a leadership or decision-making role can make it difficult to connect to people. Research suggests many executives struggle to maintain interpersonal relationships, particularly with peers, which often leads to loneliness, social isolation and stress.<sup>18</sup>

Many executives describe realising that once they reach a leadership position, their peers no longer exist within the organisation. They are outside the organisation—for example, the CEO of another organisation.

The board plays a role in promoting connection between the board and the executive team, as well as more broadly with other senior leaders.



#### Take a moment to consider:

- How does the board promote and facilitate peer support and connection?
- Where do executives and decision-makers turn when under pressure?
- Are there peer support networks to access and other more formal forms of support and guidance?

## 3.6 Considerations within the operating environment

By championing a collective approach to mental health and workforce wellbeing, executive teams can protect their own and one another's mental health, as well as the psychological safety of the entire organisation.

As the organisation's most senior executives, executive teams are commonly responsible for defining the organisation's strategic direction, setting the tone for workplace culture, and empowering one another to achieve business and personal development goals.

Protecting, responding to and promoting mental health is included in the collective remit of executive teams, particularly given the increasing shift from individual ways of working to more collective ways of working. The nature of work has also evolved to include both flexible and hybrid ways of working, which executive teams should consider when developing and implementing mental health strategies.

Executive teams could consider the following to protect their own and one another's mental health:

- Does the executive team invest time and energy in shaping the opportunities for collaboration and peer support to respond to increasingly complex and cross-cutting organisational challenges?
- Does the executive team invest time in fostering quality and meaningful relationships at work (known to be a protective factor)?
- Are there high levels of trust across the executive team and are disagreements dealt with productively and openly?
- How can you create opportunities to have explicit wellbeing conversations and pursue follow-up actions?
- What are the most challenging demands on your executive team currently? How are you collectively navigating those and addressing any negative impacts on executive team members?
- What practical strategies and policies are in place to protect, respond to and promote the mental health of executives, decision-makers and workers?
- Are your frontline leaders equipped to ensure team members have appropriate resourcing, are supported to navigate constraints and have the emotional support to maintain their mental health?

### 3.6.1 Shape roles

#### Shape executives' and decision-makers' roles to protect mental health

Organisations need to design appropriate roles for workers, executives and decision-makers. Effective role design improves job satisfaction, which ultimately leads to better mental health. Organisations, in conjunction with peak and industry bodies, are well placed to provide best practice advice on current and anticipated working requirements within sectors.

Specifically, well-designed executive and decision-making roles should incorporate the following:

- **Variety:** Greater variety in a role can improve the interest and commitment, but balance is required because too much variety may be frustrating or cause conflict.
- **Responsibility:** Executives and decision-makers must feel responsible for their work. Individuals must clearly understand what their role entails so they can be held accountable for its success (or failure).
- **Autonomy:** Being able to regulate and control their work, within the scope of the role, is a key element of effective job design.

More recently, job crafting has come to the fore as a contemporary role design intervention that is linked with better performance, intrinsic motivation, work engagement and wellbeing. Job crafting occurs when an individual takes proactive steps to improve their work environment and better align their individual preferences to their professional responsibilities. There are 3 types of crafting: task crafting, relationship crafting and cognitive crafting.

While job crafting is the responsibility of the individual wanting to make the change, boards can support executives and decision-makers to meaningfully engage in job crafting. Examples include providing them adequate time to job craft, allowing them to change the scope of tasks they complete, or supporting them to engage in peer support networks.<sup>19</sup>

See [Safe Work Australia's \*Principles of Good Work Design\*](#).



#### Take a moment to consider:

- Does the role provide the executive or decision-maker with appropriate skill variety, autonomy and feedback?
- Does the role promote motivation, satisfaction and effectiveness?
- Are the social or psychological risks of the role identified and considered (for example, moral injury)?
- Does the executive or decision-maker have sufficient support and time to meaningfully engage in job crafting, if desired?

### 3.6.2 Design teams

#### Design executive teams to promote mental health

The size and composition of a team, or teams, can directly influence an executive's or decision-maker's mental health.

The ideal team size depends on the team's purpose, the amount of collaboration between the members and who the leader is. A team's size can greatly affect its effectiveness, productivity and wellbeing, and therefore its leader's mental health.

Beyond size, it is important to consider other components of team design, such as the team structure (that is, hierarchical, flat, matrix etc.), the way team members relate, engage and interact with each other, the level of interdependence of team members, role clarity and autonomy, complementary skills, investment in culture building and trust, and the freedom to select team members.



#### Take a moment to consider:

- Is the optimum team size for executives and decision-makers considered?
- Have teams been designed to ensure leaders remain impactful and effective?
- Do delegations, decision-making processes and governance mechanisms empower team members to be accountable?
- Increasingly, levels of collaboration are an important factor in team design. Is your executive team designed to navigate complexity as a collective?

### 3.6.3 Tailor induction to executive leadership roles

#### Conduct comprehensive and informative induction processes for executives and decision-makers

Induction processes should include briefs on some of the unique challenges executives and decision-makers face, such as public scrutiny and dealing with unprecedented events. Induction processes should also cover skills for dealing with mental health challenges and links to further resources and training courses.

Induction processes are also an opportunity for early socialisation with other leaders who can act as mentors. Socialisation can take place outside of a mentoring capacity and provide informal support and insights. This is particularly important for individuals who are new to the organisation or are taking up an executive or decision-making position for the first time.



#### Take a moment to consider:

- Are executives and decision-makers supported through their first few months within the organisation? How?
- Are individuals engaging in identifying and selecting these supports?
- Are supports tailored to individual needs?

## 3.7 Strategies to protect, respond to and promote the mental health of executives and decision-makers within the operating environment

### 3.7.1 Enable flexible working

#### **Prioritise processes that allow executives and decision-makers to create desired working arrangements**

Flexible working amends standard working arrangements to better accommodate commitments outside of work. It includes changing the hours, pattern or location of work. Flexibility is becoming increasingly important as workers, executives and decision-makers balance competing priorities in life and manage fatigue. Appropriate planning for flexible or hybrid working is important to improve worker performance and wellbeing.

Flexible working can also increase psychological safety. Organisations that allow workers to balance work around other commitments can improve quality of life for executives and decision-makers, which in turn helps create a psychologically healthy work environment.

Executives and decision-makers must be equipped to lead in these new and flexible ways of working and to balance their own priorities (both personally and professionally). Executive teams also need to set the tone by modelling flexible and balanced working behaviours.



#### **Take a moment to consider:**

- Does the organisation allow for flexible working hours, days and weeks? If so, are appropriate systems in place to distribute work across team members?
- Does everyone clearly understand flexible work arrangements and how to support executives and decision-makers to adopt and model these ways of working?
- Are hybrid or flexible work arrangements structured effectively and do they allow executives and decision-makers to set boundaries?

### 3.7.2 Engage resources

#### **Invest in mental health resources, supports and training**

Building knowledge, skills and capability surrounding mental health can have significant protective benefits for executives and decision-makers.

Executives and decision-makers need access to a range of resources to protect and sustain mental health. These resources may include mentoring, coaching, peer support or psychological support or therapy. Investing in and prioritising the correct support systems is critical to ensure organisations create mentally healthy workplaces for executives and decision-makers.

Executive teams should engage in reviewing, assessing and selecting resources, and consider the most effective and appropriate resource for their needs, recognising they may change over time and in response to emerging challenges.



#### **Take a moment to consider:**

- Does the executive team commit resources to evidence-based interventions, such as mentoring, executive coaches and mental health awareness training? Or is the individual required to cover this expense?
- Are resources, supports and training scalable, sustainable, financially viable and needs based?
- Are the resources accessible in modes and formats the executive or decision-maker prefers?

### 4.1 What you should consider as an executive or decision-maker

A significant challenge for most executives and decision-makers is balancing their time, attention, resources and support to better manage workplace stress.

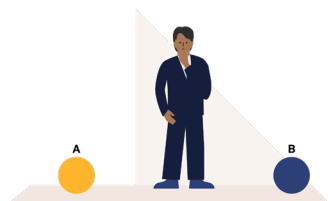
Work-related stress is closely linked with psychological strain, which can include depression, anxiety and exhaustion. This section explores some of the common outcomes associated with work-related stress, reflecting how psychological strain can manifest through decision fatigue, moral injury and burnout. It aims to equip you with tools to help alleviate these strains. It also looks at loneliness, which is surprisingly common in executive and decision-making roles.



Decision fatigue



Loneliness and isolation



Moral injury



Burnout

Wellbeing encompasses the broader holistic dimensions of a well-lived life. This includes your career and role as an executive or decision-maker, as well as the quality of your social connections, physical health, financial security and connection to land and community. It is important that you recognise your needs and values beyond the workplace and consider how these factors, and the balance between them, can influence your mental health.



#### Take a moment to consider:

##### Career

- Which aspects of your career are you most satisfied with (for example, job security, salary, recognition, work life balance etc.)?

##### Social connection

- Are you spending time with the people who mean the most to you?
- How satisfied are you with the quality of these relationships?

##### Financial security

- Are you able to live comfortably on your current salary (for example, monthly expenses, future savings, financial setbacks)?

##### Physical health

- Do you have the energy needed to 'get things done'?

##### Community

- Do you like where you live?
- Do you feel connected to your community?

## 4.2 Strategies to protect, respond to and promote your mental health

This section outlines strategies and actions you can take to protect against commonly cited (in both research and consultation) effects of work-related stress associated with being an executive or decision-maker: decision fatigue, moral injury, burnout and loneliness. Experiencing just one can negatively affect your mental health.

While you play a role in recognising these challenges and raising concerns to people who can help, you are not solely responsible for minimising and/or preventing your exposure to role-related risks. That is the joint responsibility of you and your organisation. These strategies are intended to complement the organisational strategies outlined in [section 3](#).

### 4.2.1 What to do if you experience decision fatigue

Decision fatigue often occurs when you are low on mental energy. You may be prone to decision fatigue due to the nature of your role and having to make many decisions each day. Often, you are expected to make decisions quickly, despite the complexity of the scenario, limited visibility and evidence or full knowledge of the increasing associated risks and interdependencies. All these factors increase your cognitive load.

Decision fatigue can result in reckless decisions—you may act impulsively instead of thinking through consequences. Decision fatigue may be a contributing factor to occupational burnout.

**Classic signs of decision fatigue that you may experience include:**

---

**Procrastination**

'I will do this later'

**Impulsivity**

'That will do...'

**Avoidance**

'I can't deal with this right now'

**Indecision**

'When in doubt, I just say no'

---



**Take a moment to consider:**

- Are you procrastinating more often than you usually would? Are you procrastinating because you are fearful of making the wrong choice?
- Are you making decisions 'off the cuff'? Are you surprising yourself (and others) with your decisions? Are you noticing a lack of self-control?
- If you need to decide, is it difficult for you to focus on the decision at hand? Are you easily distracted by other tasks?
- Are you avoiding decisions?
- Are you spending too long on a single, small decision?
- Are you constantly dissatisfied with your decisions?
- Do you feel overwhelmed, like you simply cannot handle one more decision?
- Are you sticking with the default option or saying 'no' instead of truly deciding because it is easier than choosing?



Decision-making is a function of your role and scope of responsibility. While strategies such as role design and team design will help to alleviate or prevent decision fatigue, the following strategies and solutions can also help to mitigate this fatigue:

- Prioritise your decisions and make the important ones early in the day. You should make your most important decisions when your energy is at its highest.
- Learn what decisions to hold onto and what decisions to delegate, or empower staff to make decisions by changing delegations (for example, permit the person working with or for you to approve decisions up to a certain amount). In doing so, consider who holds the risk under the current governance arrangements in your organisation and whether this needs to be re-evaluated.
- Create routines or pre-prepare your decisions, where possible. For example, many executives wear the same style of clothing every day because it eliminates the small decisions and saves mental energy for the big decisions.
- Remove distractions so you focus on the decisions at hand.
- Include moments of self-care throughout the day, such as scheduling a 10-minute break between big tasks.
- Create your own decision-making process that allows you to make decisions when you have to make them or when you feel refreshed. This may be setting time aside to list pros and cons or evaluating decisions against risk.
- Ask for advice: lean on your friends or colleagues for support or advice.

### 4.2.2 What to do if you experience moral injury

Moral injuries usually result from events or actions that do not align with your moral or ethical standards and are often associated with feelings of guilt, betrayal and shame. In some cases, moral injury may lead to mental health conditions, such as a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety.

The greater the moral conflict, the higher the likelihood you experience work-related stress, and therefore risk your mental health. When you have unclear objectives, expectations and responsibilities and demands that are incompatible with your values, you are more likely to experience negative psychological outcomes.

Workplace moral injury can be categorised into 3 types of outcomes:<sup>20</sup>

.....

#### Work outcomes

- Work-family conflict
  - Absenteeism and presenteeism
  - Resignation
  - Poor work/job engagement
- .....

#### Emotional outcomes

- Disrupted wellbeing
  - Emotional exhaustion
  - Ethical tension
  - Stress
  - Poor life satisfaction
- .....

#### Physical outcomes

- Poor physical health
  - Exacerbation of existing medical and physical health concerns
  - Impaired sleep quality
- .....

It may be difficult to assess whether you are suffering from moral injury because it can be difficult to describe our morals.



**Take a moment to consider:**

- Do you feel ashamed about what you have or have not done when doing your job?
- Are you troubled by acting in ways that violate your own values?
- Do you feel guilty about not helping someone who is struggling?
- Do you feel betrayed by colleagues?
- Are you troubled by witnessing others' immoral acts?
- Do you feel you violated your morals by not doing something that you felt you should have?
- Can you separate yourself from the decisions that you make on behalf of an organisation?

While sharing your experience may be uncomfortable, engaging in trusted peer support programs is a protective measure that may be useful. You can discuss moral and ethical dilemmas with trusted colleagues and share the mental health challenges you may be experiencing.

It is also important that your organisation has processes and mechanisms for you to safely express your concerns with your board or executive team, particularly if they relate to organisation-wide issues such as resource constraints, poor role design and poor succession planning. These measures help to create a sense of shared responsibility, enabling you to separate yourself from difficult organisational decisions and outcomes.

Engaging with independent supports outside your organisation (for example, counselling or mentors) may help you to properly reflect on your decision, rather than succumbing to feelings of guilt or shame. Reflection involves learning to acknowledge your moral injury, make sense of past decisions and consider options for future decisions. In this way, it can help you return to a healthier state of wellbeing.

Several self-care strategies can also help to alleviate the stress of moral injury. These include exercising regularly, prioritising sleep and rest, eating a well-balanced diet, engaging in mindfulness and meditation, and seeking early help (such as Employee Assistance Programs or professional support).

### 4.2.3 What to do if you experience burnout

**Burnout is typically caused by:**

.....

- **Poor role clarity**
- **Unmanageable workload**
- **Unclear communication or expectations**
- **Perceived lack of support**
- **Unreasonable time pressure**

.....

Burnout is a state of mental, physical and emotional exhaustion. If you are experiencing burnout, you may notice it is difficult to engage in activities you usually find meaningful. You may no longer care about the things that are important to you or you may experience an increasing sense of hopelessness.

Burnout occurs when an individual's on-the-job experiences misalign with their personal intentions, motivations and identity. For passionate, committed people, depleting cognitive and emotional resources can impede their ability to achieve personal and professional goals, and they become disillusioned with their role, job or career. It comes as the things that inspire passion and enthusiasm are stripped away, and tedious or unpleasant things crowd in, leading to anti-social or self-destructive behaviour at work and at home.

Burnout may lead to a loss in connectedness and productivity, and you may notice you are uncharacteristically exhausted, cynical or ineffective.<sup>21</sup>

As well as affecting your ability to lead effectively, you may begin to:

- delay completing ongoing tasks
- focus on token activities or tasks with a known outcome rather than strategically challenging/advancing activities
- dedicate less consideration to factors you do not believe are relevant to those you seek to please, even if they are linked to creativity, strategic benefit or individual wellbeing.

#### Emotional signs of burnout may look like:

- Low self-esteem
- Lack of self-confidence
- Feelings of anxiety or depression
- Helplessness
- Cynicism
- Sense of failure or self-doubt
- Decreased satisfaction
- Feeling detached or alone in the world
- Loss of motivation

#### Physical signs of burnout may look like:

- Headaches
- Muscle pains
- Frequent illness
- Changes in appetite/sleep
- Gastrointestinal issues
- Chronic fatigue

#### Behavioural signs of burnout include:

- Reduced performance in everyday tasks
- Withdrawal or isolation
- Procrastination
- Outbursts
- Using substances to cope



#### Take a moment to consider:

- Do you feel run down and drained of physical or emotional energy?
- Are you under an unpleasant level of pressure to succeed?
- Do you feel you have more work to do than you practically have the capacity to do?
- Do you feel you do not have time to do many of the things that you consider are important to doing a good quality job?
- Are you getting what you want out of your job?
- Are you achieving less than you feel you should?
- Are you easily irritated by small problems, or by your colleagues and team?
- Are you feeling misunderstood or unappreciated by colleagues?
- Do you feel organisational politics or bureaucracy hinder your ability to do

#### Strategies to prevent burnout:

- Take a break and review your approach to delegating tasks. Who can you hand off tasks to that will free up your time for more meaningful and energising activities? Some of the tasks you least enjoy may be opportunities for others to expand and learn.
- Schedule some time for yourself as you would for a meeting. This does not mean stopping what you are doing or working on something else; it means giving your body a rest and reprieve. Try scheduling a short walk or close your eyes and focus on breathing for 5 deep breaths.

Downtime replenishes the brain's stores of attention and motivation, encourages productivity and creativity, and is essential to both achieve our highest levels of performance and simply form stable memories in everyday life.<sup>22</sup>

- Identify activities that are urgent but not important and consider how you can optimise your time and energy, and minimise your effort, through task delegation and expectation setting.
- Introduce regular routines that you commit to and are understood by those working with and for you. This strategy can help you balance work and family and spend time with people who make you laugh and bring out your best.

As an executive or decision-maker, we know it is likely that your health habits will be the first things to suffer. It takes conscious effort to form and sustain good health habits: get 7–8 hours of sleep, exercise regularly, reduce processed food, include fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean dairy into your diet, and reduce alcohol and coffee consumption. These factors will boost your mood and decrease work-related stress.

#### Strategies for recovering from burnout:

- Use job crafting (see [section 3.6.1](#)) to change aspects of your job to make it more motivating. This could include seeking support from your board or executive team to alter the type or number of responsibilities, the way you interact and communicate with others at work and the way you see your role.
- Set boundaries between your work and non-work domains by resisting after hours access to emails and telephone calls, and actively detaching from work. If you must work after hours, set a time limit, and prioritise your tasks based on value, effort, urgency and importance. This process can prevent negative work-related thoughts from spilling over into your family or social life.
- Actively detach from work (that is, mentally disengage) by taking your allotted leave and engaging in non-work activities in your off-job time (that is, low effort, social and physical activities). This strategy will help you to recover from the working day and return to pre-stressor levels before the next working period starts.

If your experience of burnout is more extreme than that described above, but you don't know what to look for, some common warning signs to seek help include:<sup>24</sup>

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
- increased mental distance from your job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to your job
- reduced professional efficacy.

Given the correlation between burnout and depression is very high, burnout symptoms can also be similar to depression symptoms, including:<sup>25</sup>

- flat affect or low mood
- fatigue, low energy or irritability
- difficulty in meeting commitments (or behaviour that is otherwise out of character)
- significant changes in appearance, for example, drastic weight loss or gain
- feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness.

If you are experiencing some or several of these symptoms, consider seeking help.

See [section 4.3 'Mental health supports for individuals'](#) for information relating to mental health supports.

#### 4.2.4 What to do if you experience loneliness

Loneliness is a feeling so common among executive leaders that it has become an idiom: 'it's lonely at the top'.

Evidence suggests that up to half of executives and decision-makers feel lonely, with almost two-thirds (61%) reporting loneliness hinders their job performance.<sup>26</sup> The higher up you go, the more pervasive it can become.

Loneliness and solitude are not the same thing. While solitude can be valuable, loneliness is often characterised by feeling misunderstood or unaccepted. Loneliness and isolation erode confidence and self-efficacy. They can bring on anxiety and depression, degrade your judgment and performance, and ultimately lead to burnout.

Loneliness is associated with an increased risk of poor mental health, cancer, heart disease, dementia and even death.<sup>27</sup> Feeling lonely can make it difficult to maintain interpersonal relationships, including with your family, which often exacerbates feelings of social isolation and loneliness.

Executives and decision-makers experiencing social isolation and loneliness are distracted at best and debilitated at worst. Conversely, social connectedness is a predictor of overall wellbeing, and increases our resilience to stress and trauma. In fact, building high-quality connections at work is an important component of creating mentally healthy workplaces. Connection is less about face-to-face interactions and more about building strong interpersonal bonds through organisational mechanisms, such as setting clear expectations for interaction, increasing role transparency, allowing more social time at work, promoting relationship-building activities and encouraging empathy.<sup>28</sup>

There is a need for wider recognition of the impact loneliness and a lack of social connections have on our mental and physical health, particularly among executives and decision-makers.

Academic, Social psychologist

#### Personal story

Existential doubt can creep up for all of us. As a leader, it snowballed for me. I took a leadership role to help the organisation scale and improve the working lives of the team. I knew my business-focused work was making a difference but some days I wasn't sure about the positive impact I was having on the team.

There were times I worried about making mistakes or making a wrong decision. Sometimes at the end of a busy day full of meetings when I couldn't point to my accomplishments, I'd ask myself, "Does my work matter? Am I having a meaningful impact in the way I want?"

I didn't know who to talk to. The rest of the executive team was so busy running, we rarely had time for existential conversations like this. Wondering about my impact and having no one who could relate was a big part of my loneliness.

Over time, I met others who felt the same and realised that wondering about your impact was just part of leading an organisation. It dramatically decreased my feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Meaningful social connections are built in small ways that take intention and attention, but not necessarily a lot of time. Executives and decision-makers who create meaningful connections have things in common. They:

- ask how others are doing and tune in to what they say
- seek ideas and opinions from others, do not assume people will just speak up, and encourage others to speak up by being curious about their opinions and views
- deliberately interact with people they do not typically spend time with, and show interest in their perspectives, stories and circumstances.

Loneliness is a normal, temporary feeling; but if left unaddressed, it can become chronic and negatively impact our physical and mental health.



The following questions can help you determine whether you are receiving the quality social connections you need. Answering 'yes' may indicate you are experiencing loneliness.

#### Take a moment to consider:

- Do you feel your relationships are superficial?
- Do you feel people do not really understand you?
- Do you find people around you do not share your interests and ideas?
- Do you feel unable to reach out and communicate with those around you?
- Do you feel people are around you but not with you?
- Do you feel left out or isolated from others?
- Do you feel starved for company or companionship?
- Are you unhappy or feeling withdrawn?
- Do you find yourself waiting for people to call or write?

There are several ways to deal with loneliness, whether you experience these feelings temporarily or chronically. These strategies encourage meaningful social connections with others.

**Engage with peers who 'get it' or create/join a peer network**

Identify people you can share your experiences and challenges with. Good candidates might be other executives or decision-makers or a coach who can help you make sense of the social isolation that can come with your role. Finding colleagues who understand loneliness and social isolation 'at the top' may help you to feel less alone.

I belong to a 'club' of CEOs. We meet and share the same type of issues. It's good to have someone to share your ideas. I also have a group of friends with relatively similar positions. We've been meeting regularly for more than 10 years.

Chief Executive Officer, Public sector

**Prioritise a healthy lifestyle**

Individual behaviours that reduce stress include physical activity, improved sleep quality, healthy eating habits and limiting substance use. It can be helpful to involve others in these activities too. For example, you could walk with a trusted colleague, join a running group, or switch your drinks catch ups with a yoga class.

Several studies found mindfulness programs can improve self-reported stress, as well as deliver other wellbeing benefits, including enhanced resilience, improved physiological markers of equanimity and relaxation, increased psychological flexibility, increased positive affect and self-esteem, reduced anxiety, reduced negative effects and reduced mental fatigue.

Physical exercise and movement helps. It's a healthy way to release tensions and come back to work with renewed energy.

Executive leader, Private sector

**4.2.5 How to seek professional support or advice**

Being an executive or decision-maker often means offering support, rather than receiving it. Decision-makers typically have few places where they can get support to work through issues. Many seek guidance and advice from an expert consultant or a coach.

Coaching is a helping relationship. A coach typically employs a variety of behavioural techniques to support you to improve your professional performance and, consequently, to improve wellbeing and organisational outcomes.<sup>29</sup> Coaching can improve mental health through interventions focused on addressing prolonged stress, low resilience and poor satisfaction with life, one-on-one or in a group. Executives and decision-makers engaged in group coaching reported increased goal attainment, reduced stress and enhanced workplace wellbeing and resilience. Similarly, counselling interventions in the workplace can help reduce symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression.

Coaching does not typically provide mental health intervention. If you experience mental health concerns, you should seek professional mental health support.

**Coaching**

- Advises individuals on business matters
- Supports future-focused goal setting
- Fosters individual performance in a business context
- Allows for critical self-reflection

**Counselling or psychological therapy**

- Supports individuals to tackle difficult issues across a range of contexts, for example, work, home or relationships
- Focuses on individual behavioural change
- Explores subjective experience

### 4.3 Mental health supports for individuals

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
<b>Head to Health</b>	<a href="http://headtohealth.gov.au">headtohealth.gov.au</a>	Provided by the Department of Health to search free or low-cost digital supports for mental health
<b>Beyond Blue</b>	1300 22 4636 <a href="http://beyondblue.org.au">beyondblue.org.au</a>	24/7 support for mental health via phone, web chat and online forum
<b>Lifeline Australia</b>	13 11 14 <a href="http://lifeline.org.au">lifeline.org.au</a>	24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services
<b>Suicide Call Back Service</b>	1300 659 467 <a href="http://suicidecallbackservice.org.au">suicidecallbackservice.org.au</a>	24/7 telephone crisis support for people at risk of suicide, carers and bereaved, as well as online resources and information
<b>MensLine Australia</b>	1300 78 99 78 <a href="http://mensline.org.au/phone-and-online-counselling">mensline.org.au/phone-and-online-counselling</a>	24/7 telephone and online support, information and referral service for men
<b>Kids Helpline</b>	1800 55 1800 <a href="http://kidshelpline.com.au">kidshelpline.com.au</a>	24/7 telephone counselling for young people under 25 years of age
<b>headspace Australia</b>	1800 650 890 <a href="http://headspace.org.au">headspace.org.au</a>	Telephone and web chat for young people aged 12 to 25 years
<b>QLife</b>	1800 184 527 <a href="http://qlife.org.au">qlife.org.au</a>	Telephone and online chat support service for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and/or intersex (LGBTI) communities
<b>Relationships Australia</b>	1300 364 277 <a href="http://relationships.org.au">relationships.org.au</a>	Broad range of services for individuals, families and communities throughout the country

Organisation	Contact	Description
<b>Butterfly Foundation</b>	1800 334 673 <a href="http://butterfly.org.au">butterfly.org.au</a>	Support for people affected by eating disorders via telephone, web chat or email
<b>Carers Australia</b>	1800 422 737 <a href="http://carersaustralia.com.au">carersaustralia.com.au</a>	Carer gateway of practical advice and connection with local carer services
<b>SANE</b>	1800 187 263 <a href="http://sane.org">sane.org</a>	Resources, forums and support for people affected by complex mental health issues
<b>National Debt Helpline</b>	1800 007 007 <a href="http://ndh.org.au">ndh.org.au</a>	Financial counselling advice for financial hardship
<b>Counselling Online</b>	<a href="http://counsellingonline.org.au">counsellingonline.org.au</a>	24/7 support for anyone affected by alcohol and other drugs
<b>Gambling Help Online</b>	1800 858 858 <a href="http://gamblinghelponline.org.au">gamblinghelponline.org.au</a>	24/7 support for anyone affected by gambling
<b>Wellmob</b>	<a href="http://wellmob.org.au">wellmob.org.au</a>	Social, emotional and cultural wellbeing online resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
<b>National Mental Health Commission</b>	<a href="http://beta.mentallyhealthyworkplaces.gov.au">beta.mentallyhealthyworkplaces.gov.au</a>	Information and resources for mentally health workplaces
<b>Fair Work Ombudsman</b>	<a href="http://fairwork.gov.au">fairwork.gov.au</a>	Information about workplace rights and obligations
<b>Australian Human Rights Commission</b>	<a href="http://humanrights.gov.au">humanrights.gov.au</a>	An independent third party that investigates complaints about discrimination and human rights breaches
<b>Safe Work Australia</b>	<a href="http://safeworkaustralia.gov.au">safeworkaustralia.gov.au</a>	An Australian Government statutory agency established to improve work health and safety and workers' compensation arrangements across Australia
<b>Office of Australian Information Commissioner</b>	<a href="http://oaic.gov.au">oaic.gov.au</a>	The independent national regulator for privacy and freedom of information



### 5.1 Executives and decision-makers influence workplace cultures

Executives and decision-makers support mental health in the workplace by creating a shared vision and culture that supports and values people within the organisation.

Leadership and culture are interdependent, so it is difficult to determine the extent to which one influences the other.

**It is critical to have an executive leader and a culture that encourages practices that support mental health within the workplace.**

Executive Director, State government

Organisational culture determines the practices, beliefs and norms that impact an organisation’s day-to-day experience.<sup>6</sup> As well as shaping the worker experience, culture can also shape the beliefs and leadership approaches and habits of executives and decision-makers. Executives and decision-makers may exhibit certain leadership approaches and habits that influence psychological safety, benefiting themselves, as well as their workers. Psychologically safe working environments are spaces where people feel safe to take interpersonal risks, speak up, and share concerns, questions and ideas without being bullied, humiliated or punished.<sup>7</sup> Psychologically safe working environments help to support organisational and personal development, positive behaviour change, attitudes and relationships.

Importantly, mentally healthy workplaces can also provide a competitive advantage, via improved productivity, enhanced worker safety and the attraction and retention of a high performing workforce. Absence of these benefits can contribute to the complexity of the context and to the competing demands placed on executives and decision-makers. Further, executives and decision-makers who operate in an unhealthy working environment may adopt habits and practices that are detrimental to their own mental health, as well as that of others.

There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to ensuring a mentally healthy workplace. An organisation’s size, complexity and needs must be considered when using this guide and the Blueprint for Mentally Healthy Workplaces (the Blueprint) to create a mentally healthy workplace.

The Blueprint was developed by the National Workplace Initiative with the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance, which is comprised of representatives from government, unions, and mental health organisations. The Blueprint sets out 3 core pillars and principles—*Protect*, *Respond* and *Promote*—that underpin a national approach to mentally healthy workplaces.



**Protect**

Identify and manage related risks to mental health



**Respond**

Identify and respond to support people experiencing mental ill-health or distress



**Promote**

Recognise and enhance the positive aspects of work that contribute to good mental

While the pillars represent distinct types of actions, they intersect and are interdependent with one another. Failing to address one pillar will impact gains made in others.

# 6.0

## The executive's or decision-maker's role in promoting and protecting mental health at work

### 6.1 Recognise, consider and act

Executives and decision-makers need to recognise, consider and take conscious action to protect the mental health of others and themselves.

This section focuses on *your* role as an executive or decision-maker, and encourages a 3-step process (Recognise, Consider, Act) to address the factors that affect mental health in your organisation that are somewhat within your control.

#### Your role as an executive or decision-maker



#### Recognise

**Recognise your influence on and obligations for creating a mentally healthy working environment**

As a leader in your organisation, you have a legal obligation to create a psychologically safe workplace and mitigate psychosocial risks to mental health.

Active awareness, measurement and continued analysis of your operating environment can help you bring day-to-day challenges into perspective.

At the organisation level, recognising the forces that drive change, affect the organisation and individuals, and shape strategic decisions helps you decide where to invest time, effort and attention.



#### Consider

**Consider your actions, habits and approaches and how they affect workplace culture and wellbeing**

Consideration is a critical step between recognising a problem and arriving at a solution.

At the organisation level, executives and decision-makers who do this well understand complex problem solving requires strategic thought and nuanced consideration. You actively create opportunities to consider what matters most to you and your organisation, what is (and is not) in your control, who needs to be involved in the decision-making process and how the decisions could impact the mental health of you and others.



#### Act

**Act to lead effectively for wellbeing**

Reflecting on how your actions and decisions influence your wellbeing and the wellbeing of those around you is the first step to taking conscious action and changing habits that may improve yours and others' wellbeing.

As a role model your actions set the tone for the culture in your workplace.

Executives and decision-makers who consider their situation and circumstances better understand and recognise the factors that impact their wellbeing. They reflect on how they respond, making conscious choices about their reactions, responses and actions.

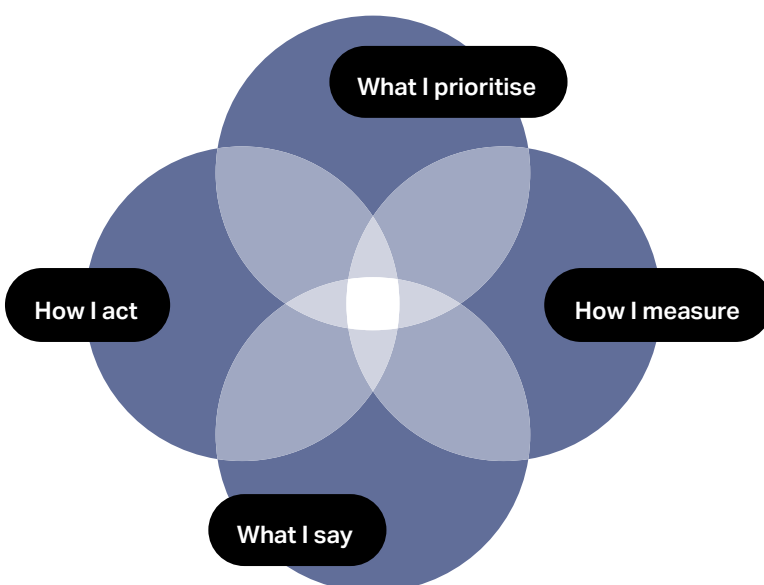
## 6.2 Recognise your influence

Executives and decision-makers can *recognise* their influence on organisational culture and promote positive mental health.

As an executive or decision-maker, you have probably noticed people watch what you say, how you react and even your body language with keen interest. These heightened levels of scrutiny bring with them both responsibility and pressure. Being conscious of your actions and your words and their impact on others, while still having authentic interactions, is a key capability for cultivating healthy workplaces.

The executive leadership shadow (see figure 2)<sup>9</sup> concept explores how leaders' words, actions, attitudes and behaviour can influence others. You can use the executive leadership shadow to understand and assess how your words, actions, priorities and standards can increase or decrease the psychological health of your working environment.

Figure 2: The executive leadership shadow



- **What I prioritise:** Allocate time and resources to mitigating psychosocial hazards and enhancing the positive aspects of work across all levels of your organisation. Make it a standing agenda item at all executive meetings and implement clear processes for how they are identified, managed and mitigated.
- **How I measure:** Implement processes that support the regular gathering of data relating to the 3 pillars of the Blueprint (see [Measuring for medium to large organisations](#), and [Measuring for small businesses and sole traders](#)).

Track organisational progress, consult on the findings, and recognise and reward actions and behaviours that contribute to positive wellbeing.

Armed with data, you can reflect on organisational progress and hold yourself and your team to account.

- **What I say:** Make sure your messaging is consistent with your individual and organisational objectives, values and actions. This means having meaningful conversations about mental health with your workforce, your board and your external stakeholders, and reinforcing messaging through repetition, regular reporting and progress updates. This also means actively advocating for psychological safety within your workplace.
- **How I act:** Role model a psychologically healthy workplace culture by using your influence to call out behaviours and structures that do not positively contribute to mental health—such as stigma and discrimination.

### 6.3 Consider your impact

Executives and decision-makers can *consider* their actions, habits and impact on culture to create a mentally healthy workplace.

Being in a position of influence, it is important to appreciate how you can use your influence to create mentally healthy workplaces that protect, respond to and promote mental health. At a minimum, this means reflecting on your own executive leadership shadow, asking for feedback from those around you, accepting areas for improvement and taking appropriate steps to enact change.

Beyond this, you also have a legal obligation to create a psychologically safe workplace and mitigate psychosocial risks to mental health. Recognising this as part of your role and exploring how you can learn, build and incorporate this core capability into your performance and your organisation's performance requires systems-level thinking.



The following are examples of questions that you may need to ask and answer within your environment.

**Take a moment to consider:**

- How do you identify and manage work-related risks to mental health?
- How confident are you to recognise and enhance the positive aspects of work that contribute to mental health?
- How do your responses to challenges and pressures impact on others around you?
- Do you adapt your approach to support individual and cultural differences and needs?
- How does organisational culture influence your experience of work? Does it influence your leadership style? Does it influence your wellbeing?
- What values and attitudes does your leadership approach convey? Are they congruent with a psychologically safe culture?
- How is your leadership approach and tone contributing to your desired organisational culture?
- Reflect on the conversations and connections you have with your colleagues and team members—do they include wellbeing?
- How do you identify and respond to support people experiencing mental ill-health or psychological distress?
- How effectively is your executive team role modelling positive mental health practices? How vocal are your leaders on these issues and in showing workers how to promote and protect mental health?
- Is your executive team investing time and effort in creating a mentally healthy workplace as a priority?

## 6.4 Act to lead for wellbeing

Invest in your executive team and build accountability for minimising psychosocial hazards, responding to and promoting mental health at all levels into performance agreements.

Investing in your executive team to create a collective response and sense of shared responsibility is an effective way to cultivate a psychologically healthy and safe culture. When leaders ensure team members are engaged, included and involved in determining how work will be conducted, feel valued for their contribution, and are respected, business outcomes and worker satisfaction will improve.

Creating such an environment begins with increasing your (and your executive team's) understanding and knowledge of mental health. Whether you participate in formal mental health training or model healthy behaviours and offer flexibility and inclusivity, you can create an organisational culture that supports good mental health. You can also help break down the stigma associated with mental health by demonstrating appropriate vulnerability and empathy.

### Recommended actions:



#### **Make visible, actioned and long-term commitments to a mentally healthy workplaces strategy**

Developing, implementing and endorsing a mentally healthy workplaces strategy or action plan nurtures a shared understanding of expectations and responsibilities across the organisation. It is important to set a realistic, achievable strategy with specific actionable goals, clear implementation measures, policies and procedures, and dedicated funding; then repeatedly action and improve it. Read our learning module on [Creating a strategy or action plan](#). This will also help [measure mental health](#) throughout the organisation.



#### **Consult and communicate extensively and often**

The workplace environment is constantly changing, so communicate openly, honestly and frequently with staff using multiple channels. Research shows the meaningful participation of the target audience (in this case workers) is essential to successfully implement an initiative or strategy. Setting up a working group or 'mental health champions' who have the skills, knowledge and influence to help lead the change and improvement is an important first step. The working group must be representative of your organisation's workers, and be empowered with the authority and support to seek, obtain and action confidential feedback in an equitable manner.



#### **Commit resources to measuring mental health**

For executives and decision-makers in smaller organisations, or those operating in a resource-constrained environment, procuring and investing in the right resources, teams, support measures and training can help. This means continually measuring the effectiveness of mental health interventions in your organisation (for example, including indicators in your measurement of worker satisfaction) and gathering feedback relating to mental health outcomes.



### 'Walk the talk'

People often adopt wellbeing practices through social contagion, where peers learn from leaders and one another. Research shows almost one-quarter of workers believe a lack of commitment at the top of the organisation is a barrier to improving workplace mental health. When leaders show their commitment to creating a mentally healthy workplace and act as positive role models for change, there is a positive flow-on effect to the workplace culture and workers. Research shows leaders play a central role in creating a 'climate of psychosocial safety'.

Improving and sustaining wellbeing also requires executives and decision-makers to stay connected with workers and be responsive if they raise issues. Where appropriate, you may also consider sharing certain personal experience to help break down negative attitudes and stigma towards mental ill-health.



### Set clear cultural standards and have a holistic definition for 'wellbeing'

Actively coach and role model participatory and inclusive behaviours, which includes fostering a culture where speaking up about problems and learning from mistakes or 'failures' is acceptable (psychological safety). This also requires communicating and following through on a zero-tolerance workplace culture to bullying, harassment and discrimination, and controlling poor organisational justice.

Wellbeing interventions are more effective—and realise greater improvement in wellbeing—when the workforce knows precisely what the organisation means by 'wellbeing'. The definition should extend beyond individualistic definitions of eating well and exercising to a definition that acknowledges how work is designed and managed and how trust and cohesion is built within work teams.



### Promote the positive aspects of work

Develop positive performance by acknowledging and rewarding good work and fostering a culture of constructive feedback. Research shows workplaces that reward and recognise their people tend to have lower turnover and great engagement among staff.

Build capability in team leaders and people managers to build team psychological capital. 'Psychological capital' at the team level is described as a shared belief in a team's conjoint capacity and probability for success (See [Building effective and resilient teams](#)).

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Attribution

This resource was created as part of the National Workplace Initiative. It was informed by a wide range of perspectives through research reviews, expert advice, consultation and feedback.

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# Appendices

## Appendix B: Glossary of terms

Terms	Description
<b>Authorising environment</b>	<p>An authorising environment refers to the actors, both within and outside an organisation, that can provide an executive or decision-maker with authority and resources to make decisions. Authorising environments will differ depending on the executive's or decision-maker's profession, lines of accountability, levels of influence, autonomy and support.</p> <p>Depending on the industry, the authorising environment could include boards, governing bodies and stakeholders. There may also be an additional layer of legal requirements, political or policy constraints or external regulatory or accreditation bodies.</p>
<b>Burnout</b>	<p>Burnout is a persistent, work-related state of psychological exhaustion that results from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.</p>
<b>Decision-fatigue</b>	<p>The impaired ability to make decisions and control behaviour as a consequence of repeated acts of decision-making</p>
<b>ERG</b>	<p>Expert Reference Group</p>
<b>Executive or decision-maker</b>	<p>An executive or decision-maker is a person in a decision-making role or someone who has significant responsibility to influence and guide organisations. The term includes leaders who work in teams and leaders who work autonomously in high-risk and/or high-consequence professions.</p>
<b>Mental health</b>	<p>A positive concept and more than just the absence of illness.</p> <p>In this resource, the term 'mental health' refers 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.</p>
<b>Mentally healthy workplace</b>	<p>This resource uses the term 'mentally healthy workplace' to broadly describe workplace experiences that protect, respond to and promote mental health.</p>
<b>Moral injury</b>	<p>Moral injuries arise as a consequence of committing acts which violate one's own moral conscience or deeply held moral values. In a leadership context, moral injuries may emerge in instances where leaders are forced to over-work workers due to understaffing and a lack of resources.</p>
<b>NWI</b>	<p>National Workplace Initiative</p>



# Appendices

## Appendix B: Glossary of terms

Terms	Description
<b>Operating environment</b>	Environment in which senior executives or executive teams lead the organisation by providing strategic direction and setting the tone for workplace culture
<b>Organisation</b>	The term 'organisation' is used to describe organisation level actors such as a board of directors or an executive committee responsible for establishing, overseeing and implementing the strategic direction of the organisation and providing support and guidance to executives and decision-making.
<b>Psychological safety</b>	A climate where people feel safe to take interpersonal risks, speak up, and share concerns, questions and ideas. A psychologically safe environment is free from bullying and humiliation. It fosters high levels of trust and mutual respect amongst individuals.
<b>PTSD</b>	Post-traumatic stress disorder
<b>Public scrutiny</b>	The examination and monitoring of organisations by broad segments of the population
<b>Regulatory environment</b>	The regulatory component of the workplace ecosystem that influences the way organisations operate and make decisions. Actors within the regulatory environment include peak or industry bodies, governing departments, regulators and associated commissions.
<b>Stigma</b>	The negative opinions, thoughts and emotions, such as anxiety and disgust, that individuals hold towards mental health-related issues
<b>the Alliance</b>	Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance
<b>the Blueprint</b>	Blueprint for Mentally Healthy Workplaces
<b>the Commission</b>	National Mental Health Commission
<b>Workplace ecosystem</b>	The term 'workplace ecosystem' situates the executive or decision-maker within a broader network of actors—both within and outside the organisation—responsible for providing support and guidance to leaders and the organisations they lead. This may include system level actors, such as peak or industry bodies (for example, Business Council of Australia), business owners, shareholders, government departments, commissions (for example, the National Mental Health Commission), as well as organisational level actors, such as a board of directors or an executive committee, and an individual executive or decision-maker.

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# Appendices

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