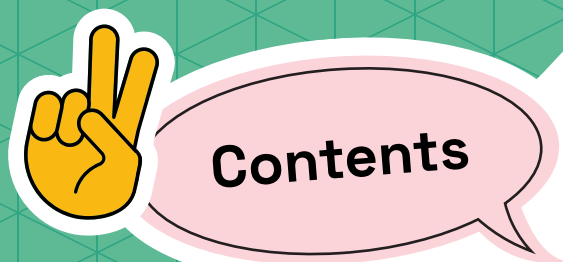


Mental health-related stigma in the workplace: A manager's resource kit





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Foreword

Employers and managers/supervisors play an important role in helping to reduce mental health-related stigma, which continues to be a key challenge facing many workplaces.

Comcare is the national authority for work health and safety and workers' compensation and carefully monitors data on workplace injury. Psychological injury is a major source of lost time and compensation costs within the Comcare scheme.

Workers who make a workers' compensation claim for a psychological injury often have a poorer recovery and return to work outcome than those who had sustained a physical injury or disease.

The National Return to Work Survey 2021 found that two in five injured workers in the Comcare jurisdiction¹ thought that they would be treated differently at work and a quarter felt that their supervisor thought they were faking or exaggerating. This suggests that stigma associated with having a psychological injury is a barrier to returning to work.

Fear and stigma around mental health issues can prevent workers from seeking the support they need from their employer or a trained professional.

This can hamper employers' ability to identify and respond quickly to the risks, which may lead to more severe health outcomes for workers.

To address mental health-related stigma, Comcare has developed a resource kit for managers and supervisors to increase knowledge and enhance skills that can support workers' mental health, encourage support and promote help-seeking behaviour early.

This resource kit contains information, practical guidance, training and resources from Comcare and leading mental health organisations.

Also included in this kit are our new **Mental Notes: Every day wellbeing at work** resources with posters, guidance and templates to raise awareness about mental health-related stigma in your workplace.

The Mental Notes materials were informed and tested with managers/supervisors, workers and people with lived experience of mental health issues.

Adopting some or all of the Mental Notes materials will signal to workers that your organisation takes their mental health wellbeing seriously and that your workplace is a safe place to disclose, and to seek support or professional help early.

Greg Vines
CEO, Comcare



For more information on how you can contribute to mentally healthy workplaces, visit [comcare.gov.au/mentalnotes](https://www.comcare.gov.au/mentalnotes)

¹ Comcare (2022). 2021 National Return to Work Survey. Retrieved from: <https://www.comcare.gov.au/about/forms-publications/documents/publications/research/NRTWS-factsheet.pdf>

Employers and managers/ supervisors play an important role in helping to reduce mental health-related stigma, which is a key challenge facing many workplaces.



78% of participants in 'Our Turn to Speak' reported some level of mental health related stigma or discrimination in relation to employment in the last 12-month period.

(SANE Australia, 2020)

Stigma explained

Mental health-related stigma consists of the negative stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination towards people experiencing mental health issues, such as anxiety or depression.²

Stigma in the workplace can:

- lead to discriminatory behaviour, including bullying and harassment
- affect people's attitudes and beliefs towards those struggling with their mental health (including themselves)
- prevent those struggling with their mental health from feeling safe to disclose and seek support from their employer and others around them.

An open and inclusive workplace, where workers feel safe and supported to seek help early, is better for everyone.

² Fox, A., Earnshaw, V., Taverna, E., & Vogt, D. Conceptualizing and Measuring Mental Illness Stigma: The Mental Illness Stigma Framework and Critical Review of Measures. *Stigma Health*. 2018 Nov; 3(4), pp. 348-376. doi: 10.1037/sah0000104. Retrieved from: [Conceptualizing and Measuring Mental Illness Stigma: The Mental Illness Stigma Framework and Critical Review of Measures - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

Why workplaces need to focus on stigma

Mental health-related stigma is a key challenge facing many workplaces.

Increased work participation

Workplaces that foster and support the psychological health and wellbeing of workers address stigma early and encourage help-seeking behaviour. These workplaces are likely to experience less absenteeism, presenteeism, employee turnover and psychological claims.

Evidence tells us that just over half (or 54 per cent) of people with a mental health condition are not seeking treatment.³ The longer a person delays treatment, the more likely they are to take leave, resulting in significant impacts not only for the worker, but for the team and the workplace.

Better health outcomes

Stigma may prevent a person experiencing mental health issues from seeking help in a timely manner. This can lead to poorer health outcomes.

Stigma may lead workers to hide or ignore risks to their mental health for fear of negative repercussions in the workplace, such as being treated differently or losing their job. This in turn can hamper employers' ability to identify and quickly respond to the risks, which may lead to more severe health outcomes for workers.



3 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2014). Australia's Health 2014. AIHW: Canberra.



How managers/supervisors can support worker mental health

Supportive and responsive managers and supervisors understand the needs of their workers and help to break down the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental health issues.

Middle managers and supervisors are responsible for managing, leading and supporting workers to understand and meet work health and safety (WHS) policies and procedures.

Middle managers or supervisors are generally expected to take reasonable care to ensure that psychological and physical health and safety is integrated into team planning and does not get downgraded based on competing priorities, budgetary constraints, or a lack of resources.

This may include promoting and encouraging open discussions on psychological and physical health and safety at all levels of the business to ensure that workers can achieve outcomes based on open communication, consultation, negotiation and agreement.

Most people with mild to moderate mental illness are able to stay at work but may require some adjustments. When you understand and support your workers' needs early, you help improve recovery time and reduce the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental health issues.

As a manager/supervisor, you play a vital role in supporting your workers' mental health and wellbeing. Enhance your capability as a manager/supervisor and keep up to date through the manager resource kit.

Understand behaviours

Managers/supervisors need to know what to look for, what to do and how to prioritise psychological safety. Better understanding of psychosocial hazards in the workplace and the conditions that may affect performance can improve your ability to manage.

Understanding mental health

The first step in creating a mentally healthy workplace is to better understand the mental health continuum and the potential risks to psychological health in your workplace.

These risks include but are not limited to poorly managed workplace change, remote work, bullying and fatigue.

Managing and supporting worker mental health at work is a critical and growing challenge for managers and supervisors. The way you interact with your workers at work can have a great effect on the mental health of your workers.

Links

- SANE Australia
[What are complex mental health issues?](#)
- Heads Up
[Mental health conditions](#)
- SANE Australia
[Mental health - fact vs myth](#)
- The Black Dog Institute
[Workplace mental health toolkit](#)

**More than two
in five Australians
had experienced a
diagnosed mental illness
at some point in their life.**

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022)

Your role as a manager/supervisor

Managers/supervisors are generally responsible for supervising and supporting worker health and safety.

The way you interact with your workers can affect their mental health. Given their role and influence, managers and supervisors are generally expected to also model safe work practices to workers and other managers.

Promoting mental health and wellbeing at work

Providing easy access to support early can improve worker productivity, engagement and their overall health.

Links



- Comcare
[Your mental health responsibilities at work](#)
- Comcare — [Digital Learning Introduction to psychological health and safety in the workplace](#)
- APSC
[Helping the helpers](#)
- SANE Australia
[How to help when you are a manager](#)
- Mind UK
[A manager's guide to mental health](#)
- Heads Up
[Workplace mental health awareness](#)



- Mind UK
[Wellness Action Plan for Managers](#)
- Mind UK
[Wellness Action Plan for workers](#)
- SANE Australia
[Promoting mental health and wellbeing at work](#)
- Heads Up
[Tips for managers to create a mentally healthy workplace](#)
- Heads Up
[Disclosing a mental health condition - the pros and cons](#)


Identify and address mental health issues

Under work health and safety laws, a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) has duties and obligations to provide physically and psychologically safe work.


PCBUs/employers also have obligations to consult with workers and their representatives about health and safety, identify risks to mental health, assess these risks, eliminate or minimise the risks, and review to ensure strategies are effective.

It is not your role as a manager/supervisor to diagnose a mental health condition or to be a counsellor. However, you can guide workers to supports if they are acting out of character or you are concerned about their mental health and wellbeing.

4 Comcare Scheme data (June, 2022).



10% of workers' compensation claims in the Comcare jurisdiction are for a psychological injury.⁴



Promoting and encouraging open discussions on psychological health and safety is a responsibility of managers and supervisors.

Identifying the warning signs of mental ill-health

Many people will experience poor mental health at least once in their lifetime and this may affect their work.

Spotting the signs of stress or poor mental health at an early stage means managers/supervisors can identify the risk before it impacts the worker's health and productivity.

Having a discussion

If you suspect a worker has poor mental health, or a worker discloses to you, it is crucial to start a conversation early.

These conversations can assist you, as the manager/supervisor, and the worker to identify and implement appropriate supports, adjustments or access to help.

If the discussion indicates that work is a contributing factor to poor mental health, seek further guidance from your human resources team.

Links

- Heads Up [Are they okay?](#)
- Heads Up [Mental health conditions](#)
- Beyond Blue [How to talk to someone you're worried about](#)
- Beyond Blue [Managing mental health risks at work](#)

- Heads Up [How to have a conversation](#)
- Heads Up [Starting a conversation](#)
- Heads Up [What would you do? How to approach an employee you are concerned about](#)

How to support a worker

Workers living with a mental health condition can often manage their own condition without it affecting their ability to do their job well.

However, there may be times when a worker requires support and reasonable adjustments at work to help them get well and stay well.

Providing ongoing support to help your worker stay at work

Good work is engaging, fair, respectful and balances job demands, autonomy and job security. There is strong evidence that good work is good for our mental and physical health and wellbeing. Approaches to creating safe and healthy work include: intervening early and knowing the warning signs, considering good work design in your planning, and supporting a workplace health and safety management system.

Workers don't have to be 100 per cent well to be at work and good work can help in recovery, injury and illness.

Links

- Comcare — Digital Learning [Early intervention: An overview for managers and supervisors](#)
- Heads Up [Managing someone with a mental health condition](#)
- Heads Up [How to help others stay at work](#)
- SANE Australia [How to help an employee with mental illness](#)
- HR magazine article [How to support staff who are experiencing a mental health problem](#)
- Heads Up [Providing ongoing support](#)
- Comcare [About Good Work Design](#)



Supporting your worker to return to work

If a member of your team is off work and struggling with their mental health, it is important that you are supportive and proactive.

Whether the struggle is work related or not, it is still a manager/supervisor's responsibility to support the mental health and wellbeing of their workers.



69% of those with a mental health related injury thought they would be treated differently at work.

(National Return To Work Survey 2021)

Links

- Comcare [Recovery and return to work resources](#)
- Comcare [Return to work process for employers](#)
- Comcare [Role of middle managers and supervisors](#)
- Deakin University [Supporting the return to work of workers with depression or anxiety](#)
- Beyond Blue — Perspectives [Returning to work following a mental health problem](#)
- Beyond Blue [Beyond Blue Return to Work Plan](#)

Supporting manager and supervisor mental health

Managing a team can be challenging so it is also very important to look after your own wellbeing.

A manager/supervisor who can lead by example and demonstrate a good work life balance will encourage their staff to do the same.

Where to get help?

- Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services
- Mental health first aid officer
- A general practitioner (GP) or mental health professional
- Call Triple 000/Emergency department
- Lifeline
- 1800RESPECT
- Beyond Blue
- Black Dog Institute
- NewAccess Workplaces

Links

- Heads Up [Taking care of yourself](#)
- Heads Up [Heads Up for Managers](#)
- SuperFriend [Wellbeing check-in](#)
- SuperFriend [Look after yourself as a leader](#)

Enquire with your employer to see if they have a manager/supervisor assistance program available or take the time to reflect on how you might use the above resources to support your own mental health.

How to identify psychosocial risks in the workplace

There are a number of ways to gauge, identify and understand psychosocial risks in the workplace.

The [People at Work psychosocial risk assessment tool](#) is validated, evidence-based, robust and free for all Australian businesses. It helps identify key psychosocial hazards in the workplace and provides guidance on practical ways to manage them.

The survey looks in detail at the different psychosocial hazards and factors in a workplace such as bullying, harassment or workload stressors.

It also measures health and business outcomes such as burnout, psychological distress, sprains and strains, and worker intentions.

The hazards measured by People at Work are based on decades of research highlighting the factors that influence worker psychological health and safety.

This free risk assessment tool is supported by Australian work health and safety regulators, and helps workplaces better identify and manage risks to psychological health.

The psychosocial hazards are based on guidance from Safe Work Australia.

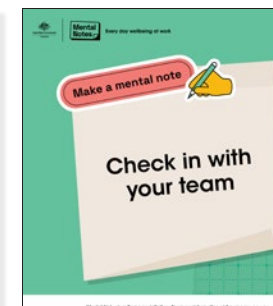
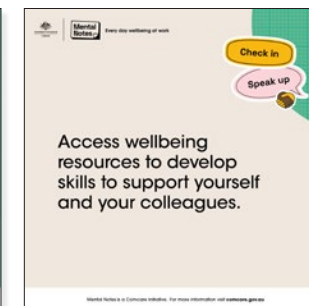
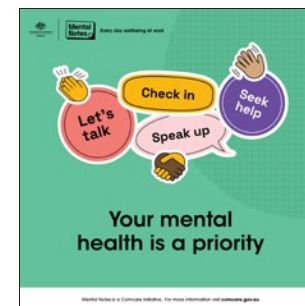
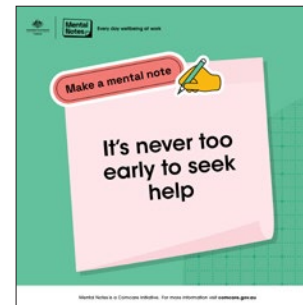
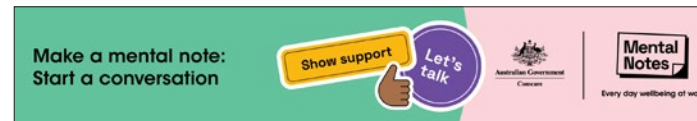
Go to peopleatwork.gov.au or contact mentalhealthprogram@comcare.gov.au.



Mental Notes: Every day wellbeing at work

Comcare has developed [Mental Notes: Every day wellbeing at work](#) digital assets and resources to assist employers and managers/supervisors to raise awareness of mental health-related stigma in the workplace, and to promote early help-seeking behaviours and available assistance.

- Practical resource 1: What is mental health-related stigma and how does it affect workers?
- Practical resource 2: Addressing stigmatising attitudes and behaviours in the workplace
- Practical resource 3: Supporting workers who experience mental health-related stigma
- Program guidance
- Conversation guide
- Poster
- Screensaver
- Social media files
- E-signature
- Presentation template



Mental health and wellbeing information and resources

Comcare mental health resources

Comcare offers a range of free education and paid training workshops on topics related to mental health and psychosocial wellbeing via our learning management system.

First go to [comcare.gov.au](https://www.comcare.gov.au) to create or access your [Comcare LMS account](#). To register for training, see [our full list and catalogue](#).

Training and Education

- Beyond Blue
[Managing mental health risks at work](#)
- Beyond Blue
[What would you do? Approaching an employee you're concerned about](#)
- Comcare
[Introduction to psychological health and safety in the workplace](#)
- Comcare
[Workshop: A guide to psychosocial hazard management](#)
- Comcare
[Workplace sexual harassment: An overview for employers and managers.](#)
- Comcare
[Determining liability - psychological condition and reasonable administrative actions](#)

Factsheets and information

- [Resource 1: What is mental health-related stigma and how does it affect workers?](#)
- [Resource 2: Addressing stigmatising attitudes and behaviours in the workplace](#)
- [Resource 3: Supporting workers who experience mental health-related stigma](#)
- [Mental Notes conversation guide](#)
- [Workplace bullying fact sheets](#)
- [People at Work fact sheet](#)
- [Workplace sexual harassment resources](#)
- [Office Safety tool](#)
- [Work Demands: Practical guidance for Managers and Supervisors](#)
- [Work demands: Psychosocial hazards](#)

Webinars and transcripts

- [Addressing mental health stigma in the workplace](#)
- [Managing and preventing burnout in the workplace](#)
- [What do you know about Diversity and Inclusion?](#)

Latest research and news

- [Register to receive Comcare's Workplace Research Monthly](#)
- [Mental Health Community of Practice subscription](#)
- [Subscribe to Comcare eNews](#)

Information and resources from mental health organisations

Websites

- [Mental Health Commission](#)
- [Beyond Blue](#)
- [Safe Work Australia](#)
- [Australian Public Service Commission](#)
- [SANE Australia](#)
- [Black Dog Institute](#)
- [1800RESPECT](#)

Training

- Black Dog Institute
[Mental Health is Everybody's Business training](#)
- [Mental Health First Aid training](#)
- Heads Up
[Mental Health Toolbox talks](#)

Factsheets and information

- [Safe Work Australia's psychosocial hazards information](#)
- BeyondBlue
[Workplace wellness plan](#)
- Heads Up and Beyond Blue
[Seven Actions to create a mentally healthy workplace](#)
- Black Dog Institute
[Workplace Wellbeing factsheet](#)
- Queensland Mental Health Commission
[Reducing Mental Health Stigma in the Workplace factsheet](#)
- Everymind
[Language and Stigma](#)
- Heads Up and Beyond Blue
[What is a Healthy Workplace?](#)

Videos

- [Stigma](#)
- [What You're Thinking Isn't What They're Thinking](#)
- [Know When Anxiety is Talking](#)

Webinar

- Heads Up and Beyond Blue
[Better Mental Health at Work - Why it Matters?](#)



Every day wellbeing at work

Mental Notes is a Comcare initiative. For more information visit [comcare.gov.au](https://www.comcare.gov.au)