



Australian Government

Comcare

# COMCARE NEWACCESS TRIAL FINDINGS SUMMARY

## CONTEXT

Mental health is a growing concern in Australia with considerable repercussions on individuals, organisations and the broader economy. Untreated mental illness is estimated to cost workplaces \$10.9 billion each year in lost productivity and compensation claims.<sup>1</sup> The most common type of disorder experienced by Australians is anxiety disorders (14.4 per cent), followed by affective disorders such as depression (6.2 per cent), and substance use disorders such as alcohol abuse (5.1 per cent).<sup>2</sup>

Individuals are exposed to various risk factors at work that can adversely impact their mental health and wellbeing. Job demands and pressures, lack of clarity on roles and support, poor workplace relationships, poor organisational change management and justice, poor environmental conditions, remote or isolated work and violent or traumatic events are some of the commonly reported risk factors.<sup>3</sup>

Workplaces present an opportune setting to prevent mental illness and support recovery and return to work. Therefore, employers have a key role to play in providing mentally healthy workplaces for all employees.

Innovative models of care that focus on prevention and early identification of mental illness have been designed and implemented nationally and internationally, with proven recovery and return to work outcomes. In this context, Comcare contracted Beyond Blue to trial a low intensity cognitive behaviour therapy program (LiCBT), NewAccess, in two Australian Public Service (APS) workforce settings for a cohort of 50 people over 6 months. NewAccess is an adaptation of the UK's Improving Access to Psychological Therapy (IAPT) program and was previously trialled in the community where it achieved a strong recovery rate of 67.5 per cent. Recovery rate describes the percentage of people who enter the program above the clinical cut off score and exited the program below the clinical cut off.

Comcare engaged PricewaterhouseCoopers Consulting (Australia) (PwC) to conduct an independent implementation evaluation of Comcare's NewAccess trial (Comcare trial). The objectives of the evaluation were to assess the appropriateness of the program, ease of implementation, uptake and return on investment.

---

1 PwC. (2014). Creating a mentally healthy workplace: return on investment analysis. Available at: [https://www.headsup.org.au/docs/default-source/resources/beyondblue\\_workplaceroi\\_finalreport\\_may-2014.pdf](https://www.headsup.org.au/docs/default-source/resources/beyondblue_workplaceroi_finalreport_may-2014.pdf). Last accessed 12th May 2019.

2 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2008). National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing 2007, Summary of Results (cat.no.4326.0).

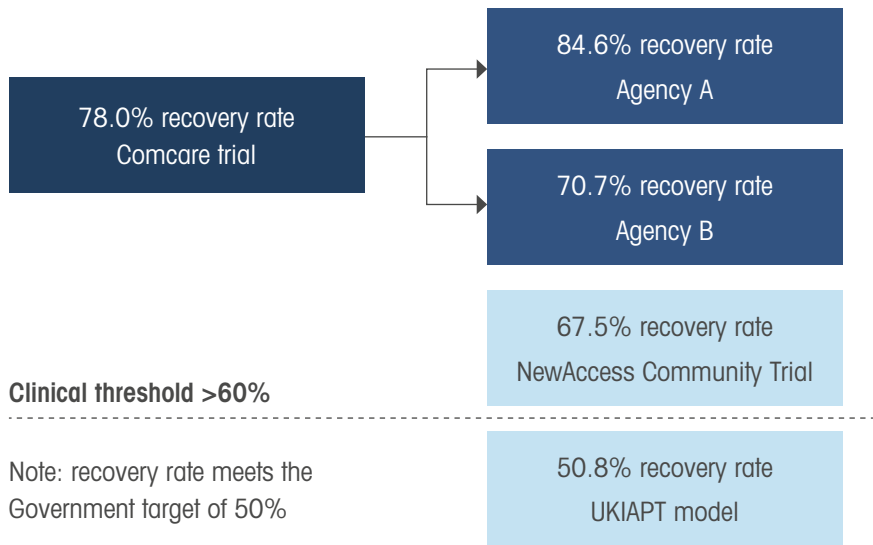
3 Safe Work Australia (2018). Mental Health – Mental health in the workplace. Available at: <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/topic/mental-health>. Last accessed 12th May 2019.

# KEY FINDINGS

The findings are based on quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data and information collected during the evaluation period. A summary of key findings is provided below.

## 1. NewAccess is an appropriate service for workplace settings and delivers comparable recovery rates to previous trials

The Comcare trial achieved a recovery rate of 78 per cent, above the clinical threshold of >60 per cent, demonstrating a higher recovery rate than the NewAccess community trial (67.5 per cent) and the UK’s IAPT model (50.8 per cent). This indicates that evidence-based psychological therapies can be delivered successfully by a non-clinical workforce to help people manage mild to moderate signs of anxiety and depression in Australian workforce settings.



While the cohorts selected for inclusion in the trial were predominantly female, men also accessed the program and achieved a higher recovery rate (81.7 per cent) compared to women (76.9 per cent).

## 2. NewAccess met the needs and expectations of employees using the service, particularly with maintaining confidentiality

The majority of post participant survey respondents were very satisfied (67 per cent) or satisfied (33 per cent) with the service and reported that NewAccess either exceeded (50 per cent) or met their expectations (44 per cent).

### Satisfaction with the service

Thinking about all your interactions with the NewAccess program, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with this service?



### Expectations of the program

To what extent did New Access meet your expectations?



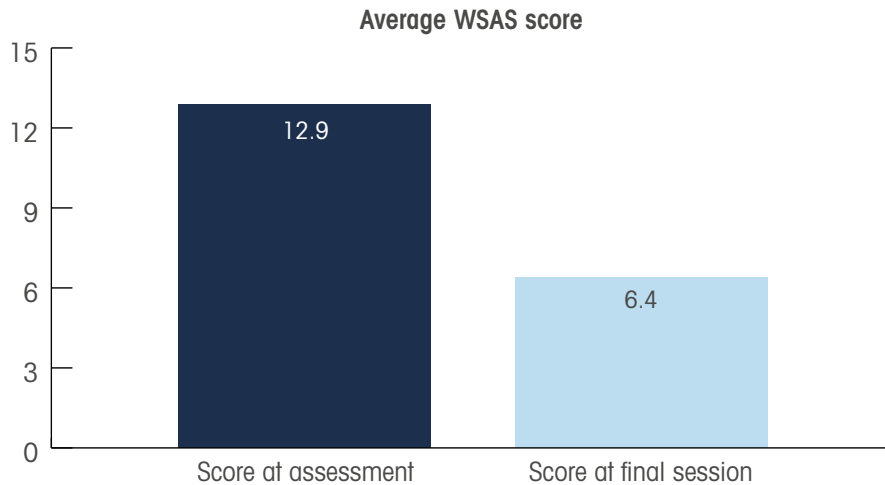
Survey respondents noted that the program helped them identify triggers for stress and anxiety and provided them with the appropriate skills to manage their symptoms.

Confidentiality was identified as a key factor in employees’ motivation for participating in the program.

### 3. NewAccess enhances self-reported job satisfaction and productivity

The majority of post participant survey respondents (66 per cent) rated their job satisfaction as very good or excellent after completing the program, compared to (39 per cent) before completing NewAccess.

Employees were asked to rate their problems using the Work and Social Adjustment Scale (WSAS scale). The Comcare trial participants were able to achieve a 6.5 reduction in their WSAS scores, between assessment and final session, indicating that the program helped participants reduce or manage their symptoms.



There was an improvement in self-reported productivity, with 84 per cent of survey respondents reporting their productivity as very good or excellent after NewAccess, compared to 61 per cent prior to NewAccess. There was no change in self-reported absenteeism.

### 4. Implementation of the program requires marketing support to manage demand

The design and dissemination of marketing and communications on NewAccess involved an iterative process. On-going communication with Beyond Blue and Comcare was seen as key to progressing the trial. Support from Beyond Blue was provided to tailor communications to reflect the diversity of the target audience and promote the value and purpose of the program.

Demand for the program is correlated with marketing and awareness. Therefore, marketing campaigns need to be sustained to encourage uptake.

### 5. NewAccess indicates economic viability

An analysis of indicative costs and potential opportunities for cost savings suggest that NewAccess could generate \$1.30 in productivity benefits from every dollar invested into the program indicating economic viability.

## CONCLUSION

This evaluation has shown there is a place for LiCBT in the workplace and its unique methodology can have a significant impact on mental health and productivity. The potential cost savings also provide Comcare with the business case to explore ongoing service provision and to develop a model of service that can be used by all interested employers.