



Australian Government

Comcare

Mental Health Community of Practice: **Vicarious Trauma in-person** workshop



Acknowledgement of Country



Speakers



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Research and Evaluation Lead



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Senior Research Officer

Institute for Safety, Compensation and Recovery Research

Housekeeping

- Please keep your phones on silent
- Questions will be addressed at check in points and towards the end of the session
- Presentation slides will be emailed following the event
- Morning tea break will be provided at 11:00am

Agenda Overview

- An introduction to vicarious trauma
- Small group activities to reflect on how vicarious trauma is understood in your workplace
- Case studies exploring barriers and facilitators
- Prevention approaches at organisational, team, and individual levels
- Policy example and analysis activity

Preventing vicarious trauma

Comcare Mental Health Community of Practice Workshops
August 2025



Carmen Schroder
Dr Sarah Oxford

Aim of this session

1

What is vicarious trauma

2

Barriers and enablers to prevention

3

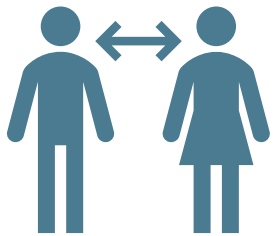
Approaches to prevention

Take a moment...

What is vicarious trauma?

What is vicarious trauma?

Vicarious trauma is a *predictable* and *human* response to exposure to *traumatic content*



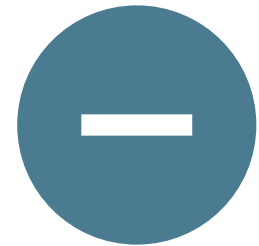
Engaging
with other
people's trauma



Builds
up over
time



PTSD
symptoms
plus



Negative
changes to
views

Emotional demand related hazards

Hazard

Indicators

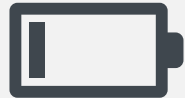
Trauma related



Secondary traumatic stress

Immediate distress
Intrusive thoughts, avoidance,
arousal

Exhaustion related



Compassion fatigue
Burnout

Cumulative
Exhaustion, detachment,
capacity

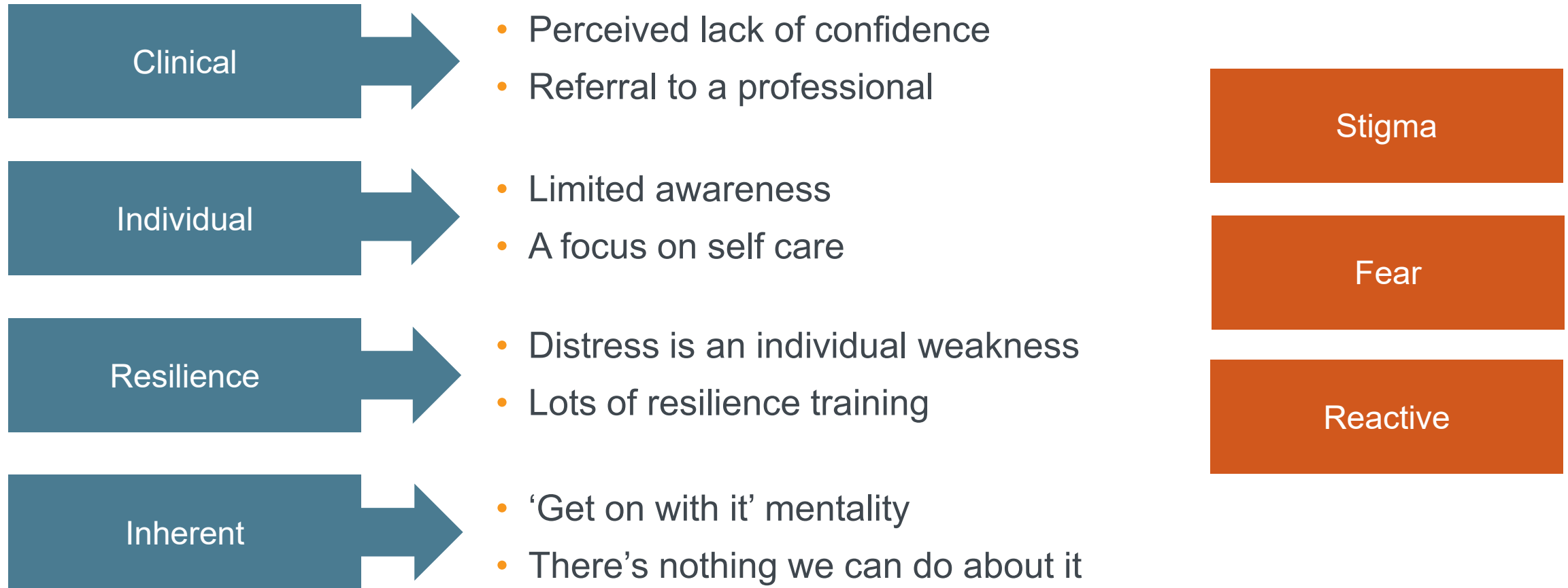
Values related



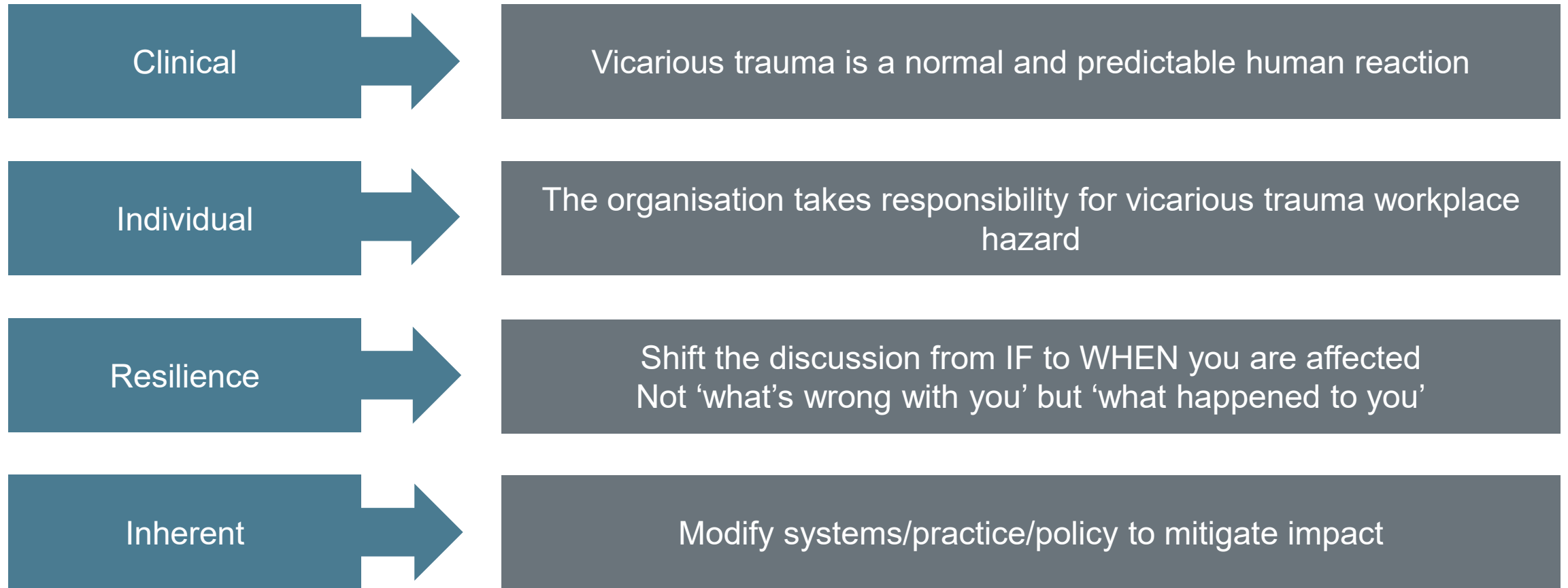
Moral injury

Betrayal vs transgressive
Guilt, shame, loss of faith/trust

How vicarious trauma is commonly framed?



The case for proactive prevention



What is vicarious trauma?

How vicarious trauma is framed and understood determines how it is prevented



A psychosocial hazard



Systemic and proactive prevention



Trauma and power



Trauma + overwhelm = injury

Group reflection

- How is vicarious trauma framed and understood in your workplace?
- How does this impact how vicarious trauma is approached and prevented?



Barriers and enablers to proactive prevention

Group reflection

- What enablers or barriers exist in your workplace?
- What are examples of good practice in your workplace?
- Are there any opportunities or levers?



Prevention planning and action

Levels of prevention



Organisation level



Understand the context

- ✓ Conduct risk audits: what, who, when, how
- ✓ Consider non-essential exposure
- ✓ Mixed methods

Reframe vicarious trauma

- ✓ Awareness and education
- ✓ Leadership led and modelled
- ✓ Label psychosocial hazards

Tailored prevention plan

- ✓ No one size fits all
- ✓ Leverage strengths
- ✓ *Consider a working group*

Policies and processes

- ✓ Recruitment and onboarding
- ✓ KPIs that reflect your policies/approach
- ✓ Monitor and evaluate

Team/service level



Training

- ✓ Tailored to the needs of the team/role
- ✓ Capacity building – staff should feel prepared to manage disclosures
- ✓ Ongoing and embedded

Support

- ✓ *Quality* supervision
- ✓ Peer support and collective care: mentoring, reflective practice, staff matching
- ✓ EAP vs wellbeing service

Job design

- ✓ Flag triggering content
- ✓ Create pathways to reduce exposure
- ✓ Role clarity and boundaries
- ✓ Physical environment

Manage other psychosocial hazards

- ✓ Workload and case load
- ✓ Recognition and reward

Individual level



Wellbeing plans

- ✓ Identify individual triggers
- ✓ Identify stress symptoms
- ✓ Identify preferred support, wellbeing and coping strategies

Control exposure

- ✓ No exposure in the afternoon
- ✓ Exposure when support is available
- ✓ Organise exposure free days

Wellbeing activities

- ✓ Provide a suite of wellbeing activities
- ✓ Consider family support

Group reflection

Drawing on the policy example on your table:

- What do you like about the policy?
- What would you change about the policy?
- Are there any strategies you would add?



Key messages for action

- Take a **tailored** approach
- **Perfection** vs **action**
- Look for examples of **best practice** in **your organisation**
- **Ask workers** what they want
- Monitor, **evaluate** and share

Thank you

For more information
contact

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Your Path to Better Mental Health

What is Before Blue?

An evidence-based program enabling you to build lifelong skills to improve your mental health.

Key Features:

- A multi-week program with the same coach
- Up to 8 coaching sessions
- Personalised and confidential
- Evidence-based techniques
- Interactive content for ongoing support

How Can It Help?

- Manage work and life stressors
- Build lasting resilience
- Improve productivity
- Enhance job satisfaction

Proven Results

72% experienced significant improvement

94% would recommend the program

45% improvement in productivity

Insights

82% Felt more productive at work

94% Were satisfied with the program

97% Were likely to recommend it to others

68% Showed a clinically significant improvement



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