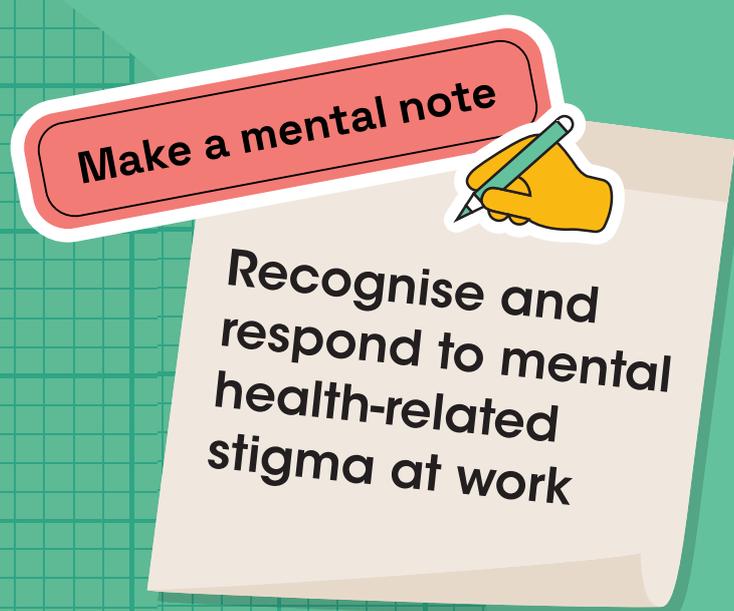


Addressing stigmatising attitudes and behaviours in the workplace

Mental Health-Related Stigma in the Workplace



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This resource provides information to managers and supervisors on steps they may take if stigmatising behaviour or attitudes occur in the workplace. For an introduction on what mental health stigma is and how it impacts workers, please see ['What is mental health-related stigma and how does it affect workers?'](#) in this series.



Steps to take when discriminatory behaviour occurs in the workplace, or is suspected of occurring

Managers and supervisors can receive reports of discriminatory behaviour through a range of avenues. This behaviour could be reported to you as the manager/supervisor either by the person experiencing the behaviour, or a witness/bystander, either verbally or in writing.

Depending on your role and influence, a manager or supervisor may be an 'officer' in your organisation's business or undertaking under the [Work Health and Safety Act 2011 \(WHS Act\)](#). Officers have a duty under the WHS Act to be proactive and continuously ensure that their business or undertaking complies with its WHS duties and obligations, including providing a healthy and safe workplace where the mental health and wellbeing of workers is supported.

Responding to reports of stigma and discriminatory behaviour

In the first instance you should:

- **Identify if the behaviour fits the definition of discrimination or bullying** – Follow relevant organisational policy and procedures.
- **Act promptly** – Reports of discriminatory behaviour should be addressed as soon as possible.
- **Treat all matters seriously** – All reports should be assessed seriously based on all available facts.
- **Maintain privacy and confidentiality** – Be sure to maintain confidentiality during the process for all parties involved. If you are uncertain, seek advice from your Human Resources (HR) or Privacy teams before acting.
- **Ensure that staff know their legal responsibilities** – Explain that all workers have an obligation under the [WHS Act](#) to ensure they do not adversely affect their co-workers' health and safety. Officers also have a further duty under the WHS Act to exercise due diligence to ensure the Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBU)/employer they work for complies with their WHS Act duties.
- **Educate workers on available support services and how to access these** – Be sure to provide the workers involved with contacts to internal and external services, such as HR and Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- **Manage interactions between the person experiencing stigma and the person allegedly displaying the stigmatising attitudes and/or discriminatory behaviour** – Identify alternative arrangements to reduce interaction between the two parties and monitor their interactions as much as possible. Be present in meetings between the two parties and encourage collegial behaviours and cooperation.
- **Consider making reasonable adjustments** – The workers involved may need changes to their working hours and locations, workloads or work environment to deal with the possible heightened distress associated with experiencing mental health-related stigma and discrimination or being alleged to have displayed stigmatising attitudes and discriminatory behaviours.
- **Communicate about the process and outcomes of any investigation into the accusations of inappropriate behaviour** – Explain to both parties what the process is, who will be involved and what is expected to happen. Communicate any outcomes throughout the process.
- **Keep records of all reports, meetings and conversations** – Document all conversations or interactions with any and all parties throughout the process.



Suggested next steps

- Set up a separate meeting with each party in a location that ensures privacy.
- Ask the worker alleged to have displayed the stigmatising attitudes and/or discriminatory behaviours if they would like a support person to accompany them to the meeting – it is important that all parties to the allegations are supported.
- The allegations should be put to the worker alleged to have displayed stigmatising attitudes and/or discriminatory behaviours, and they should be given a fair hearing.
- The best feedback is straightforward and simple. Be specific and factual about the alleged inappropriate behaviour and provide examples.
- Emphasise the need for change in behaviour, explore training and education options, and explain that failure to change behaviour may have consequences.
- Set goals and make agreements about the strategies to change behaviour and set a period of review. Once you reach agreement on approach, set due dates and record exchanged agreement.
- Follow your organisation's discrimination or bullying protocols if appropriate under the circumstances.
- Ensure to refer the individual onto support services such as the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). External organisations are also available including counselling services, legal services, or trade unions (if they are a union member).
- Provide suggestions to the worker alleged to have displayed stigmatising attitudes and/or discriminatory behaviours on where to seek further support. The box below provides an example of the type of advice you might consider providing to the worker.

Advice for workers suspected of displaying stigmatising attitudes and/or discriminatory behaviour

You should always take any feedback like this seriously. It is important to be open to feedback from others and prepared to change your attitude or behaviour if necessary. Attend any relevant training or education that your organisation provides to assist you in developing the appropriate behaviours required in the workplace and/or to increase your mental health literacy. Ask your manager/supervisor about any available resources.

All parties should be protected during the incident reporting and management process. Your employer should have workplace policies and procedures that demonstrate how they will maintain confidentiality, privacy and protect those involved from bullying, intimidation or retaliation.

If you are alleged to have displayed stigmatising attitudes or discriminatory behaviour towards a worker with experiences of mental health issues, you may wish to seek advice and support from a trusted person, Harassment Officer or your organisation's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). You can also engage an external organisation such as a counselling service, legal service, or trade union (if you are a member). Ask your employer or manager/supervisor about available services.

Please see '[Supporting workers who experience mental health-related stigma](#)' in this series for more information on how to support workers with mental health issues who experience stigma in the workplace.

What strategies can your organisation employ to reduce mental health-related stigma?

Creating a supportive and stigma-free environment is a fundamental step towards having a mentally healthy workplace and managers and supervisors play a key leadership role in its achievement. In addition to the broad approaches to promoting mentally healthy workplaces outlined in the resource on '[Supporting workers who experience mental health-related stigma](#)', organisations can engage in dedicated initiatives that aim to reduce mental health-related stigma and discrimination in the workplace.

Stigma reduction approaches can be grouped into three areas:

Educational approaches that challenge negative stereotypes with facts using a range of resources, including fact sheets, guidance documents, books, videos, and webinars.

Contact approaches in which people with lived experience of mental health issues engage with those without lived experience to increase interpersonal contact, empathy and understanding. Activities may include social and community events, sports, and the arts.

Protest approaches which highlight the injustices of stigma and request a change in behaviour and attitudes. These tend to be less effective than the other two in changing behaviour and attitudes. (Beyond Blue, 2015)





The Global Anti-Stigma Alliance represents 25 organisations across 14 countries who are actively working to eliminate stigma and discrimination associated with mental health issues.

The Alliance has identified seven approaches to reducing mental health-related stigma, which your organisation can also use depending on need and resources. (Beyond Blue, 2015)

Lived experience leadership

People with lived experience of mental health issues are the drivers of social change. Appropriate training and peer support needs to be offered to people with lived experience so that those who wish to and are comfortable to do so can lead in sharing their experiences and starting conversations about mental health. This may encourage others to do the same and contribute to creating a safe and supportive environment through open communication and leading by example.

Increase awareness

Organisational communications and social marketing need to focus on promoting behaviour and attitude changes that are more supportive and inclusive of people with experiences of mental health issues. Messages need to be creative and memorable to promote behaviour change, targeting audiences of workers with and without experiences of mental health issues.

Engagement

Encourage meaningful engagement where people are supported in speaking about their lived experiences of mental health issues with those who may not have such experiences. This will aid in empowering those with lived experience while also increasing the knowledge and understanding of those without lived experience.

Cultural responsiveness and relevance

Ensure communications and awareness activities have culturally relevant values and use culturally appropriate language and concepts and are developed in consultation with, or led by, members of the relevant cultural communities represented in the workplace.

Organisational culture

Build a psychosocially safe climate that emphasises respect, support, trust, inclusivity, and equity. Promote zero tolerance for discrimination and bullying behaviours. These changes will promote help-seeking and reduce perceived mental health-related stigma among workers.

Education and training

Build manager/supervisor capabilities and promote training and education for all employees. Consider including these in onboarding and compulsory.

Link action to outcomes

Be clear on why this change in workplace culture and behaviour is needed. Having clear goals and communicating them to workers will promote enthusiasm and motivation to reach the desired outcomes.



Tools for assessing psychological risks and hazards in the workplace

Work Health and Safety Regulations prescribe how duty holders must identify and manage hazards and risks to workers' psychological health and safety. This includes engaging and consulting with workers to foster mentally healthy workplaces. A number of validated measurement tools are available to objectively identify psychological hazards and assess risks to workers' wellbeing across a range of workplaces. Four commonly used tools are listed below.

People at Work

People at Work is a validated, evidence-based, robust psychosocial risk assessment tool, available for free to all Australian workplaces. It helps to identify key psychosocial hazards in the workplace and provides guidance on practical ways to manage them. On completion of the survey, organisations receive a report which compares their results against a benchmark of Australian industries.

Office Safety Tool

The **Office Safety Tool** helps to identify health and safety risks in your work or home office. It allows the assessment of different workspaces and rooms (e.g., working areas, meeting spaces, bathrooms, kitchens, etc.) as well as different domains of workplace safety, including bullying, mental health, workplace sexual harassment and first aid. The tool is available for free on [Comcare's website](#).

A Participative Hazard Identification and Risk Management (APHIRM) Toolkit

Developed by the Centre for Ergonomics and Human Factors at La Trobe University, the **APHIRM toolkit** allows for the assessment of both physical and psychological hazards. The main component of this toolkit is a staff survey and it also provides cloud based tools and resources to assist with managing risks in the workplace.

Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ)

COPSOQ is a validated, international instrument that gathers reliable information about main psychosocial risk factors at work. The tool assesses different dimensions of work, including job-strain, demand-control-support and effort-reward-imbalance, emotional demands, and role clarity.

COPSOQ is useful in any workplace either in the industrial or in the services branch. For more information, visit the website of the [COPSOQ international network](#).

Each workplace is unique and duty holders need to identify the most appropriate approaches and mechanisms to comply with their work health and safety obligations. Using validated tools can assist with early identification of poor psychological health and safety in the workplace and assist employers to consult with their workers.

Support services for managers/supervisors and workers

- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Beyond Blue Support Service 1300 22 4636
- SANE Australia 1800 18 SANE (7623)
- [NewAccess Workplaces – Beyond Blue](#)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Crisis Support Line – 13 YARN (9276)

More information

- [Legal advice from the Workplace Advice Service | Fair Work Commission](#)
- [National Mental Health Commission](#)
- [Diversity and discrimination | Fair Work Ombudsman](#)
- [Complaints | Australian Human Rights Commission](#)
- [National Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Strategy](#)
- [Inquiry report – Mental Health | Productivity Commission](#)

Comcare resources

- [Full training list | Comcare](#)
- [Middle managers and supervisors | Comcare](#)
- [Comcare's role under the WHS Act | Comcare](#)

Other useful resources

- [Guide for preventing and responding to workplace bullying – Safe Work Australia](#)
- [Stigma Towards Injured or Ill Workers: Research on the causes and impact of stigma in workplaces, and approaches to creating positive workplace cultures that support return to work | Griffith University](#)
- [Tips for managers | Headsup](#)
- [Developing a workplace mental health strategy – A how-to guide for organisations | Headsup](#)
- [Workplace mental health strategies should be the new norm | Black Dog Institute](#)
- [Our work in improving workplace mental health | Beyond Blue](#)
- [Guide to difficult conversations in the workplace | Fair Work Ombudsman](#)



Comcare's position and role

Comcare's purpose is to promote and enable safe and healthy work. Comcare recognises mental health stigma as a psychosocial hazard which has the potential to cause workers psychological or in some instances, physical harm.

Comcare is a government regulator, workers' compensation insurer, claims manager and scheme administrator.

Through its role, Comcare works with employees and other workers, employers, service providers and other organisations to:

- Minimise the impact of harm in the workplace
- Improve recovery at work and return to work
- Promote the health benefits of good work.

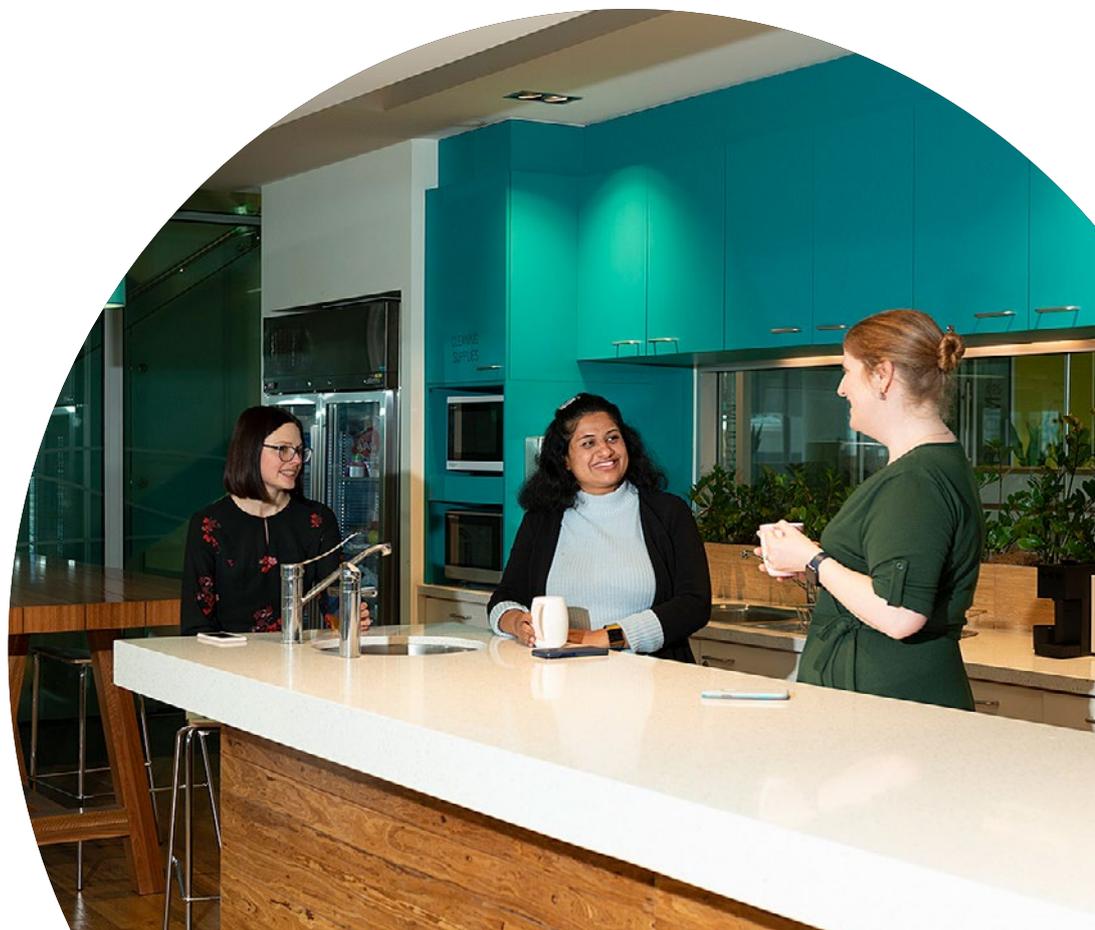
Related guidance

This resource is the first in the series on Reducing Mental Health-Related Stigma in the Workplace.

Other topics include:

- **Resource 1:** What is mental health-related stigma and how does it affect workers?
- **Resource 3:** Supporting workers who experience mental health-related stigma

Please visit www.comcare.gov.au/mentalnotes to access the other resources in this series.



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Check in

Seek help

