

MAPPING THE STATE OF INCLUSION AND MENTAL HEALTH IN THE AUSTRALIAN WORKFORCE

WHY IS MENTAL HEALTH A CRITICAL ISSUE FOR AUSTRALIAN ORGANISATIONS?



Poor mental health is common

45% of Australians will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime,¹ and 1 in 5 Australian workers are experiencing a mental illness at any one time.²



Mental health at work is business-critical

Failing to provide a mentally healthy workplace increases workers' compensation,³ staff turnover and absenteeism, and penalties for work health and safety breaches.⁴



Work can be a force for good or bad when it comes to our mental health

31% of Australian workers report their workplace has a very negative or negative impact on their mental health, while 32% report work has a very positive or positive impact.

4 STEPS TO MAKE WORK A FORCE FOR GOOD MENTAL HEALTH.

Step 3: Improve Safety

Make it safe to talk about mental health at work



Step 1: Build Inclusion

In leaders, in organisational culture, and especially teams

Step 2: Address Exclusion

Discrimination, harassment, and everyday exclusion

Step 4: Seniority Matters

Recognise seniority makes a difference in experiences of mental health at work



STEP 1: Build inclusion – in leaders, in organisational culture, and particularly in teams

Inclusion – whether in teams, leaders, or the organisational culture – is linked to better mental health at work. Workers in inclusive teams, compared to those in non-inclusive teams, are:

- **7 times more likely to report their workplace has positively or very positively impacted their mental health** (46% in inclusive teams compared to only 6% of employees in non-inclusive teams)
- **7 times more likely to report their workplace is safe and supportive for those with poor mental health** (75% in inclusive teams agree/strongly agree their workplace is safe and supportive compared to only 10% of those in non-inclusive teams)

Workers who had **discussed their mental health with colleagues** are also **significantly more likely to be in an inclusive team** (53% discussing with colleagues were in inclusive teams, while only 12% were in non-inclusive teams).

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STEP 2: Address exclusion – particularly ‘everyday’ exclusion

Experiencing everyday exclusion at work takes a toll on our mental health.

Workers who experience:

- **being left out of social gatherings** are 3 times more likely to report poor mental health (41%) than they are to report excellent mental health (14%)
- **having others make incorrect assumptions about their abilities** are 3 times more likely to report poor mental health (49%) than they are to report excellent mental health (16%)
- **being ignored at work** are 3 times more likely to report poor mental health (47%) than they are to report excellent mental health (16%)
- **not having access to the same opportunities or privileges as others** are 2.5 times more likely to report poor mental health (55%) than they are to report excellent mental health (20%).



STEP 3: Make it safe to talk about mental health at work

Talking about mental health in the workplace can lead to increased understanding and better access to required support.⁵ However, we have work to do to make work a place where most workers are able to talk about their mental health. For example:

- 42% of workers reporting their mental health had been poor in the past 12 months did not discuss their mental health with anyone in the workplace
- workers who discussed their mental health at work were twice as likely to report an experience of discrimination and/or harassment at work compared to those who did not discuss their mental health at work (31% compared to 16%).



STEP 4: Recognise seniority makes a difference

Senior leaders are the most likely to discuss their mental health at work, being twice as likely than entry-level staff to do so. This is important as senior leaders can play a key role in creating mentally healthy workplaces by speaking out about mental health at work and reducing stigma.⁶

But there is also a significant gap between staff in senior roles compared to those in less senior roles about how supportive of mental health their workplace is, and how much work positively impacts mental health. This tells us we should use assessment tools to get the best gauge of whether employees at all levels feel that the workplace is supportive for employees with poor mental health.

1. Beyond Blue, ‘The Facts’, 2020, available at <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts>
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), define mental illness as a clinically diagnosable disorder that significantly interferes with a person’s cognitive, emotional or social abilities (see AIHW, ‘Mental Health’, 23 July 2020. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/mental-health>)
3. Deloitte, ‘The Cost of Ignoring the Mental Health and Wellbeing of your Workforce’, 7 October 2019. Accessed at <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/blog/risk-advisory-blog/2019/cost-of-ignoring-mental-health-and-wellbeing-of-workforce.html>
4. <https://www.meridianlawyers.com.au/insights/significant-1-3m-payout-warns-employers-take-employee-bullying-complaints-seriously/>
5. Suicide Call Back Service, ‘Should I Talk About my Mental Health at Work?’, 2022, <https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/mental-health/should-i-talk-about-my-mental-health-at-work/>
6. Kelly Greenwood and Julia Anas, ‘It’s a New Era for Mental Health at Work’, Harvard Business Review, 4 October 2021, <https://hbr.org/2021/10/its-a-new-era-for-mental-health-at-work>