

# MINDS AT WORK

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**IS YOUR BUSINESS  
MENTALLY HEALTHY?**

**A BUSINESS SA  
DISCUSSION PAPER**

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## INTRODUCTION

### **NIGEL McBRIDE, Business SA Chief Executive**

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**If you have ever owned or managed a business you will know how hard it can be to moderate stress levels, whether they're your own or your staff are under the pump. Almost half of all Australians will be affected by mental health at some stage in their life, so there's no question you will have come across it in your workplace or will do so in the future. It may even be knocking on your own door.**

As a business owner you may be managing staff, working long hours, juggling a family, constantly weighing your profit and loss statements to make ends meet, paying wages – and forgetting to look after yourself. Your own mental health may suffer.

If you're a manager, do you have a policy in place to handle mental health issues? Do you have staff trained to help colleagues struggling with their mental health? And are you putting on a brave face if you're going through your own battles with the black dog?

And if you are suffering from a mental illness or struggling with your mental health, have you been lying in bed at night worrying about telling your boss or fearing you might be treated differently?

New figures from the University of South Australia's Asia Pacific Centre for Work Health and Safety show unplanned absences in large worksites due to poor mental health can cost a business close to \$1.2 million annually, seriously impacting on productivity and the wider economy.

Professor Maureen Dollard's report, which is mentioned within our discussion paper, shows improved conditions and mentally-healthy worksites – where employers introduce wellbeing and engagement initiatives among other things – greatly reduced sickness absence, workers compensation claims and presenteeism.

According to Safe Work Australia, mental stress claims are the most expensive compensation claims submitted. Each year Australian businesses pay out \$146m in costs. By improving the workplace environment, whether it be through

engagement or wellbeing programs, five-day or five-month challenges, we can start to lower those costs and provide healthier worksites for all.

Mental health affects everyone, and too often we forget it impacts on those around you at work as well. It could be your colleague in the cubicle next to you, your manager balancing his budgets at the end of the corridor, or yourself, even if you're trying to put on a brave face and soldier on in front of others.

It's time for the business community to be proactive about tackling mental health at work, whether it's by encouraging others to come forward, offering training to know how to deal with colleagues, or making sure people are aware of employee assistance programs. We're in this together, and our mental health should be our greatest strength.



## A MESSAGE FROM THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSIONER



**CHRIS BURNS**

By law, any Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking must ensure that workers and other people are not exposed to psychological health and safety risks arising from the business or undertaking.

Managing the workplace should not be just about compliance with the law. A good leader will accept a moral and ethical obligation to maintain a mentally safe and healthy workplace ahead of any legal compliance requirements.

The emphasis for today's business leaders must be about care, not just compliance.

A few short decades ago the standard workplace fashion was a Jackie Howe singlet, King Gee shorts and Volley tennis shoes. Today you won't get on a worksite without your helmet, high viz vest and steel cap boots or Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

So what is the PPE for mental health and wellbeing in the modern workplace?

The new foundation of workplace safety has to be workplace culture and wellbeing because:

- Almost one in two Australian adults will experience mental illness in their lifetime;
- In any year, 20 per cent of Australians experience a diagnosable mental illness;
- Each year, one in five Australian workers take time off because they feel mentally unwell; and
- 19,000 working weeks are lost every year in South Australia due to mental health-related compensation claims.

For every \$1 invested in strengthening mental health and wellbeing in the workplace, the average return is \$2.30.

When employees struggling with their mental health are supported, it provides a foundation for positive connection between management and employees and reduces negative behaviours and productivity losses.

Mental health in the workplace is a leadership issue. While nine in ten workers believe mental health in the workplace is important, just over half believe their senior leaders value mental health in the workplace.

The South Australian Mental Health Commission is committed to promoting mentally-healthy workplaces – in order to grow the state's mental wealth.

## WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

**Mental health** is a continuum, ranging from good mental health to mental illness. A person will move along this continuum at different points in their life. A person with good mental health will feel in control of their emotions, have good cognitive functioning and positive interactions with others. Good mental health allows people to perform well at work or study, and with family and social relationships.

A **mental health problem** is a broader term including mental illnesses and symptoms of mental illnesses that may not be severe enough to warrant a diagnosis.

A **mental illness** is diagnosable and affects a person's thinking, emotional state and behaviour, and disrupts the person's ability to work or carry out other daily activities.

*Source: Mental Health First Aid Manual, 4th Ed, Kitchener, Jorm and Kelly*



# THE COST OF MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE



**MAUREEN DOLLARD**, University of South Australia,  
Director of the Asia Pacific Centre for Work Health and Safety

**Unplanned absences in large worksites due to poor mental health can cost a business close to \$1.2 million annually, seriously impacting on productivity and the wider economy.**

UniSA's Professor Dollard studied the Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) in workplaces. In other words, she and her team have measured worker psychological health and safety and how it is valued in a workplace, along with measuring the impacts PSC can have on a worksite.

Many Australians work in psychologically risky environments. Safe Work Australia statistics from 2018 show work pressure and bullying are the leading causes of increasing costs associated with work-related mental health disorders and compensation claims, with 7,200 Australian workers compensated annually, costing \$543 million.

The cost of compensation is frighteningly high, and that does not include the expenses incurred by a business due to lost productivity and absenteeism. We know unhappy worksites or ones where staff have low engagement levels, are the least productive.

The PSC studies looked at close to 700 staff in just under 40 workplaces. The study found more than half (51 per cent) reported high PSC contexts – meaning the workplace created a high chance of future depressive symptoms and job strain.

Professor Dollard says PSC is a leading indicator of psychological distress and emotional exhaustion, depression, exhaustion, cynicism, sickness absence, low work engagement and worker's compensation claims for physical and psychological injuries.

The report found that across 38 worksites almost a third were in high risk environments, where the psychosocial safety climate was poor, 24 per cent were at medium risk, and 47 per cent were at low risk.

According to Professor Dollard, when PSC was low, work absences increased, and when PSC was high – or worksites had mentally healthy environments – absence rates remained stable.

Evidence suggests that a 10 per cent increase in PSC, or improved conditions, would lead to a 4 per cent decrease in demands, a 4.5 per cent decrease in bullying and an 8 per cent increase in psychosocial resources, such as social support, training and autonomy. It would also lead to a 6 per cent increase in engagement.

Financial modelling suggested that a business employing 1,000 people could save \$1.18m per year in lost productivity due to unplanned absences relating to job strain and depression.

Professor Dollard's research suggests by improving PSC, workplaces would reduce sickness absence, presenteeism, and workers compensation, allowing employers across the nation to recoup a collective \$6 billion per year. The research also shows workers in low PSC environments take

43 per cent more sick days and have 72 per cent higher performance loss at work, equating to \$1,887 per employee per year (based on average wages of \$440 per day), compared to psychologically healthy workplaces.

Professor Dollard says some worksites have conditions which predispose workers to higher stress levels – such as environments subjected to deadlines, the health industry, construction and even legal affairs. However, by being aware of those stressors and how they may change, a PSC-aware worksite may be able to mitigate levels of high stress, better support workers and create a healthier environment for staff.

By measuring PSC and monitoring how staff are faring, businesses can consider preventative strategies to improve mental health and engagement levels, and be more able to pinpoint what's going wrong, including bullying and harassment, stress levels and disengagement. Moderating PSC can also provide social support to help workers manage demands.

**“RESEARCH SHOWS WORKERS IN LOW PSC ENVIRONMENTS TAKE 43 PER CENT MORE SICK DAYS AND HAVE 72 PER CENT HIGHER PERFORMANCE LOSS AT WORK.”**

# PUBLIC SECTOR MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING



**NEV KITCHIN**, Public Service Association Secretary

**As a teenager growing up, Public Service Association Secretary Nev Kitchin was acutely aware of the impacts mental illness could have on people's behaviour and how it could challenge relationships.**

His father had an acute mental illness, and Nev didn't understand at the time what it was about.

"As a young male I thought it made my father look weak because I didn't understand, and that's a mistake I don't want others to make," Nev says.

Nev began his career as a police officer, where he encountered people with mental health issues daily. He would arrest people, they would be placed in institutions for 48 hours and then return to the community without any causes being addressed or problems sorted.

With a great understanding of mental health and watching its impacts on the workforce over the past three decades, Nev raised and discussed the idea of introducing mental health first aid training into the South Australian Modern Public Sector Enterprise Agreement: Salaried 2017. His initiative has since been introduced, covering close to 40,000 public sector workers under the award, and becoming the first union and EBA nationally to create such a clause.

"Our health infrastructure can't deal with (mental illness), we don't have enough people on the ground to deal with it, we don't have enough child psychologists," he says. "We as a community must all chip in and we believe as a union it was something we could all work on, and we need to address it at the source."

"Mental health first aid officers might be able to see something, get help, or help people on a daily basis. We know it has enormous costs to the community. Anything we can do to address it would help."

The mental health first aid training clause stipulates that parties agree to provide training within five months of the EBA being approved, aimed at training Health and Safety Representatives (HSR) and First Aid Officers (FAO). The training is not compulsory, with the PSA recognising not all HSRs or FAOs will want to undertake the course.

When the agreement expires in 2020, thousands of public sector workers will have undertaken training.

Nev says training does not mean HSRs become psychologists, it simply gives them the tools to recognise signs, symptoms or when people need help.

With industrial officers dealing with mental health claims on a regular basis, Nev is acutely aware of how mental health can impact on a workplace and colleagues. He knows it can be triggered by anything from stress to domestic violence, family conflict, anger management issues, operational issues, conflict, general and women's health, medication, bullying and relationship breakdowns. And that's not including chemical imbalances and other diagnosed disorders.

Having a mentally-healthy workplace also has productivity and financial benefits, far outweighing the cost to provide training.

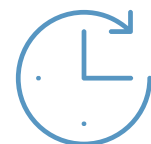
The PSA mental health first aid training clause is being considered by other unions, and several states are considering using South Australia's model.



**60% OF MENTAL DISORDER CLAIMS ARE AWARDED TO WORKERS AGED 40 AND OVER**



**\$543 MILLION IS PAID ANNUALLY IN WORKERS COMPENSATION FOR WORK-RELATED MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS**



**20 TIMES MORE SICK DAYS ARE TAKEN PER MONTH BY WORKERS WITH SEVERE DEPRESSION**

Source: Safe Work Australia

# A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO DEALING WITH MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

## FOUR STEP APPROACH

### A SUMMARY FOR MANAGERS DISCUSSING MENTAL HEALTH

#### ONE

##### Make contact

- Arrange a meeting time in a suitable, confidential location
- Work out what you want to say and achieve in advance

#### TWO

##### Explore the issues

- Ask open questions, listen carefully, be attentive
- State the behaviour you have observed. "I have noticed that..., is everything OK?"
- Define the issues and discuss

#### THREE

##### Develop options and offer support

- Explore what the person wants, e.g. workplace adjustments
- Consider operational demands
- Work together to create solutions
- Gently and constructively engage the person if they come up with barriers

#### FOUR

##### Agree on actions

- Agree on a course of action
- Define and agree on clear, specific steps
- Follow up at an agreed time, review, and provide feedback
- Stay in touch, particularly if the employee is off work

Pricewaterhouse Coopers research shows one in five Australians are likely to have experienced a mental illness in the previous 12 months, and many will be working when that illness occurs.

Our mental health is affected by work and what is happening in our lives, but in practice, it can be hard to distinguish when work stress turns into a mental health problem and when existing mental health problems become exaggerated by stress at work. While this doesn't mean your workplace is the cause of all mental health issues, it can play a pivotal role in helping with mental health.

With mental illness prevalent in Australia, there is a strong business case for addressing mental health in the workplace. When workers give up their jobs because of mental health issues, it can be a terrible waste of talent for Australian businesses. Especially since, contrary to popular belief, most people who develop problems can and do recover with appropriate treatment and support.

The first step for businesses to assist with mental health is to create a positive culture. It is important for workplaces to recognise mental health issues are common and to take positive steps to breakdown the stigma surrounding mental illness.

A mentally-healthy workplace starts at recruitment. When recruiting new staff ensure job requirements match the person's capabilities, there is a positive corporate culture and a clear induction.

A workplace can implement policies to create a mentally-healthy workplace such as stress-risk assessments, flexible work hours, occupational health and safety, bullying and harassment and diversity.

Senior staff play a crucial role when managing employees. There should be clear policies and guidelines on how to appraise and assess staff if they are not performing. The process should reduce

stress on the employees and include work planning and increased training and development to ensure they can meet the requirements of the job they were hired to perform.

It should be up to everyone to proactively ensure workplaces are mentally healthy. If workers notice an employee who is distressed, they shouldn't ignore them. Employees should be reminded of employee assistance programs (if provided) and workplaces should provide information on external support. Details on external mental health providers are on the last page of this discussion paper.

If an employee is taking sick leave for a mental illness, they should not be forgotten. Workplaces should continue to actively engage with employees in a positive manner. Their return to work should be planned and efforts made to make them feel comfortable about returning, especially if their illness is widely known and acknowledged.

When an employee returns to work, ensure they are actively monitored and supported and if necessary or there is concern, monitor how other staff react to the returning employee.

Asking non-judgemental, open questions will have the best outcome. Questions such as:

*"How are you going at the moment?"*

*"Is there anything we can do to help?"*

*"I've noticed that you've sometimes been arriving late recently and wondered if there was a problem?"*

Addressing mental health can benefit your business, such as improved productivity, reduced sick leave and improved staff morale. Having a mentally-safe workplace isn't just something nice to do – it's a legal requirement.

Every business, no matter what its resource constraints, can do something even if it's small to improve staff mental health. It requires courage and commitment to take the necessary steps.



# MENTAL HEALTH IN CONSTRUCTION

## GATEWAY SOUTH'S DARLINGTON UPGRADE PROJECT

Mental health is a significant issue in the construction industry with employees working unusual hours, often in fly-in fly-out locations, battling fatigue and pushing to finish work targets.



Gateway South, the joint venture between Fulton Hogan and Laing O'Rourke responsible for delivering the \$620 million Darlington Upgrade Project on behalf of the federal and South Australian governments, is aware of how much mental health can impact on its industry and has subsequently implemented an innovative and proactive plan to raise awareness and support workers.

Health Safety and Environment Manager, John Hannon, and Learning and Development Advisor, Suzi Ivey, were part of a team which implemented the 5 Ways to Wellbeing initiative, raising awareness of mental health and wellbeing on the project to reduce the stigma.

Over five months the site's five mental health champions introduced themes around wellbeing to encourage staff to act and improve their wellness. The themes included: *Take Notice, Give, Be Active, Connect and Keep Learning.*

Each theme involved activities. The photo competition for *Take Notice* encouraged staff to take a moment in their day to think about things that bring them joy and take a photo showing it. More than 80 people took photos of cows, teddy bears, sunsets, families and countless other things, which were placed on a notice board and three winners were selected.

Each theme has a simple message. During November's *Connect*, one staff member put their hand up to go through their phone for 26 days, finding a different person for each letter of the alphabet who they had not spoken to recently and gave them a call. That's 26 phone calls in 26 days and a fantastic way to connect with others.

In *Be Active*, workers recorded their steps, logged them on a team site and competed against each other while planning to virtually walk from Laing O'Rourke's Sydney office to London. People walked and talked, held meetings in nearby parks within walking distance, while encouraging conversations and healthy competition.

John says creating themes and giving workers a way to connect or talk can be helpful. Sometimes, he says, people just need an ear.

Five staff on the Gateway South project have undertaken further training in mental health support and are now the project's Mental Health Champions, wearing badges to ensure they're identifiable. They also introduced mental health first aid training in October.

Along with the 5 Ways to Wellbeing program, John and his colleagues are involved in daily toolbox talks where they raise awareness of monthly initiatives, talk about where to get help if needed, and let people know they're around.

**“JOHN SAYS CREATING THEMES AND GIVING WORKERS A WAY TO CONNECT OR TALK CAN BE HELPFUL. SOMETIMES, HE SAYS, PEOPLE JUST NEED AN EAR.”**

Other activities include monthly cooking classes at lunch time where more than half a dozen staff bring in slow cookers and cook different international cuisines, barbecues hosted by management, quizzes, random free coffees at a local café and individual employees teaching others about their areas of interest, such as kite surfing.

In conjunction with SA Health and the Civil Contractors Federation, Gateway South supported the Healthy Workers, Healthy Futures plan in 2017 to support healthy behaviours in the workplace. The program encouraged people to eat more vegetables, quit smoking and get fit for work. The healthier staff are, the more likely they are to have better mental health, be more productive and have fewer sick days.

“Our role is to help people and try to get them back on track when they're not,” John says. “The caring factor is important to us.”



# WHAT CAN BUSINESSES DO TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH?

**MARDI WEBBER**, Mentally Healthy  
Workplaces Consultant, ReturnToWorkSA

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Most businesses understand the importance of having a focus on workplace mental health and the benefits this brings to both the business and individual workers, however, it can be difficult to know where to start and what to do.

While workplaces may have differing priorities and needs, the list below provides some ideas on taking action to improve workplace mental health:

- Undertake some initial research and review the free tools and resources available in building a mentally-healthy workplace by visiting [www.rtwsa.com](http://www.rtwsa.com) (search “mentally healthy”) or [www.headsup.org.au](http://www.headsup.org.au), with the latter also having a specific section for small business;
- Make sure critical success factors are in place including leadership having a shared commitment to a mentally-healthy workplace and workers having the opportunity to contribute their ideas and be involved in any mental health initiatives.
- Get started and take action which could include:
  - Raising awareness about mental health and reducing stigma by making mental health information available, being involved in mental health events such as RU OK Day and Mental Health Week, and promoting support services such as your employee assistance program (if you have one) or other free support services such as the Beyond Blue Support Service;
  - Focus on a supportive workplace by providing managers, supervisors and workers with training/information on how to approach someone they are concerned about, have a conversation and provide ongoing support. This could include having trained mental health first aiders in the workplace;
  - Review the workplace to identify risk factors to mental health and take action to reduce these risks. For example, managing workloads, preventing bullying and discrimination and managing workplace change; and
  - Ensure you have effective return to work processes in place to assist workers with a mental health condition to remain at, or return to work, in a supportive and positive manner.

If this sounds like a lot to do on top of an already busy workplace, it's important to remember that you don't need to address everything at once. The most important thing is to start, no matter how small and build from there.

Need more help? You can access free support and assistance through ReturnToWorkSA's mentally-healthy workplaces consultancy service.



# MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

## TRAINING FOR WORKPLACES

Mental health first aid training has seen a rapid growth in Australia, with more than 500,000 undertaking courses by 2017.

Given almost half the total population will experience a mental health disorder at some point in their lifetime, mental health first aid training enables employees to support a work colleague, family member or friend when the time comes.

The early signs and symptoms of mental illness are often noticed at work, where people spend the majority of their time. Providing mental health first aid early can assist workers to return to their usual performance quickly and avoid the problem worsening or a crisis emerging. Mental health first aid training courses are generally

held over 12 hours or two days and teach how to provide initial support to those developing a mental illness or experiencing a crisis.

The course curriculum is evidence-based and generally teaches:

- improved knowledge of mental illnesses and their treatments;
- how to identify signs and symptoms;
- how to assess for risk;
- how to listen non-judgmentally, without attempting to diagnose or treat someone;
- knowledge of appropriate first aid strategies; and
- where to direct people to appropriate professional services for clinical care.

Courses aim to decrease stigma and improve attitudes towards mental illnesses.

The benefits of mental health first aid training far outweigh the cost, with Australian businesses receiving an average return of \$2.30 for every \$1 they invest in effective workplace mental health strategies.

Business SA has partnered with St John, South Australia's leading first aid provider, to deliver mental health first aid training. For further information, please call 8300 0089.



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HEALTHY  
WORKPLACE  
LEADERS

IMPROVE MENTAL WELLBEING AT YOUR WORKPLACE THROUGH OUR AWARD-WINNING PSYCHOLOGICAL INJURY MANAGEMENT SERVICES<sup>1</sup> AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING.

Mental wellbeing and Return to Work programs return up to \$4.70 for every dollar spent<sup>2</sup>.

EML's psychological injury management is shaped by the research of our academic and industry partners, funded in part by our Member Benefits program.

Improve mental health and wellbeing at your workplace with EML.

[eml.com.au](http://eml.com.au)

1. <https://www.eml.com.au/news-community/awards/>

2. Mental Health Australia and KPMG 2018, *Investing to Save: The economic benefits for Australia of investment in mental health reform*, May 2018, viewed Thursday 24 January 2019, [https://mhaustralia.org/sites/default/files/docs/investing\\_to\\_save\\_may\\_2018\\_-\\_kpmg\\_mental\\_health\\_australia.pdf](https://mhaustralia.org/sites/default/files/docs/investing_to_save_may_2018_-_kpmg_mental_health_australia.pdf)



## CASE STUDY

# NIKALENE RIDDLE

## SKINNYMIXERS FOUNDER



**Skinnymixers founder Nikalene Riddle first battled a mental health issue when she was just 12 years old, and has dealt with the ongoing challenges it poses for the past 20 years.**

It's a tough thing for a primary school-aged girl living on a farm to deal with, including taking anti-depressants. Chemically-depressed, she had been suffering from insomnia and anxiety and self-harming at the time.

It wasn't until two years ago, after Nikalene had started to build up a massive online following for her Skinnymixers thermal cook books and blog, that her world started to crumble.

With more than 167,000 followers, two children aged four and five at the time, three staff, up to 50 volunteers, demand for more recipes, a chronic back injury requiring surgery, a house to run, and the need to take on more staff to help her test recipes and distribute her books (she has now published eight books), Nikalene was struggling.

"I felt suicidal, I was seeing a psychologist because of the self-harm," Nikalene says.

"I knew I was addicted to pain killers after my back injury and I was taking more than I was prescribed. The drugs didn't stop the pain they just numbed me, they made me feel like a space cadet."

Nikalene's husband Michael sent their children to their grandparents and made his wife go cold turkey, with help from her doctor and support from her staff, and she has since learned how to better deal with her mental illness.

"My GP is really good and I'm honest with him. If I recognise the signs I ask for a limited supply, and I don't need pain killers anymore."

Nikalene says being honest with herself, her staff and her followers has helped her deal with her mental health issues. Last year she posted a photo on social media while unable to get out of bed, without make-up, telling the world that life as a business owner isn't always easy.

"I thought I would lose everything but more than 2,000 people posted comments thanking me for being honest and that they'd been there too, and that it was good to see someone not pretending their life was perfect," she says.

"My mental health was at that point where it was impacting on my community because I couldn't function and they were expecting me to produce. It's so important to be honest."

### **"IT'S IMPORTANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH CAN HAVE AN IMPACT ON YOUR BUSINESS"**

The most important aspect of dealing with mental health as a business owner, Nikalene said, was being honest with your staff, your family and your customers. Building a reliable team is also important, because they understand what's going on and can help keep the business on track when needed.

Honesty also means staff can share their own problems with her. She operates on a policy where she doesn't ask for a sick certificate and her employees can take more than 10 days off if needed.

"It's important to acknowledge that your mental health can have an impact on your business as well," she says. "As is having a plan in place for when things aren't going well, what support you need, and what you need to do to make sure things are ok. It's leading by example, and my staff have been able to tell me about their struggles as well."

## MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- changes in a person's usual behaviour
- poor performance
- tiredness and increased sickness absence
- comments on an increased use of alcohol, drugs or smoking
- a normally punctual employee might start turning up late
- tearfulness
- headaches
- the employee may start perceiving/experiencing issues with colleagues
- loss of humour
- changes in moods

*Various sources including Beyond Blue, SafeWork SA and Heads Up*

## CASE STUDY

# CHRIS CHALUBEK

## ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE MANAGER



**Sometimes our mental health challenges us later in life, sometimes we can become aware of it when we're young. But with mental ill health affecting one in five people, we're bound to experience it at some stage.**

Former Centacare Health, Wellbeing and Education Services Assistant Executive Manager Chris Chalubek first experienced depression and anxiety in his late teens, but as he explains it, self-management and a bit of ignorance helped him get by until he hit his 30s.

"I never really got to the point where I had severe symptoms, I managed it myself and pushed it under the carpet, but it was tough" Chris says.

Like many people who think they don't need help or fear a diagnosis, Chris realised it was time to act when he hit a stressful period – he had been promoted to a leadership role, bought a house, married and had a baby on the way.

Encouraged by his wife, Chris sought help with a GP, started a management plan including medication and saw a psychologist. Diagnosed with social anxiety and depression, Chris was able to self-manage.

When his mental health started to deteriorate progressively five years ago, leading to a significant depressive episode last year, Chris was then diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

Characterised by strong changes in mood and energy which can last a week or more, bipolar affects thoughts and behaviour. Untreated, it can make coping at work, home, school and in social settings difficult.

When Chris knew something was wrong, he sought help from a colleague. Centacare supported him to take time off and gave him space to seek help and recover. "That was so important to my recovery, the time and space, but the thing I appreciated the most was that I wasn't made to feel different, especially when I came back." He went on a 12-month journey of personal recovery.

"I was able to reframe my sense of identity," Chris says. "I'm now someone who just happens to have bipolar, I'm not a bipolar individual. What's happened over the past 12 months is I've developed this really strong sense of identity and I've positively reframed my abilities. I can speak out and I can reduce stigma because I'm Chris and I have bipolar and that's okay."

In October, Chris came forward and decided to share his mental health battles with his colleagues.

Coming forward has lifted a weight off his shoulders and shown others that it's ok to talk about your mental health and admit you're not always perfect.

"I felt really positive, really strong," he says. "The reaction was really good. A number of people emailed me and came to see me, and many people told me they knew someone or they were struggling themselves. I feel privileged to be in an organisation where people feel comfortable speaking out, particularly those in a leadership role."

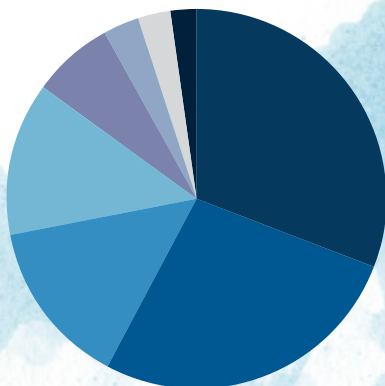
Chris is sharing his experience hoping to help others answer the question 'what next?' instead of 'why me?'

Many people who experienced mental health issues felt they were holding their breath and speaking out helped relieve that anxiety in a work and social setting.

"Wellbeing and recovery occur in a community, they don't occur in isolation," he says. "One of the biggest communities that we're in on a daily basis is work, and we need to be supportive and open and stigmatising mental health is not good for recovery. We need workplaces that are switched on to mental health and respond positively and compassionately."

## MOST COMMON CAUSES OF WORKPLACE MENTAL STRESS

- Work pressure 31%
- Work-related harassment and/or bullying 27%
- Exposure to workplace or occupational violence 14%
- Other mental stress 13%
- Exposure to a traumatic event 7%
- Vehicle accident 3%
- Being assaulted 3%
- Sexual/racial harassment 2%



**BETWEEN 2010-11 AND 2014-15, 91% OF WORKERS COMPENSATION CLAIMS INVOLVING A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION WERE LINKED TO WORK-RELATED STRESS OR MENTAL STRESS.**



**60%**  
OF CLAIMS ARE WOMEN

**40%**  
OF CLAIMS ARE MEN



## CASE STUDY

# MARY JO FISHER

## BEYONDBLUE AMBASSADOR



**How do we deal with our own mental health in the workplace, when we know we're having problems? And how do we tell our colleagues, even when we know they may treat us differently or look at us through a distorted prism, constantly wondering if our actions relate to our mental health?**

Former Liberal senator Mary Jo Fisher began experiencing anxiety and depression while in Federal Parliament in 2009, doing a job she had loved. She knew something was wrong – she struggled to focus, she would start multiple projects and not finish anything, and she constantly second-guessed decisions she had made a month ago, a week earlier or even that day.

"I certainly didn't feel like I deserved to be in the Senate," Mary Jo said. "I felt I'd cheated my way there and wasn't doing a good job, which I've since learnt is called imposter syndrome."

The extrovert became an introvert and she wanted to curl up in a corner. She didn't care about anything and didn't want to do anything about it. Then she felt a "deep, dark melancholy" and couldn't get out of bed, or even pack her bags to return to Canberra for a sitting week.

A combination of factors led her to get help, including a hard-hitting intervention letter from her husband John. That meant telling her staff and a select group of political colleagues, who supported her when she needed it.

"You feel initial relief, but telling people doesn't make you better, you've got to deal with it yourself," she said. "We're all human and as soon as you tell you do get assessed by those around you in that context."

"People often ask me whether they should tell people and it's really complex. I refer people to the Beyond Blue website because it has some good advice on how to go about it."

Mary Jo said people needed to ensure they had space to seek a diagnosis and learn to manage their condition. That could mean giving employees space to get help, perhaps allowing them to take leave without pay or start later each day. Some might not need time off, she said, and many often responded better when they had a routine or reason to get up each day.

"You can't have doona days when you manage staff either," she said. "You might need to ask your employer if you can take a different role where you can come in later or not be responsible for others. I had to change my career as well."

**"YOU FEEL INITIAL RELIEF, BUT TELLING PEOPLE DOESN'T MAKE YOU BETTER, YOU'VE GOT TO DEAL WITH IT YOURSELF"**

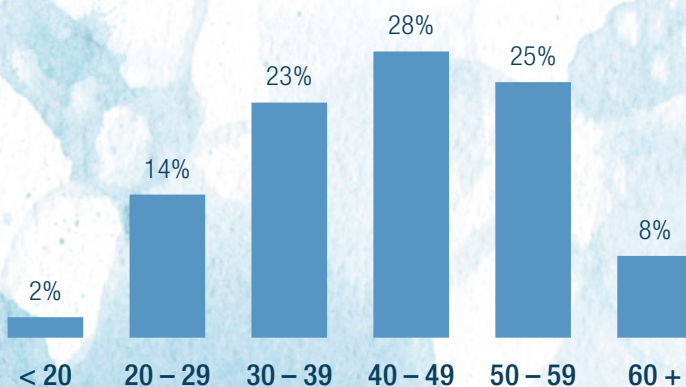
A mis-diagnosis of depression and anxiety while in politics, rather than bipolar disorder, and a change in medication resulted in an episode 18 months after Mary Jo first sought help. She was caught shoplifting from an Adelaide supermarket while in a disassociated state in December 2010. After a second episode while shopping, her political career was over. She counts herself lucky to not have a criminal record.

Less than two months after resigning from the senate Mary Jo's former colleague, Printing Industries Association of Australia chief executive Bill Healey, offered her a job as a workplace relations adviser.

"I said, 'I'm in the middle of a court case, I may well be a felon, I'm a bit of a nut job, are you for real?' He said, 'All that does is make you accessible to me when you wouldn't otherwise be, at a price I can now afford'."

Mary Jo now volunteers as an ambassador for Beyond Blue.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL WORK INJURIES BY AGE



## RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Research shows that for every \$1 a business spends on improving mental health and wellbeing in the workplace, including health and engagement programs, the average return in productivity gains is \$2.30.

To check the return on investment for your organisation, check out this *Heads Up: Better mental health in the workplace Rol calculator*. [www.headsup.org.au/healthy-workplaces/why-it-matters/return-on-investment-tool](http://www.headsup.org.au/healthy-workplaces/why-it-matters/return-on-investment-tool)

Source: PwC's Heads Up report

# MATES IN CONSTRUCTION

## FIGHTING SUICIDE IN THE AUSTRALIAN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Statistics tell us that Australian construction industry workers are at a higher risk of suicide than many other occupational groups. On average, 190 Australians working in the construction industry take their own lives each year – this means we lose a construction worker every second day to suicide.

MATES in Construction is an independent charity that exists to turn this around – to reduce the number of suicides in the construction industry.

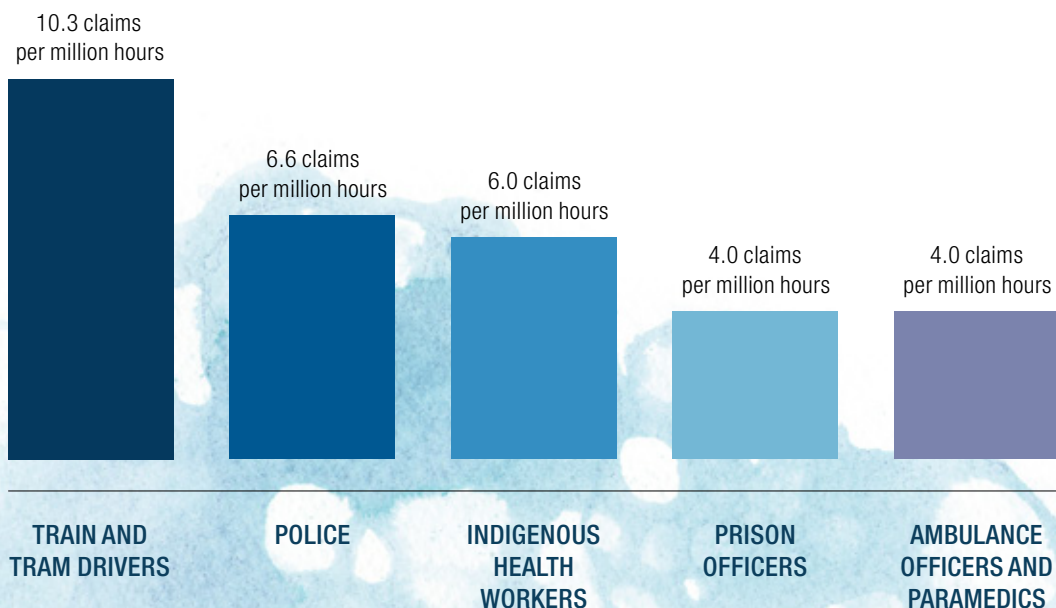
Its program is based on the simple idea that "suicide is everyone's business". If the building and construction industry in Australia is to improve the mental health and wellbeing of workers and to reduce suicide, then it cannot be left to the mental health professionals, but rather everyone in the industry must play their part.

The MATES in Construction approach is an integrated program of community development and support that teaches people what it looks like when one of their mates is struggling, how to have meaningful conversations, how to ask the right questions and listen empathetically. MATES also offers ongoing support by way of a 24/7 helpline, case management, critical incident support, postvention and more.

For further information, please refer to our Where to Get Help page.



## MOST AT RISK INDUSTRIES



Occupations with the highest rate of claims for mental health conditions

Source: Safe Work Australia



# WHERE TO GET HELP

## **Beyond Blue Support Service**

Information and referral to relevant services for depression and anxiety related matters.

Call 1300 22 46 36

[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

## **Black Dog Institute**

The Black Dog Institute is a world leader in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mood disorders.

[www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)

## **Butterfly Foundation's National Helpline**

Free, confidential service that provides information, counselling and treatment referral for people with eating disorders and body image related issues.

Call 1800 33 4673, 8am – midnight AEST, 7 days a week.

## **Lifeline**

24 hour telephone counselling service.

Call 13 11 14

[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

## **MATES in Construction**

Suicide prevention in the construction industry.

National helpline 1300 642 111

Call 08 8373 0122

[www.matesinconstruction.org.au](http://www.matesinconstruction.org.au)

## **Mental Health Coalition of SA**

Includes a directory of mental health services in SA and help if looking for support.

Call 08 8212 8873

[www.mhcsa.org.au](http://www.mhcsa.org.au)

## **Mensline Australia**

A dedicated service for men with relationship and family concerns.

Call 1300 78 99 78

[www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au)

## **The MindSpot Clinic**

Free telephone and online service for people with stress, worry, anxiety, low mood or depression. They provide online assessment and treatment for anxiety and depression.

Does not provide an emergency or instant response service.

Call 1800 61 44 34 AEST, 8am – 8pm (Mon – Fri),

8am – 6pm (Sat).

## **ReturnToWorkSA**

Provides resources for small business owners to create a mentally-healthy workplace.

Call 131 855

[www.headsup.org.au/healthy-workplaces/for-small-businesses](http://www.headsup.org.au/healthy-workplaces/for-small-businesses)

## **SANE**

Helpline 1800 187 263

## **Suicide Call Back Service**

Provides 24/7 support for you or someone you know.

Call 1300 659 467

## **Family Drug Support**

Call 1300 368 186

## **Mental Health Emergency (South Australia)**

For assistance in a mental health emergency, contact the mental health triage service on 13 14 65 available 24/7 – metropolitan and country SA.

Call 13 14 65

[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au)

