# noggin

# A Comprehensive Guide to Workplace Mental Health & Wellbeing

# Importance of mental health in the workplace

Mental illness has become one the leading causes of sickness absence and long-term work incapacity – sometimes even the leading cause. As a result, mental health and productivity in the workplace are at crisis levels.

How so?

Well, employees with unresolved depression experience a 35 per cent reduction in their productivity, according to U.S. data from the American Psychiatric Association.

In Australia, the Productivity Commission estimates that employees with mental illness take an annual average of 10 to 12 days off due to psychological distress. Total costs from lost productivity range from AUD 12 billion to AUD 39 billion.

Compliance costs come into play, as well. Persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) are legally obligated to eliminate risks to the health and safety of their employees.

By statute, health encompasses mental wellbeing in the workplace in many countries.

A broad array of psychosocial hazards, therefore, come into play for employers. These are mental health and wellbeing aspects of work that have the potential to cause psychological or physical harm.

The relevant aspects of work falling under the employer's duty of care obligation include:

Bullying in the workplace

Fatigue

Mental stress

Overseas work

Remote or isolated work

Workplace change

Workplace violence or customer aggression

# How the mental health and wellbeing is monitored

Employers might be loath to intervene in what they consider the personal issues of their workers.

However, the costs for flouting this component of duty of care are steep. In Australia, the cost of workers compensation claims related to work-related mental health conditions is about two and half times higher than that of other claims. They also involve significantly more time off work for employees.

What's more, the evidence now indicates that workplaces themselves need to play an active role in managing and supporting mental health at work – even in the virtual office. The remaining question, of course, is how.

Key, here, are monitoring worker mental health and understanding the factors that contribute to mentally healthy workers. According to the research[i], the factors that contribute to a mentally healthy workplace include the following:

**Job design.** Demands of the job, control in the work environment, resources provided, the level of work engagement, the characteristics of the job, and potential exposure to trauma.

**Team/group factors.** Support from colleagues and managers, the quality of interpersonal relationships, effective leadership, and the availability of manager training.

**Organisational factors.** Changes to the organisation, support from the organisation, recognising and rewarding work, how justice is perceived in an organisation, a psychosocial safety climate, positive organisational climate, and a safe physical environment.

**Home/work conflict.** The degree to which conflicting demands from home, including significant life events, interfere with work.

**Individual biopsychosocial factors.** Genetics, personality, early life events, cognitive and behavioural patterns, mental health history, lifestyle factors and coping style.

## Attributes of a mentally healthy workplace

- Work designed and managed to minimise harm

- Protective factors promoted at an organisational level to maximise resilience

- Personal resilience enhanced

- Early help-seeking promoted and facilitated

- Workers recovery from mental illness supported

- Increased awareness and reduced stigma of mental illness

# Strategies for managing mental health in the workplace

What more can be done to enhance workplace mental health and wellbeing?

According to best practice, senior management should intervene to clarify the importance of workplace mental health and wellbeing.

After all, every major organisational initiative needs leadership commitment and worker buy-in. Managing and supporting mental health at work is no different.

Strategies to demonstrate leadership commitment and secure worker participation include:

Identify, monitor, and be aware of roles and responsibilities with respect to managing psychosocial risks

Obtain and provide feedback to determine the effectiveness of managing and preventing psychosocial risk within the OHS management system, both in implementation and operation

Determine the resources needed and make them available in a timely and efficient manner

Empower workers and ensure they are competent to fulfil their roles and responsibilities to identify and manage psychosocial risk

Reinforce the sustainability of managing psychosocial risk by including it in strategic plans as well as existing systems, processes, and reporting structures

Remove barriers that can limit worker participation and aim to enhance participation

Protect workers from reprisals and/or threats of reprisals for reporting incidents, hazards, risks, and opportunities

Actively engage workers in a continual dialogue on the management of psychosocial risk

Communicate how whistle blowers, victims, witnesses, and those who report or raise workplace psychosocial risk concerns will be protected

Support and encourage workers to actively participate in the management of psychosocial risk in the workplace

Implementing best-practice standards, such as ISO 45003: Psychological health and safety at work, can help, as well.

ISO 45003 is the International Organisation for Standardisation's first foray into psychological health and safety at work. Written to help organisations already using occupational health and safety (OHS) systems based on ISO 45001: 2018, the later standard provides simple, practical guidance on how to manage the psychosocial hazards that arise in the work environment.

What else? The standard also enables organisations to prevent work-related injury and ill health (whether of employees, customers, or other stakeholders) and promote wellbeing in the workplace.

How, exactly? The standard sketches out how to develop, implement, maintain, and improve healthy and safe workplace practices, with the aim of helping business leaders identify where psychosocial risks arise and how those risks can be mitigated or eliminated.

In early sections, the standard highlights key areas shown to impact workers' psychological health, with the intent of making compliant organisations able to do the following:

Identify the conditions, circumstances, and workplace demands that have the potential to impair the psychological health and wellbeing of their workers

Determine what changes are required to improve the working environment to improve the psychological health and wellbeing of their workers

Manage psychosocial risk within an OHS management system

# Further measures for managing psychosocial risks

Other relevant measures for managing and supporting mental health at work include understanding the full context of the organisation.

The following issues are all germane to the management of psychosocial risks:

| External issues | Internal issues |
|---|---|
| • The supply chain in which the organisation operates | • How the organisation is governed and managed |
| • Relationships with contractors, subcontractors, suppliers, providers, and other interested parties | • The organisation's level of commitment and direction with respect to psychological health, safety, and wellbeing at work, as set out in policy statements, guidelines, objectives, and strategies |
| • The sharing of workplaces, resources, and equipment with other parties | • Other management systems adopted by the organisation that can interact with the management of psychosocial risks |
| • Customer and/or client requirements for service provision | • Size and nature of the organisation's workforce |
| • Economic conditions that can affect availability, duration, and location of work | • Characteristics of workers and the workforce |
| • The nature of work contracts, remuneration, employment conditions, and industrial relations | • Competence of workers to recognise psychosocial hazards and manage risks |
| • The demographics of workers who are available for work | • Locations of work |
| • Rapid technological changes | • Workers' terms and conditions |
| • Labour force mobility, creating greater diversity among workers with different backgrounds and cultures, and speaking different languages | • Adequacy and availability of resources |
| • The wider context of the geographical region affecting the organisation | |

What other factors matter? Understanding the needs and expectations of workers is also paramount.

Employers should know that their workers (and other stakeholders) have a variety of needs and expectations that can be influenced by psychosocial risks at work. Those include:

- Financial security

- Social interaction and support

- Inclusion, recognition, rewards, and accomplishment

- Personal development and growth

- Equal opportunity and fair treatment

Finally, in this age of mental health crisis, workplaces should update their safety management system as well as related operations and activities to address psychosocial risk.
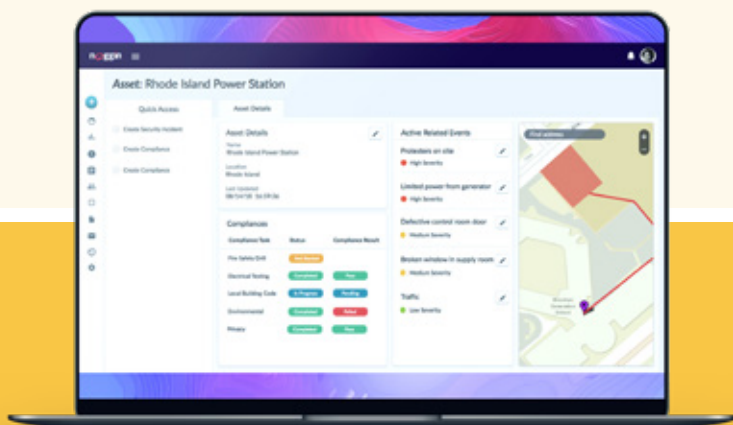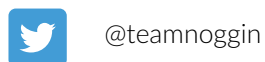
That might entail procuring mental health management software. Such a solution will help employers maintain a comprehensive view of the wellbeing of their workers. Through various assessments, checks, analytics, and resources, employers will therefore be able to manage the physical and mental wellbeing of personnel across various locations and programs – a key capability in this era of fragmented workplaces.

## Sources

i. *Dr. Samuel B Harvey et al, School of Psychiatry, University of New South Wales: Developing a mentally healthy workplace: A review of the literature: A report for the National Mental Health Commission and the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance. Available at http://affinityhealthhub.co.uk/d/ attachments/developing-a-mentally-healthy-workplace-final-november-2014-1476727013.pdf*

## Like what you read? Follow Noggin on social media

@teamnoggin          facebook.com/teamnoggin          linkedin.com/company/noggin-it

# noggin
## for Safety

To learn more,
visit: **www.noggin.io**
or contact: **sales@noggin.io**

Meet the next-generation tool for corporate crisis and business continuity management teams to collaborate, plan, track their response, and share information. Built on the Noggin Core platform, Noggin Safety gives response teams and decision makers the tools to know what's happening, collaborate quickly and effectively, make better decisions, and enact the right plans to take action when it counts the most.

The Noggin Safety solution pack is backed by the Noggin Library with hundreds of plans and best-practice workflows, out of the box, and installed in minutes.

MAR-112e