Creating a Mentally Healthy Workplace

Your Seven Point Plan

Lifeline

BUSINESS WESTERN SYDNEY

Seven Point Plan
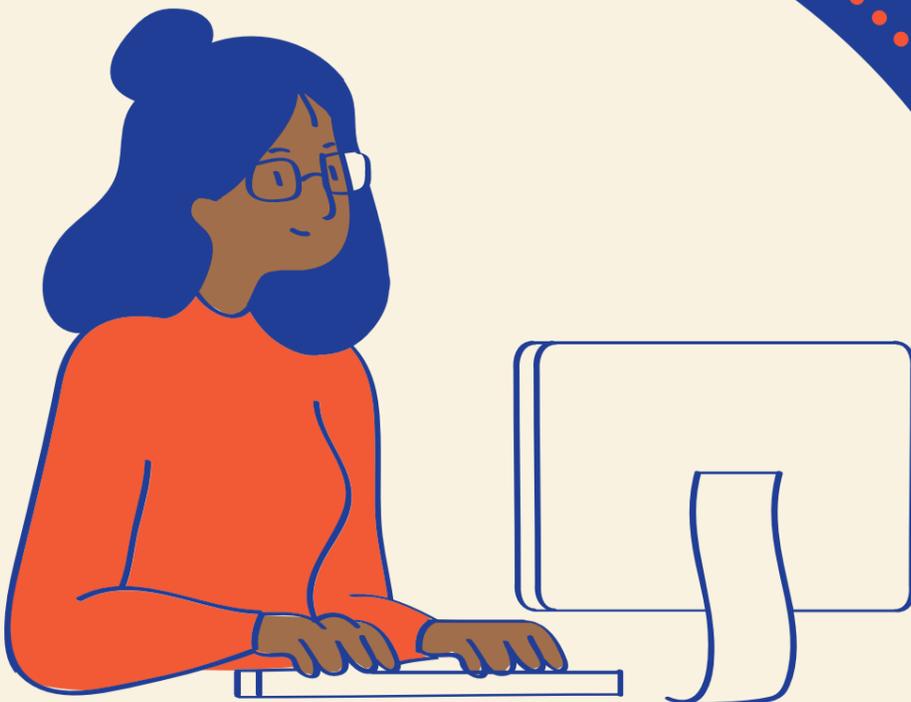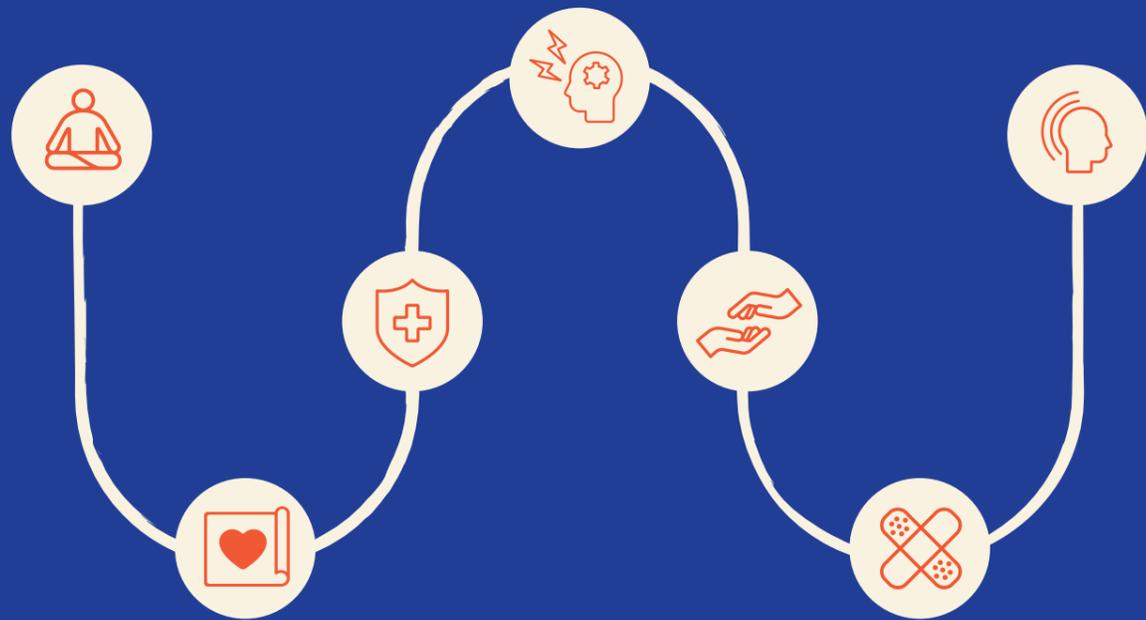
A Message from
David Borger

Executive Director
Business Western Sydney

As one of the region's leading business organisations, Business Western Sydney recognises the vital importance of mental health in the workplace. The pressures faced by businesses and their employees have never been more acute, particularly in Western Sydney. From the rising cost of living and doing business to the lingering impacts of the COVID pandemic, these challenges affect everyone in our community.

In response to those challenges, and in line with community expectations in an increasingly mental health-aware world, businesses are now subject to regulatory requirements. The SafeWork NSW Code of Practice for managing psychosocial hazards at work is a practical guide to how businesses can help safeguard — and enhance — the mental health of business owners and employees. Complementing that approach,

and in partnership with Lifeline Australia, we are pleased to support a Seven Point Plan to provide practical guidance and support for creating mentally healthy work environments.

By prioritising mental health, we can help our business community build resilience, support each other, and navigate these challenging times together. Let's work towards a future where every workplace in Western Sydney is a place of support and strength.

A Message from
Colin Seery

Chief Executive Officer
Lifeline Australia

Over the course of the last 62 years, Lifeline has reshaped and evolved during difficult times to remain at the forefront of crisis support and suicide prevention in Australia to this day.

Especially in the last few years, Lifeline has played a critical role through distressing events. The Bondi shopping centre tragedy, and shockingly frequent cases of domestic and family violence across the nation are two examples that have only served to highlight the importance of Lifeline as an ongoing source of support and community reassurance.

Today, Lifeline is supporting more Australians than ever before and working hard to promote the importance of mental wellbeing across the community.

I'm pleased that business recognises that mental wellbeing must be treated with the same level of importance as physical wellbeing. Not only is this the right thing to do, but it is also the smart thing to do. We know mentally healthy workplaces are more productive workplaces.

I hope this guide, co-produced by Lifeline Australia and Business Western Sydney, helps you by giving you the tools you need to create and maintain a mentally healthy workplace. By working together, as individuals, as communities and as businesses, we can help to improve the mental wellbeing of people across Australia.

Complementing anecdotal evidence of how financial distress drives the need for support, Lifeline reports that website traffic in January showed 26,000 searches for assistance — the highest on record.

Lifeline's website page on financial stress has also seen a dramatic increase in views and page users.

Lifeline crisis supporters' call notes show an increase in financial management being given as the reason help-seekers contacted Lifeline.

Lifeline saw an easing of distress around financial management following the easing of COVID restrictions, yet the figures for January to March this year are higher than the same quarter in previous years including during the COVID peak.

While Lifeline data doesn't capture who is calling, it is reasonable to assume some of the additional calls about financial distress are from people in small businesses.

The challenge of supporting mental health and wellbeing in Australia has been recognised widely in recent years leading to several key inquiries and reports.

These include the Productivity Commission's investigation into Mental Health, the Royal Commission into Mental Health in Victoria, and a report from the National Suicide Prevention Taskforce.

A key recommendation was the expansion of avenues through which support is provided extending beyond the mental health sector.

Business has a Key Role in Workplace Mental Health

With approximately five million people in Australia employed by small businesses and with adults estimated to spend approximately one third of their life at work, businesses are a key influence on mental health.

They have an incredible opportunity to support – at scale – the mental health and wellbeing of the nation.

In this paper, we cover the intrinsic benefits of mentally healthy businesses including increased productivity and innovation, and reduced staff turnover.

Australia faces a major challenge on how to support the mental health and wellbeing of a population affected by successive disasters including a one-in-100-year pandemic.

We know from the most recent National Mental Health and Wellbeing survey that more than 40% of adult Australians have experienced mental illness at some point in their lives.

This data shows the widespread nature of the issue and the need for comprehensive support systems.

Lifeline — Australia's largest and longest serving crisis support service — believes other challenges, such as the rising cost of living, have replaced stress factors associated with the pandemic.

Its crisis supporters are seeing an increase both in the number of people reporting cost of living concerns and the level of distress they are feeling.

The feedback from Lifeline's frontline aligns with other services that are being delivered for people in distress.

For example, one Lifeline Member also runs a statewide debt helpline. Anecdotal feedback from its call operators estimates that more than 70% of calls relate specifically to cost-of-living pressures.

The Depth and Breadth of the Seven Point Plan

Our Seven Point Plan covers a wide range of evidence-based actions for creating and maintaining a mentally healthy workplace.

These include:

Modelling mentally healthy behaviours such as self-care

Designing work to minimise harm

Increasing awareness and reducing stigma

Promoting help-seeking behaviour

Mental health and wellbeing are foundations for having healthy individuals, businesses and societies. Let's work together now to create a mentally healthy future.

Why Prioritise Mental Health and Wellbeing?

Businesses already face many challenges including staff recruitment and retention, supply chain issues and rising costs, and addressing cyber-crime risk.

In such a busy competitive space, what value is there for businesses to invest in mental health and wellbeing?

Bottom line

$11-12bn

It's estimated that businesses in Australia lose $11-12 billion annually due to mental ill health related issues including absenteeism, reduced performance and compensation claims (KPMG & Mental Health Australia, 2018).

$4 / $1

In NSW, it has been estimated that investing in mentally healthy workplaces achieves a $4 return for every $1 invested (Yu & Glozier, 2017).

Mentally healthy individuals

Mentally healthy workplaces have flow on effects to life outside of work.

They support outcomes for individuals promoting enhanced sense of purpose, feelings of acceptance within society and providing opportunities for development.

44%

Learned skills such as resilience and self-care support the roughly 44% of adults who experience mental ill health to recover faster (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022).

What this looks like for businesses

A study of more than 5,000 employees in a US customer service organisation found work performance was highest when staff reported high levels of psychological wellbeing and job satisfaction (Wright et al., 2007).

Businesses that invest in mental health are more productive and innovative and have better retention of the best and brightest people.
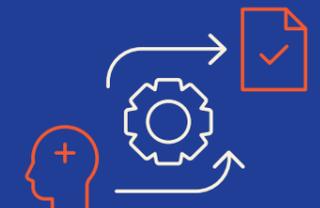
Businesses that apply a systematic approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing including risk identification and management are well placed to meet the requirements of the Work Health and Safety Act.

The **7** Point Plan

1. Model Mentally Healthy Behaviours and Self-Care

Research shows leaders' behaviour and communication practices, including social support and self-care, have a direct and indirect influence on employee health and wellbeing (Klug et al., 2019; Kranabetter & Niessen, 2017).

Practise what you preach – consistently adopt behaviours, whether to yourself or to others, to develop a mentally healthy workplace culture.

2. Design Workplaces that Minimise Harm

Good workplace design can minimise harm by eliminating or substituting threats to psychological safety.

Factors such as job strain resulting from a combination of low job control and high job demands can impact workplace burnout, distress and suicidal ideation.

They can be eliminated by encouraging employee participation in deciding how work is performed (Choi, 2018; Maglalang et al., 2021).

Substituting long workplace hours with safer workplace flexibility can reduce the likelihood of staff burnout (Maglalang et al, 2021).

Mental health audits can help identify and resolve threats to workers' mental health and wellbeing.
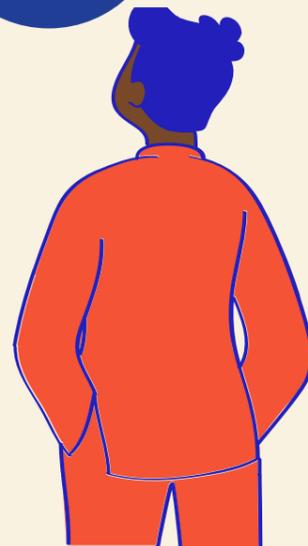
3. Embed Protective Factors

Workplaces shouldn't just aim to minimise harm but also strive to do good. They can promote positive aspects of work and worker capabilities.

Design psychologically safe systems and practices that allow employees to use their skills to be creative, gain a sense of accomplishment and interact with co-workers.

Develop anti-bullying policies, team-based interventions, management and leadership training and enhance organisational justice.

4. Enhance Personal Resilience

Workplaces can be stressful. Create an enabling environment encouraging employees to support their mental health and personal resilience when things get challenging.

Support employees by providing CBT-based stress management/resilience training particularly for those in high-risk occupations.

Coach and mentor employees by promoting self-care activities such as exercise, healthy eating habits, prioritising sleep, cultivating supportive relationships and taking regular breaks.

5. Promote and Facilitate Early Help-seeking

Workplaces have a key role in promoting and facilitating early help seeking. This is recognised as important in improving outcomes associated with mental ill-health.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) and workplace counselling can play a supportive role in a suite of workplace mental health and help-seeking promotion initiatives.

Evidence is emerging of the beneficial contribution of peer support programs where trained staff provide support to those around them (Agarwal et al., 2020; Ross et al., 2019).

Create a supportive work environment where help is given and received based on the principles of respect and shared responsibility.

6. Support Recovery from Mental Illness and Stressful Life Events

People experiencing mental ill-health can continue to contribute in the workplace although some changes might be needed to support them in their roles.

Indeed, work can play an important role in a person recovering their usual function and managing mental illness.

A range of evidence-based approaches can support employees including training managers and supervisors on how to support staff experiencing mental ill health and stressful life events.

These can include flexible workplace hours and leave arrangements and ensuring that the workplace is supportive and that no bullying can occur.

7. Increase Awareness of Mental Illness and Reduce Stigma

Actions supporting mental health in the workplace will be ineffective without increasing awareness of the complexity of mental ill health and its impacts.

Mental health training of employees and managers can improve knowledge, attitudes and intention to support others experiencing mental ill health at work.

This is particularly important to achieve an enabling environment where supportive behaviours are encouraged and normalised (Gayed et al., 2018).

Speak openly about mental ill health to address stigma issues and to build a mentally healthy workplace culture.

Promote Mental Health and Workplace Training

Workplace mental health and resilience training are important features of the seven point plan.

Most training options focus on increasing participants' knowledge and attitudes to mental health and wellbeing, enhancing skills to identify and respond to mental health issues, and self-care strategies to prevent burnout and promote overall wellbeing.

A variety of mental health training domains are backed by research evidence tuned to the needs, resources and objectives of a workplace

Management and Leadership Training

This equips managers and leaders with skills and knowledge to support their team members' mental wellbeing.

It enhances their understanding of mental health issues, improves their ability to recognise signs of distress and provides strategies to create a supportive and inclusive work environment.

Managers and supervisors with adequate training are more confident in supporting staff with their mental health needs reducing psychological distress among employees (Klug et al., 2019).

Resilience Training

This enhances employees' mental wellbeing, builds their resilience and equips them with strategies to cope with workplace stress, adversity and challenges.

Resilience training contains psycho education and stress inoculation to enhance wellbeing among people in high-risk populations without prior exposure to trauma (Brassington & Lomas, 2021).

Mental Health Education and First Aid

A specialised training program that provides employees with knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to recognise and respond to mental health issues in the workplace.

It equips individuals with necessary tools to provide initial support and assistance to someone experiencing a mental health crisis or challenge.

Evidence suggests for up to two years after mental health first aid training, participants retain knowledge, an attitude and an intention to support others with a mental health problem (Reavley et al., 2021).

Peer Support Training

Employees are trained to identify and respond to concerns and provide support to colleagues experiencing distress and mental health challenges.

It creates a supportive network in the workplace where employees can seek help from peers who have had a shared experience and have received specialised training.

Emerging research shows peer support training can improve employees' wellbeing and relationships in the workplace (Agarwal et al., 2020).
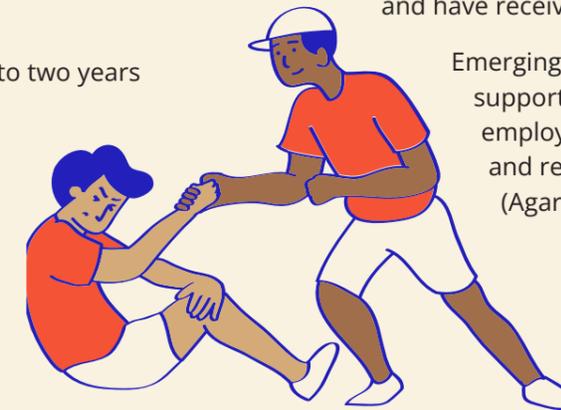
Workplace Mental Health Membership Organisations

Going it alone can be tough! Joining a workplace mental health membership organisation can connect with a supportive network of like-minded businesses and organisations also working to achieve better and more sustainable mental health outcomes.

Examples of member organisations are:

The Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance

An alliance of national organisations from business, union, community and government sectors seeking to lead change by promoting and creating mentally healthy workplaces. It works collaboratively to provide practical guidance to workplaces to create sustainable and measurable change in business practice.

Find out more : mentallyhealthyworkplacealliance.org.au

Corporate Mental Health Alliance

A member-based organisation which helps for-profit businesses create safe environments, empower leaders and drive mental health reform in the corporate sector. CMHA has 25 member organisations representing more than 500,000 Australian employees.

Find out more: cmhaa.org.au

Lifeline

We're here for you.

If you or someone you care for needs support or is thinking about suicide, please contact Lifeline.

☎ **13 11 14**
24 hours • 7 days

💬 **0477 13 11 14**
Lifeline Text
24 hours • 7 days

🖱 **lifeline.org.au**
Chat to a Crisis Supporter online
24 hours • 7 days