

# Respond to health and wellbeing concerns

Reduce the impact of ill health on staff and your business



Download this pocket sheet to access the linked resources.

Approximately 500,000 Australians sustain a work-related injury or illness each year and currently 1 in 2 Australian's have a chronic health condition, a number that is expected to rise. Access to early treatment for these conditions is important because it not only results in a better outcome for the initial condition, but can prevent the onset of additional conditions. Unfortunately, many Australian's with injury or ill-health do not access the support that they need due to issues of awareness, affordability, stigma and time constraints. Workplaces can be influential in encouraging and assisting workers to access appropriate help and supporting them with meaningful employment throughout the process.

## Detecting health concerns early

- ☐ Set up a reporting process for work and non-work related injuries. Make sure to train all staff on the process.\*
- ☐ Set up a process for thoroughly investigating the causes of work related injuries. Watch this webinar on **Human Factors Guide to Incident Investigation – Human Factors and Ergonomics Society of Australia** for ideas on how to do this.\*
- ☐ Make wellbeing check-ins a part of regular 1:1 reviews and let individuals know that it is ok to open up about their health and wellbeing if they choose to do so.
- ☐ Encourage workers to take stock of their health and wellbeing by performing an online **Brief Health Check** from SA Health, an online mental health assessment at **Head to Health**, or an online financial health check at **Get your Financial Wellbeing Score | ANZ**.
- ☐ Run on-site health checks or offer time off to attend an annual health check-up.
- ☐ Train workers to recognise and respond to co-worker health and wellbeing concerns. Mental health first aid, fatigue awareness training, domestic violence awareness training and peer support resources, such as **How to ask “Are you OK?” | R U OK?, How to support someone | Head to Health**, or **The Prevention of Violence against Women – for Workplaces** can be beneficial.
- ☐ Outline the purpose and scope of the help seeking pathways clearly to set reasonable expectations.
- ☐ Obtain worker input on the types of services that they would find valuable and be willing to engage with.
- ☐ Based on this information, establish a formal Early Intervention Program (EIP) for work and non-work related physical health conditions. **Use this template** for setting up this relationship.
- ☐ Establish an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to support employees experiencing mental health conditions.
- ☐ When setting up an EAP you should ask workers about what type of services they would be most likely to engage with eg. phone, face-to-face, online, chat based, etc. More information on **how to adopt better EAP practices**.
- ☐ In addition to or in lieu of an EAP you can direct your workers to **Head to Health** – a government run website. At Head to Health workers can undertake a self-assessment which will direct them to the most appropriate services for their situation. Most of the services are low or no cost. The website also contains information about general wellbeing and ways to cope with life stressors, such as financial concerns.
- ☐ Raise awareness about Medicare funded services on offer for individuals with chronic health conditions. These services require a GP referral and individuals may be eligible for up to 5 sessions with an allied health professional, 10 sessions with a mental health professional and 9 group sessions with an exercise physiologist or dietitian. **More information about these services**. All South Australian's can access free health coaching via **[www.getthehealthy.sa.gov.au](http://www.getthehealthy.sa.gov.au)**.

## Supporting individuals to access help

- ☐ Advise workers that you will be looking to establish help seeking pathways to support them with their health and wellbeing.

\*Legislative requirement

- Increase accessibility for culturally and linguistically diverse workers by pointing them towards **Multicultural Health Connect** and **Mind Your Health**. Here they can find culturally appropriate health care services and resources in their language.
- Promote the EAP and EIP in your workplace, and provide workers with clear instructions on how to access the services.
- Provide flexible working arrangements so that individuals can engage with the services that they require.
- Obtain de-identified statistics from your EAP and EIP providers to inform your 'protect' strategies. For example if the EAP is being used a lot for workload stress, you can take proactive steps to address workloads for all.
- Approximately 60% of individuals who are currently experiencing domestic violence are in paid employment. The workplace can be a safe haven for these individuals to disclose about their situation and seek support. To learn how you can better support individuals experiencing domestic violence review the following resources: **Family and domestic violence at the workplace | Safe Work Australia, Employer guide to family and domestic violence | Fair Work Ombudsman, Workplace Accreditation | White Ribbon Australia, Workplace Equality and Respect Home | Our Watch**.
- Where necessary you can direct individuals to the following supports: **Home | 1800RESPECT** or **Help lines | White Ribbon Australia**. In addition to the immense personal and societal impact, domestic violence is estimated to cost the Australian economy \$22 billion per year.
- Financial stress costs organisations in Australia \$66.8 billion per year in lost productivity through absenteeism and distraction. Financial stress also has a cyclical relationship with physical and mental health, whereby financial stress can result in poor physical and mental health (through stress and poverty) and poor health can result in a reduced ability to earn income (compounding financial stress). Financial wellbeing is an often neglected, but essential, component of employee wellbeing. Additionally, the cost of living crisis now means that most people living in poverty in Australia have at least 1 family member in full-time employment. While receiving a living wage is an important part of financial wellbeing, other skills such as budgeting, saving and understanding how to manage money are vital. Addressing both can be of great benefit to your business. Review the following resources to further understand how you can support the financial wellbeing of your workers: **State of Employee Financial Wellbeing | Wagestream**,

**How to build a financial wellbeing program | Wagestream, Financial Inclusion Action Plan – FIAP and Employee financial wellbeing Action Guide | Good Shepherd.**

- For workers experiencing financial hardship you can encourage engagement with these services: **National Debt Helpline, Moneysmart, Financial Services | Good Shepherd**.

## Facilitating continuation of work

Remaining at a good workplace is very good for our health as it provides structure, connection, purpose and financial stability. Many workers desire to remain at work while navigating their health conditions and while some can continue their usual duties others may require temporary or ongoing modifications in order to cope. Actively supporting workers throughout the work continuation or return to work process is not only a primary determinant of a successful return to work outcome, but also has a positive effect on workplace culture as it is a tangible display of care. This can encourage other workers to raise and address their concerns too, resulting in a healthier and more productive workforce.

- If the injury, illness or disability is work-related then a clear procedure, in accordance with the **Return to Work Act 2014**, must be in place and followed. You can compare your current process against the best practice model: **Injury management self-audit tool** or contact ReturnToWorkSA's Employer Risk team or Employer Education Advisors for tailored assistance: **Employer education and support**.\*
- For further information on effective return to work programs visit **Return to Work Programs: A work design approach – Thrive at Work**.
- For non-work related conditions, you should establish a clear fitness for work process that favours remain at work or return to work options where reasonably practicable. **Fact sheet and reference guide for managing non-work-related health conditions**.\*
- The process could include: consulting with the worker regarding their preferences, obtaining information from their medical practitioners that clearly outlines their capacity for work (with appropriate permission), undertaking a fitness for work assessment and writing up a return to work plan that contains appropriate duties, timeframes, required supports and steps for modifying the plan as needed. **More information about your obligations as an employer**.