



# Striving for mentally healthy workplaces

# About us



Consult Australia is the industry association representing consulting firms operating in the built and natural environment sectors. These services include design, engineering, architecture, technology, survey, legal and management solutions for individual consumers through to major companies in the private and public sector including local, state and federal governments. We represent an industry comprising some 48,000 firms across Australia, ranging from sole practitioners through to some of Australia's top 500 firms with combined revenue exceeding \$40 billion a year.

Some of our member firms include:



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# Executive summary

Our wider society has long failed to recognise the importance of mental health, particularly in the workplace. While our understanding of mental health has improved over recent years, significant stigmas around mental health are still common. These stigmas are often perpetuated by stereotypes or simply a lack of understanding. They limit our ability to create open and supportive environments, where people are willing to manage and discuss concerns, and to seek appropriate support when needed. Mental health stigmas can only be removed if industry, governments and society all work together.

Caring about the mental health of our employees is the right thing to do. People are critical to the services provided by consulting firms operating in the built and natural environment. To this end, our sector should be looking at the mental health of employees through the following principles:

- 1** We have a social obligation to support the mental health of our staff;
- 2** We have legal obligations to put in place appropriate measures to prevent and respond to mental health concerns; and
- 3** We can improve the performance and productivity of our sector by focusing on creating workplaces that thrive.

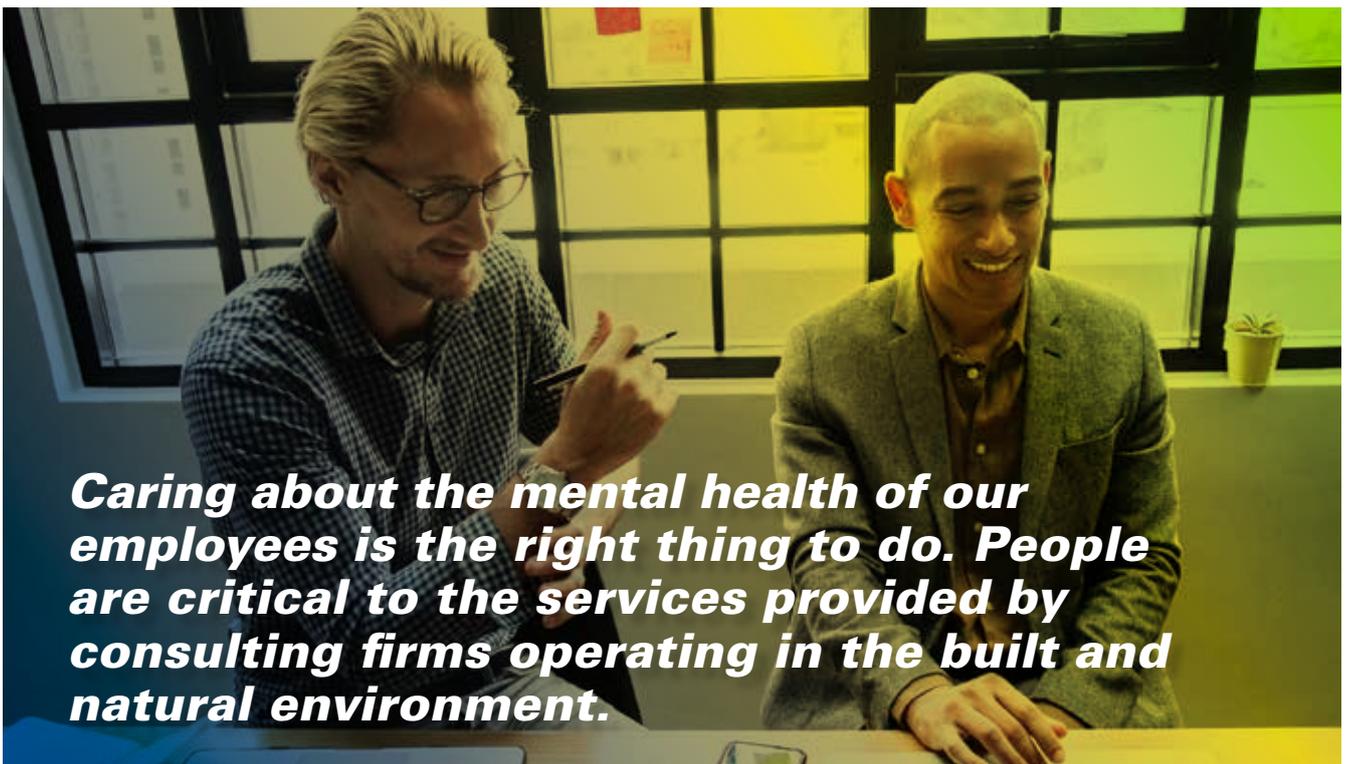
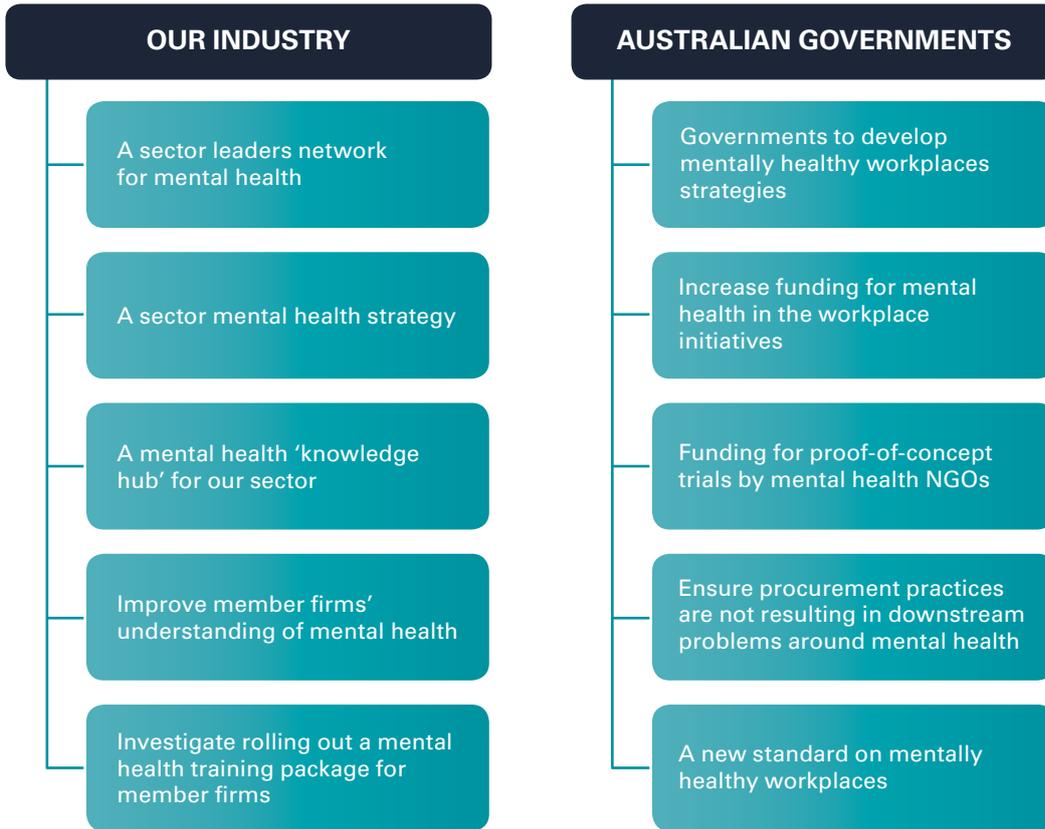
While most workplaces have a number of measures in place to support mental health, research highlights a significant divide between the proportion of employees and employers who believe their workplace has appropriate practices and resources in place. This suggests the current approach to mental health in workplaces is not cutting through, and more can be done to support the wellbeing of employees.

Research and practices by non-government organisations (NGOs), universities, in other sectors and internationally provides useful insights into how mental health measures in the workplace can deliver real benefits. Here we are seeing mental health measures that do not simply focus on addressing concerns and providing support. Instead, mental health measures also focus on encouraging employees to 'flourish' and building resilience to limit the severity of mental health concerns. A focus on positive mental health is also delivering business performance benefits, by improving productivity and delivering a competitive edge – a thriving organisation.

Many Consult Australia member firms have also started to realise a traditional approach to mental health is not cutting through. As outlined in case studies included in this report, these member firms are leading the way by improving the effectiveness of mental health measures by taking a strategic approach informed by research. A key objective from this approach is creating a work environment that builds the confidence and acceptance of employees seeking help by removing perceived barriers and simply being open about mental health. This report outlines how the learnings from these examples can be scalable across consulting firms of all sizes operating in the built and natural environment.

This report aims to continue our sector's journey to creating mentally healthy workplaces. To this end, a number of recommendations are outlined in this report for our industry and Australian governments. These recommendations are summarised in the table opposite.

Table 1: Consult Australia’s recommendations for our industry and Australian governments



# Context

Businesses have a social obligation to create mentally healthy workplaces for their employees. With one in five Australians experiencing mental health conditions in a given year<sup>1</sup> and the same proportion of workers having taken time off work because they felt mentally unwell,<sup>2</sup> the prominence of mental illnesses in the workplace means the topic must be a priority. While we have improved our understanding of mental health conditions, our approach to creating an open environment to discuss mental health and providing the right support in the workplace is still lagging behind.

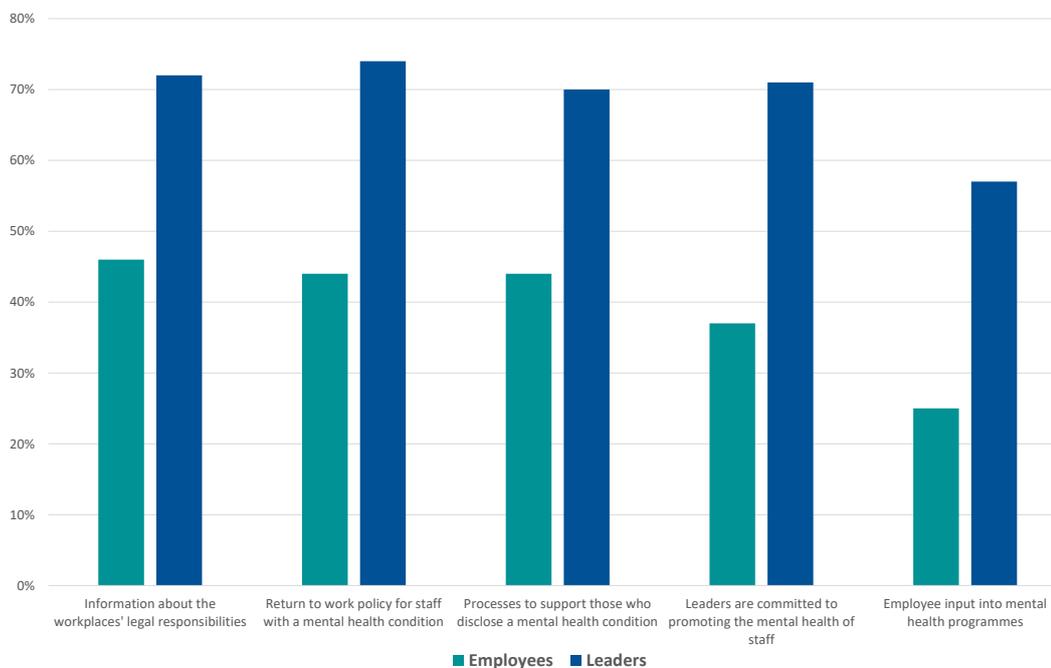
By their nature, workplaces can have an impact on mental health or bring concerns to the surface, with many people spending a significant amount of their time at work while managing day-to-day pressures that challenge our mental wellbeing. Workplace factors are considered to be potential triggers for mental health concerns. Three quarters of Australian employees believe the workplace has a role in providing support to someone experiencing difficulties.<sup>3</sup>

Beyondblue, a leading mental health NGO, highlights the workplace as an ideal setting to promote and support mental health from a policy perspective. Workplaces provide easy access to a large number of people, there is existing infrastructure in place (such as communication channels and networks) and they provide a cost effectiveness approach compared to clinical and community-based programmes.<sup>4</sup>

Aside from a social obligation, creating a mentally healthy workplace can result in productivity benefits and make the workplace more attractive to staff. A PwC report from 2014, titled *Creating mentally healthy workplaces*, estimates the cost of inaction on mental health from absenteeism, reduced productivity and compensation claims alone cost Australian workplaces approximately \$11 billion per year. PwC argue that if these costs could be reduced by one third as a result of effective actions, there would be an average return of \$2.30 for every dollar invested by an employer.<sup>5</sup>

However, the challenge facing many employers is delivering the right policies, procedures and practices to create a mentally healthy workplace. A Beyondblue research report from 2014, titled *State of workplace mental health in Australia*, highlights this challenge. 81% of organisational leaders surveyed indicate their workplace has one or more actions in place to support mental health, but many employees (35%) were unaware if resources exist, or they do not have access to them, highlighting a significant knowledge gap between leaders and employees.<sup>6</sup> A breakdown of the knowledge gap outlined by Beyondblue is below.

**Table 2: Percentage of employees and organisational leaders who believe their workplace has specific practices and resources to promote mental health (source: Beyondblue)<sup>7</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> Black Dog Institute, Facts and figures about mental health

<sup>2</sup> Beyondblue, State of Workplace Mental Health in Australia (2014)

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> PwC, Creating a mentally healthy workplace: return on investment analysis (2014)

<sup>6</sup> Beyondblue, State of Workplace Mental Health in Australia (2014)

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

This report will identify the types of effective actions consulting firms operating in the built and natural environment can put in place to meet their social obligations to provide mentally healthy workplaces and to help improve the productivity of their business as a result. These findings will be identified through a review of current mental health challenges facing workplaces in Australia, exploring best practices within the sector, and investigating effective approaches in other sectors and internationally. The report will conclude with a series of recommendations for how industry and government can both work together to support mentally healthy workplaces in our sector.

## The impact of mental health on society

Mental health underpins the success of society. Mental health has been defined by the World Health Organization as ‘a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution in her or his community.’<sup>8</sup> The World Health Organization’s definition stresses the positive dimensions of mental health, not merely the absence of illness or disorders, and its value to individuals and their community.

In regard to mental health conditions, the Australian Health Ministers’ Forum has defined these as ‘... a clinically diagnosable disorder that significantly interferes with an individual’s cognitive, emotional or social abilities.’<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, mental health conditions can be short or long-term and includes anxiety disorders, affective or mood disorders and substance use disorders.<sup>10</sup>

Mental health conditions have long been subject to a great deal of stigma across society that are often perpetuated by stereotypes. This stigmatisation can lead to an impact on the self-esteem of people suffering with mental illnesses and lead to them not seeking treatment or withdrawing from society.

Mental health conditions can be mild, lasting only a few weeks, to moderate and severe, impacting a person’s ability to function day-to-day. As the impacts of mental health conditions can vary across a broad continuum or range, people can experience symptoms without having a mental health disorder. Our mental health is not fixed or static, but changes over time based on own personal range in response to different stresses.<sup>12</sup>

Our surrounding environment and personal circumstances can significantly impact and influence our mental health and wellbeing in both a positive and negative way. While many individuals are able to manage mental health conditions well and without a significant impact on their lives,<sup>13</sup> some conditions developed from specific experiences can lead to a range of impacts on different areas in our lives. This highlights the importance of having an open environment where individuals feel comfortable discussing concerns and seeking support across their touchpoints with society (such as with friends and family, at sport clubs and in the workplace), particularly as a means of countering some of the social stigmas across society.



<sup>8</sup> World Health Organization, Mental Health: A State of Wellbeing (2014)

<sup>9</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results (2007)

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Healthdirect Australia, Mental Health Stigma

<sup>12</sup> Heads Up, Mental Health Conditions

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

## Mental health conditions in the workplace

Mental health conditions are a major concern in Australian workplaces due to the negative impacts on individual employees and businesses. In addition to the breadth of people who experience mental health conditions, the severity of some cases in the workplace is also a concern. Each year over 7,200 employees successfully receive compensation for work-related mental health conditions, representing a combined cost of \$540 million. These claims usually result in more time off work than other claims, with a typical average of 15.3 weeks compared to an overall average 5.5 weeks.<sup>14</sup>

Safe Work Australia have identified a number of traits of job types that may have an adverse impact on mental health, particularly during prolonged or high exposure. These are:

- High or low demand jobs;
- Poor support and workplace relationships;
- Low role clarity;
- Poor organisational change management;
- Poor organisational justice;
- Poor environmental conditions, remote or isolated work; and
- Violent or traumatic events.<sup>15</sup>

The 'always on' culture of flexible working and from technology improving our connectivity to the workplace can also exacerbate the impact of these job traits. A University of Western Australia and PwC report, titled *The opportunity to thrive*, highlights how technology and flexible working can sometimes have an opposite effect to intentions and instead promote a poor work balance by removing physical barriers between the work and home. The report argues that these tools need to be complimented with a redesign or a cultural change in the way people work.<sup>16</sup>

While the job traits that may have an adverse impact on mental health are relevant to a number of sectors, prevalence rates of mental health conditions can vary by industry type. For example, additional research from PwC indicates the overall prevalence of mental health conditions is highest in the financial and insurance sectors with 33% of people, while depression has a high prevalence in the professional and technical services sector and anxiety conditions have a high prevalence in the IT industry.<sup>17</sup>

Unplanned absences, staff turnover, withdrawal and presenteeism, and poor quality work have also been identified by Safe Work Australia as potential links to work related stress, which in turn can lead to work-related mental health conditions.<sup>18</sup>

## The current role of governments in supporting mentally healthy workplaces

The role of governments across Australia in supporting mentally healthy workplaces has evolved over time. Governments, in their legislative and administrative capacity, have helped influence a change in the public's perception and understanding of mental health and they have also responded to a cultural shift in the expectation for mentally healthy workplaces.

This section breaks down the key roles of governments in supporting mental health in the workplace, and particularly focuses on the overarching role of the Australian Government.

### Work health and safety requirements

Work health and safety (WHS) legislation across Australia, managed by state and territory governments, determines health to include both physical and psychological factors. This means businesses have the primary duty under WHS legislation to manage risks associated with hazards that could result in psychological harm. This includes the need to take 'reasonably practicable' steps to:

- Provide and maintain a work environment without risk to psychological health and safety;
- Provide and maintain safe processes of work;
- Monitor the psychological health of workers and conditions in the workplace;
- Consult staff on WHS matters; and
- Provide information, training, instruction and supervision so workers can perform work activities in a psychologically safe manner.

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<sup>14</sup> Safe Work Australia, Mental Health

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> PwC, Creating a mentally healthy workplace: return on investment analysis (2014)

Furthermore, all employees have a duty to take reasonable care of their own, and not adversely affect other people's, psychological health and safety.<sup>19</sup>

To help provide consistency across Australia on WHS legal responsibilities for employers and employees, uniform WHS legislation was developed in 2011. The uniform approach to WHS legislation has been implemented in all states and territories, with the exception of Victoria and Western Australia where there are minor variations.<sup>20</sup>

## Disability discrimination restrictions

The Australian Government's Disability Discrimination Act 1992 includes a number of employment protections for people living with a disability. The Australian Human Rights Commission notes the definition of disability in this legislation is broad and includes both permanent and temporary mental health conditions.<sup>21</sup> The legislation makes it unlawful to discriminate against anyone with a disability in the recruitment process, in the terms and conditions of employment, and for promotions, transfers, training or other benefits.

## Safe Work Australia

Safe Work Australia was established in 2008 by the Australian Government to develop national policy on WHS and workers' compensation. The agency is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and state and territory governments across Australia.

Through Safe Work Australia's role managing the uniform WHS legislative framework and the national WHS strategy, a key role for the organisation is driving the public debate on improvements to WHS outcomes. The agency also takes the lead on developing an evidence base to inform the evaluation of current practices, such as the mental wellbeing of staff in the workplace.

## The Fair Work Commission

The Fair Work Commission is the national workplace relations tribunal in Australia established in 2009 under the *Fair Work Act 2009*. It is an independent body established by the Australian Government to carry out a range of industrial relations functions, including:

- Providing a safety net of minimum conditions in the workplace;
- Dealing with applications in relation to unfair dismissals;
- Resolving a range of workplace disputes through conciliation, mediation and public hearings; and
- Functions relating to workplace determinations, equal remuneration and other general protections.

The *Fair Work Act 2009* and supporting regulations provide a number of protections for workers with mental illnesses. These include the inclusion of mental health conditions as a type of injury or illness covered by personal leave, enabling flexible working conditions and arrangements, and further protections against discrimination and workplace fairness.

The Fair Work Commission has investigated a number of cases on the workplace processes around mental health, which have resulted in compensation fines for breaches. One example is a failure to follow due process in a dismissal by ensuring an employee's mental health were considered in performance management arrangements, return to work plans and ultimately the dismissal.<sup>22</sup>

## National Mental Health Commission (NMHC)

NMHC was established in 2012 by the Australian Government as an independent agency to promote mental health and prevent mental illness and suicide. The NMHC provides insight, advice and evidence on ways to continuously improve mental health and suicide prevention systems and seeks to drive these changes.

NMHC produces a number of reports on mental health and suicide prevention, including national report cards, spotlight reports on prominent issues and a review of mental health services and programmes.

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<sup>19</sup> Safe Work Australia, Preventing psychological injury under work health and safety laws: fact sheet

<sup>20</sup> Safe Work Australia, Model WHS Laws

<sup>21</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, Workers with mental illness: a practical guide for managers

## Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)

AHRC is Australia's national human rights institution established in 1986 and was expanded and renamed in 2008. AHRC is an independent agency of the Australian Government, responsible for investigating infringements to Australia's anti-discrimination legislation, including the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, and promoting solutions to human rights issues by engaging with Australian governments and the public.

As part of AHRC's role managing the Australian Government's disability discrimination framework, the agency develops support material for employers and employees on improving how workplaces can support mental health and wellbeing.

## NSW Mentally Healthy Workplaces Strategy 2018-2022

The NSW Government has developed a comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing mental health in the workplace. This strategy, released in June 2018, also represents a \$55 million commitment over a four-year period to improving the mental health of NSW workers.

The strategy has a vision is for NSW employers and workers taking effective action to create mentally healthy workplaces and sets the target of more than 90,000 NSW businesses (around 12%) meeting this vision by 2022. The strategy aims to achieve this target through four streams: awareness raising, evidence-informed interventions, research and programmes. The evidence informed interventions will focus on small-micro businesses and high-risk industries, including the professional, scientific and technology sector.

## Other support tools for mentally healthy workplaces

In addition to the role of governments, there are also a number of independent NGOs that play an important hands-on role in raising awareness and providing practical solutions to support mental health in the workplace. Some key NGOs who play an active role in supporting mental health in the workplace are listed below.

### Beyondblue

Beyondblue was established in 2000 to provide a national focus and community leadership to reduce the impact of depression, suicide, anxiety disorders and other related mental conditions in the community. The founding Chairman was Jeff Kennett, former Victorian Premier, and the current Chair is The Hon Julia Gillard AC, former Prime Minister of Australia. The organisation works in partnership with workplaces, community organisations, health services, schools, and the media, as well as individuals with mental health conditions.

A recent focus of Beyondblue is on influencing behavioural change and service innovation. The organisation looks to identify gaps in existing services and to pilot potential solutions through funding from non-government sources. From the pilots, Beyondblue uses the evidence of success to attract government support to scale up and to embed the approach into the broader system. One example of a successful service innovation is The Way Back Support Service which addressed a gap in providing ongoing assistance after a suicide attempt.

In 2014, Beyondblue and the Heads Up initiative released a report titled *State of workplace mental health in Australia* which surveyed 1,126 workers to provide a snapshot of how mental health is perceived in the workplace. The key finding of the report was mentally healthy workplaces are as important to Australian employees as physically safe workplaces, however workplaces are not meeting their expectation.<sup>23</sup>

Beyondblue also provides a range of material to better inform the community about mental health and how to support someone with a mental health condition.

Beyondblue resources to support mental health in the workplace are available at: [beyondblue.org.au/about-us/about-our-work/workplace-mental-health](https://beyondblue.org.au/about-us/about-our-work/workplace-mental-health).

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<sup>22</sup> Cooper Grace Ward Lawyers, Fair Work Commission criticises HR model and dealings with employees suffering mental illness (2018)



***A mental health strategy needs a strong, visible and long-term commitment from senior leaders.***

## **Lifeline**

Lifeline is a crisis support service established in 1963. Lifeline provides a free service on suicide prevention, mental health support and other related support by telephone, face-to-face and online. The organisation is supported by a number of volunteer crisis supporters.

In addition to crisis support services, lifeline also runs national community campaigns to raise funds and promote awareness. Initiatives include Lifeline's stress down day, the 'out of the shadows and into the light' fun walk, and 'Liptember'.

Further information on Lifeline is available at: [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au).

## **R U OK? Day**

'R U OK? Day' is a national action day focused on encouraging people to have regular and meaningful conversations about mental health. The initiative was founded in 2009 by Gavin Larkin, who chose to champion the cause after experiencing suicide in his family.

R U OK? Day occurs annually on the second Thursday in September. With Gavin Larkin passing away from cancer in 2011, Gavin has left a legacy of a national conversation movement that is supporting Australians with the skills and confidence to reach out to those struggling with life.

The R U OK? Day Foundation have developed material to support conversations about mental health in the workplace. This material is available at: [ruok.org.au/work](http://ruok.org.au/work).

## **Black Dog Institute**

Black Dog Institute was founded in 2002 and is a facility for research, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mood disorders such as depression and bipolar disorder. The institute provides a number of clinical resources to help individuals better understand mental health conditions and runs a number of workplace mental health and wellbeing training programmes.

Black Dog Institute's prides itself on its unique model of operating by integrating mental health research, clinical care and education to deliver effective outcomes in the community.

Black Dog Institute publish a range of research material on mental illness that can be found at: [blackdoginstitute.org.au/research](http://blackdoginstitute.org.au/research). Additionally, various training and education support programmes are available at: [blackdoginstitute.org.au/education-training](http://blackdoginstitute.org.au/education-training).

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<sup>23</sup> Beyondblue, State of Workplace Mental Health in Australia (2014)

# Current initiatives at Consult Australia member firms

Many Consult Australia members have introduced workplace initiatives to support the mental health of their employees.

A common theme behind why many consulting firms operating in the built and natural environment are implementing these steps is the desire to improve the livelihood of employees, to make it easier for staff to address any mental health concerns in the workplace, and to improve the overall performance of the business as a result.

A trend from the initiatives shared by Consult Australia member firms is an objective to create a working environment that builds the confidence of employees to independently seek help in the workplace if they are experiencing mental illness. The focus here is removing barriers, particularly from the employee's 'on-the-ground' perspective, to being open about mental health and using the support measures available.

These initiatives also recognise the importance of training and providing support to 'frontline' managers and other operational leaders in consulting firms. Managers and operational leaders are in the best position to embed a change around the perception of mental health in the workplace and to have a conversation with people who may be struggling with mental illness. A focus on embedding support within existing management structure highlights how mental illnesses can be best managed through existing relationships and through everyday circumstances, particularly at a first response stage.

Another theme of the case studies shared by Consult Australia member firms is the development of an overarching strategy to inform the range of targeted initiatives aimed at creating mentally healthy workplaces. This highlights how measures are underpinned by considerable research and all form part of a connected approach to improving mental health in the workplace. These strategies have also allowed some Consult Australia members to also develop performance measures for their initiatives, which provides a valuable insight into their effectiveness and to continuously improving workplace practices.

These initiatives also recognise the importance of driving cultural changes in the workplace. A cultural change around mental health and stigmas must be championed from the top through senior leaders and embedded by 'frontline' managers and other operational leaders. This change is instrumental to ensuring staff are comfortable seeking support with any mental health concerns and is key to a mentally healthy workplace.

While these case studies provide good examples of the positive approaches by Consult Australia member firms to creating mentally healthy workplaces, these initiatives do not yet appear to be as comprehensive, prevalent and entrenched across the wider sectors. These examples therefore highlight the important steps the wider sector can put in place to improve how mental health is handled in the workplace and the benefits comprehensive initiatives can offer to the performance of the business.

Below are case studies on mental health initiatives from the following Consult Australia member firms:

- Tonkin Consulting;
- Aurecon;
- Jacobs;
- SMEC;
- Golder;
- Arcadis; and
- AECOM.



***A cultural change around mental health and stigmas must be championed from the top through senior leaders and embedded by 'frontline' managers and other operational leaders.***

### Case study 1: Tackling mental health at Tonkin Consulting



At Tonkin Consulting, we strive to provide our staff with a healthy workplace. We want our staff to grow, develop and be healthier as a result of the time they spend working. Providing a mentally healthy workplace is critical to achieving this objective.

Tonkin Consulting's CEO, Gerry Doyle, is open about his battles with depression and anxiety and has used his experiences as a talking point with staff to try and break down the stigma associated with mental health. By regularly talking about mental health issues, we are trying to make it OK for people in the business to discuss how they are feeling and if they need help.

To support this, our people managers have been trained in how to have a conversation with someone who may be struggling with personal issues. Being a small organisation, we are able to offer the opportunity for any staff member to talk one on one with the CEO about his experiences or about where they are in their lives. By talking about what is going on, others are able to assist and provide support. Suffering in silence is just suffering.

Tonkin Consulting offers all staff access to an Employee Assistance Provider (EAP). The EAP is available for all staff to contact directly and staff can book up to three appointments completely anonymously. When someone talks to one of our people managers or CEO about their challenges, they will always offer the opportunity for the individual to meet with the EAP. We found that by encouraging people to attend the EAP and by enabling all staff to book into the EAP without asking for approval, usage of the service increased significantly.

The final part of our mentally healthy workplace strategy relates to how we do our work and the teams that we build. We strive to provide a workplace where people connect with their teams and can rely on their colleagues for support. We also offer all staff flexible working arrangements so that you can manage what you need to do in your life as well as possible. We understand that everyone has a life outside of work. Being able to manage their lives to get what they need done helps them to feel supported and happy. This ultimately leads to a friendly and productive work environment for our people at Tonkin Consulting.

## Case study 2: Aurecon's Mind Matters Program



Aurecon's employees not only matter to us but they also matter to someone else. Our health and safety strategy has been created with a strong focus on health, safety and wellness as a way of being, not just something to comply with. To complement our health and safety strategy, we introduced our "because people depend on you" and "#mywhy" to really get to the heart and minds of our people.

Our mental health program, 'Mind Matters' was established as a result of both our people and health and safety teams across Australia and New Zealand reporting increased exposure to mental health issues. This was the trigger that led us to reach out to Beyondblue and undertake further research into mental ill health.

Given the statistics we researched, it was evident that the vast majority of our employees would be impacted by mental ill health either directly or indirectly at some point during their career with Aurecon.

The overwhelming statistics faced by all of us is something we took notice of and have actively tried to do something about.

### What did we do?

Aurecon formed a mental health committee in January 2015 and Mind Matters was born. The program's initial objectives were to:

- raise awareness of mental ill health and its impact on the workplace;
- provide mental health first aid; and
- reduce stigma through understanding.

At the heart of our program has been the integration of Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA) across our business. We currently have over 90 MHFAs located across Australia and New Zealand with the aim of ensuring we have MHFA's in every office. MHFA teaches the same skills for mental illness as the basic first aid uses for someone experiencing a physical health problem.

We took this approach as we believed having MHFAs on the ground across the business would aid our objective of raising awareness and understanding of mental ill health. Our MHFAs create opportunities to open discussions on mental health, as well as having skills and knowledge to recognise the signs and symptoms of mental illness and to initiate conversations with people who may be experiencing mental ill health.

We have also completed line manager education and awareness sessions, another important initiative given it is highly likely a line manager will supervise an employee with mental illnesses at some point during their career. Our aim was to instil confidence in line managers about having conversations with those that they recognise may be struggling and that those people know where to go to for help.

We are also focusing on the education of all employees in mental health and the recognition of signs and symptoms and again trying to instil confidence to have a discussion and/or know where to go for help.



### What's next?

For Aurecon, we see the next horizon focusing on the prevention side of mental health. This follows significant investment into generating greater understanding and reducing stigma.

We have also refreshed our Mind Matters Committee to ensure we have representation and reach from across all levels and functions of our business. This not only helps with diversity of thought, but ensures our continued mental health journey is aligned to the needs of our people.

## Case study 3: Jacobs ANZ mental health journey

**JACOBS**® Jacobs has been implementing mental health initiatives over the past 12 years. During that time, our over-riding goal for these initiatives in Australia and New Zealand has been that they would create a working environment where our people can feel comfortable to ask for help.

Our mental health initiatives started with awareness raising through community events such as Movember, but as we, as an organisation, became more aware, we saw the need to do more to protect our people and to care for them if they were to experience a mental illness.

We stepped up the awareness raising with workshops run by Beyondblue for all staff. We also partnered with Beyondblue to implement training for people managers to help them to better identify the signs of stress-related mental illness in the workplace. Through these initiatives, we realised that mental illness is common in the wider community (between one in four and one in six Australians and New Zealanders will experience a mental illness at some stage in their lives and this is higher for professional services firms). It would be naive to think that Jacobs would be immune from these sorts of statistics in our workforce.

### A change in mindset

So rather than thinking we can prevent mental illness in our workforce, we sought to normalise it. We moved the dial from being surprised at incidences of mental illness to expecting them. We continued to put measures in place to prevent working at Jacobs being the cause of mental illness in our people but also focused on what we could do to care for our people when the wider pressures of life were impacting on the mental health of our staff and/or their family members.

Like many organisations, Jacobs engaged an EAP to provide counselling services for employees. We also extended those services to direct family members of staff. We found that the utilisation of the EAP service increased as leadership in Jacobs ANZ spoke more openly about mental health. This included some members of leadership sharing their personal stories of their own battles with mental illness or those of family members. We have also had staff who have used the EAP service, volunteer to tell their story to demonstrate the value that EAP provides.

Over the years we have brought the discussion of mental health into new staff inductions so that on day one, new staff know that this is a key issue and that leadership is committed to helping staff. We have come a long way in reducing the stigma associated with mental illness but there is still a long way to go. There is still concern from some staff if they “put up their hand” and ask for help that it will be seen as a weakness or it will be a career limiting move. Continued visible leadership is needed to dispel these fears.

### Proactive measures

Our training for our people has matured to be more focused on effective management of mental health through a series of sessions:

- Building resilience for all employees;
- Building resilience for managers; and
- Critical mental incident for managers.



These sessions come under our ‘*Mental Health Matters*’ program. This program crosses over with our Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) program under the Disability portfolio. We positioned mental health in this way because we didn’t want it to be just in the realm of HSE and/or HR. The focus of our D&I portfolios is to create an environment where people can bring their whole self to work. For so long, the stigma of mental illness resulted in exclusion rather than inclusion. In having it as an important component of one of our D&I portfolios, the focus changes to developing mechanisms and initiatives that include people with mental illnesses.

A program that originated in Jacobs UK that Jacobs ANZ is supporting is the *Positive Mental Health Champions* initiative. This program trains staff to be a first port of call in each office on mental health issues. Just like having a safety champion for each office.



Jacobs recently partnered with Medibio to use its Mental Health Check-in process. The check-in has been a hugely successful initiative. It has added objectivity to what we always suspected and has given our people a great tool to maintain their mental health or a plan to help them address the mental illness they are experiencing.

Had we used the statistics from the use of the EAP to estimate the percentage of our workforce suffering a mental illness, the estimate would have been less than 1.5% of our workforce. This is so far off the societal norm of between 20-30%. The Medibio check-in tool encouraged a much higher participation rate and opened our eyes to the real issues facing our staff. Some of the findings that came out of the Check-in were:

- Around 1,000 of our Australian staff participated in the check-in, which represents about 20% of our workforce in Australia. About 25% of that cohort were found to be experiencing moderate to high levels of clinical depression or anxiety. Only about 2% were being treated by a medical practitioner. Of the 25% of participants, 77% knew something was wrong but were unaware they had such a condition.
- For some of these people, the report they received from Medibio was the catalyst for discussing their issues for the first time with their families and having a plan to bring them back to full health.
- While the results are totally confidential, the fact that we implemented this initiative in Jacobs and the open culture we have tried to create, I have had a number of people contact me for a chat about their experience with mental illness and how they feel OK to talk about it in the workplace.
- The check-in run by Medibio has been a hugely successful initiative. It has added objectivity to what we always suspected and has given our people a great tool to either maintain their mental health or a plan to help them address the mental illness they are experiencing.

The findings, while confidential for the individuals, are aggregated up to a dashboard to better assist leadership in developing strategies to better meet the needs of our people. This initiative was presented to Jacobs' global leadership. It is now being implemented as a global initiative with the first wave being to make the check-in available to all staff in Asia-Pacific, India and the Middle East regions. Being the first engineering and environmental consultancy in the world to participate in the check-in demonstrates our commitment to mental health.

To bring all these initiatives together, we created the Jacobs "Your Mind Matters Toolkit". This is an interactive tool on the Jacobs intranet site that enables staff to access all of the Jacobs mental health resources (including the Check-in and external links) in one place. This was provided to all staff across AsiaPac and Middle East. When Jacobs' CEO saw the tool, he insisted that it be rolled out globally and made available to all 75,000 employees.



### What next?

Our next challenge is to use what we have learned over the past 12 years to address a key issue that we are facing as a global organisation. As we move people around the globe on major project assignments, we need to address the mental side of those assignments with staff being isolated from their natural support networks of family, friends and regular social settings. We don't have the answers yet, but this is our next major focus for caring for the mental health of our people.

## Case study 4: SMEC's approach to addressing mental health in the workplace



The SMEC Executive Committee are champions of health and safety including the mental wellbeing of employees. Over the last couple of years, there has been an increased focus on creating a constructive culture that makes a genuine difference to our workplace and how we interact. Part of this focus includes mental wellness which is part of our overall health and wellbeing approach.

### Intervention and Implementation

SMEC's focus has been on promoting the awareness of Mental Health in the workplace. The business has focused on:

1. Annual sponsorship of wellbeing events such as R U OK? Day across SMEC offices nationally.
2. Providing easy access and confidential EAP services to all employees and their family members through our third-party provider, Benestar.
3. Collaborating with Mental Health accredited organisations such as Beyondblue and BUPA on facilitating workshops and training.
4. Empowering our Leadership Development Program participants to create a Mental Health Strategy for the business.
5. Promoting a positive work culture emphasising constructive and positive behaviours.

### Sponsorship of Wellbeing Events

SMEC annually sponsors R U OK? Day across our major offices. SMEC has capitalised on the day to inspire meaningful connectedness amongst staff by enabling the importance of senior leaders speaking at the event in different offices, staff share personal stories, public figures such as sports stars have previously participated by sharing their story to break down the stigma and normalise mental health.

### Employee Assistance Program

SMEC's EAP is designed to improve the wellbeing and lifestyle of employees who may be affected by personal or work-related challenges including mental health issues. There is a common awareness of how to access this program as it is advertised on our intranet page, in common areas of the workplace, and managers frequently offer this service to employees.

### Workshops

SMEC has provided access to mental health training for staff through accredited organisations such as Beyondblue and BUPA. These workshops have included:

- i. Creating a Mentally Healthy Workplace – Awareness and Strategies for Managers. The people and culture team were the pilot team who attended this workshop (run by Beyondblue in conjunction with SMEC's EAP provider Benestar) in 2017 to:
  - a) Increase their knowledge and awareness about anxiety, depression and suicide,
  - b) Understand the principles and strategies that facilitate the creation of a mentally healthy workplace,
  - c) Enable how to have a conversation with someone of concern,
  - d) Build confidence in how to support an employee who is experiencing or recovering from a mental health condition.
- ii. Open Minds - Mental Health Basics Seminar. As part of SMEC's annual Health and Wellbeing calendar, this Lunch and Learn seminar was run by BUPA for employees exploring
  - a) The meaning of mental health and mental illness,
  - b) How circumstances, work practices and lifestyle habits can have an impact on mental health,
  - c) How mental health conditions like anxiety, and depression can affect people at work,
  - d) Practical strategies for seeking help and getting back on track,
  - e) Getting Through the Festive Period.

iii. Mental Health First Aid training. A couple of first aid officers in one of our smaller offices attended this one-day course to increase their awareness on mental health. The course focused on awareness, recognising signs and symptoms of mental health, conversation starters and how to get support. This workshop was run by St John of God.

### **Mental Health Strategy**

We have incorporated mental health into our Leadership Development Program by empowering participants of the program to contribute to the design of a Mental Health Strategy for the ANZ business. This strategy will detail proposed activities that the business can focus on to enhance a positive culture of mental wellness, enable awareness and support of colleagues experiencing mental health as part of our overall health and wellbeing strategy.

### **Conclusion**

Mental Health is currently incorporated into our overall Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The focus is on prevention, awareness and support. We are continuing to explore other ways and avenues of creating a healthier and happier workplace.

## Case study 5: Golder's Asia Pacific Mental Health Strategy



**GOLDER**

The Golder Asia Pacific Mental Health Strategy is built around a shared understanding that mental illness is not a rare condition and workplaces can play a key role in both preventing mental illness, and providing structures, support and connections that can protect against it. In building our strategy we sought feedback from our employees through our health and safety culture survey. The results indicated our employees were largely supportive of the respect, reward and recognition they receive while also acknowledging that work pressures have, from time-to-time, impacted their life outside of the workplace. The pleasing aspect of these results was that we had a strong base to leverage our strategy from.

Using a model comprising factors of 'Prevention', 'Promotion' and 'Intervention', we identified the existing structures and practices that:



1. Prevent a person suffering from poor mental health;
2. Promote the importance of positive mental health and conversations around this topic; and
3. Help us intervene when someone is displaying early signs of being unwell.

As a result, our Mental Health Strategy builds on existing initiatives such as our flexible work practices and leave provisions, return to work programs, support of R U OK? Day and EAP. With an understanding of what we currently do, we were able to identify further actions under each factor of the model for inclusion in our regional plan.

<b>Prevention</b>	Continue to implement actions aimed at becoming a more diverse and inclusive organisation.
<b>Promotion</b>	Review or flexible work arrangements to ensure they meet our current needs.
<b>Intervention</b>	Incorporate wellness check in as part of mentoring relationships and discussions. Actively pursue opportunities that drive further intra and inter group connectedness. Develop manager and supervisor skills in identifying the signs and symptoms of poor mental health. Expand Mental Health First Aid training across offices.

We felt it was important to recognise that while it is often factors outside of the workplace that can negatively impact on a person's mental health, we still have a key role to play. The goal of our strategy is to be recognised as an organisation that provides our people with challenging work, recognition for their efforts and enough energy at the end of their day to invest in other parts of their lives. This is consistent with our organisational values and, as an employee-owned organisation, central to the sustainability of our business.

## Case study 6: Arcadis Australia Pacific



Arcadis Australia Pacific has long been committed to staff engagement and wellbeing. Current measures of the wellbeing of our staff place us in promising or leading categories for several indicators.

Our most recent engagement survey results show engagement levels at 3.15 and 91% of staff agree that the company cares about their health and wellbeing. Absence rates are also consistently low.

The benefits of taking actions are clear. To work at their best and contribute to the success of our organisation, the health and wellbeing of our staff is crucial.

Our award winning 'Positive Living' Program was created from the region's 'Wellbeing by Design' Program, which was launched in 2010 in response to raising safety awareness. Employee wellbeing became a central pillar to the program and has evolved into the holistic, gamified, popular program of activities that it is today.

### Our wellbeing model

Our integrated approach to wellbeing is demonstrated in our model. Our vision relies on drawing on different elements, as a wide range of factors impact staff wellbeing. This model categorises these factors into three key areas, all of which are framed by our values based culture.



### Our Vision

“  
**To build a healthy and resilient workforce by putting our People First and empowering them to live life at optimum health**  
 ”

### Our approach to being a mentally healthy workplace

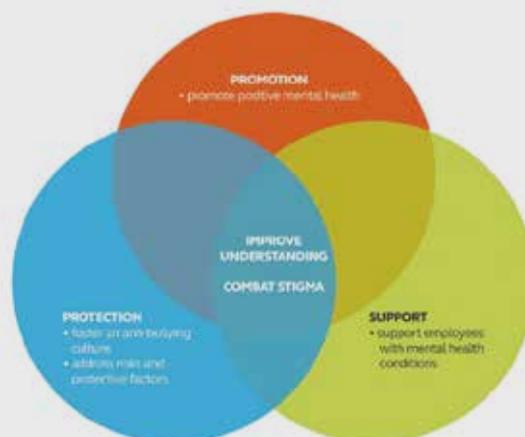
We have identified there is a need for more strategic focus on continuing and improving upon becoming a mentally healthy workplace. In a mentally healthy workplace, people at all levels have a shared vision of, and commitment to, positive mental health. Work demands are realistic in a way that balances the needs of the staff and the employer, and do not pose an unreasonable risk to the mental health of individuals.

Everyone in the workplace feels comfortable to speak openly about mental health and mental health conditions, without fear of stigma or discrimination. This creates a culture of respect and inclusivity. People look forward to coming to work and employees are flexible and supportive of each other.

## OUR APPROACH TO BEING A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE

The key areas of focus are protection, promotion and support. Our key goals are to:

- Improve Understanding and awareness of Mental Health
- Support employees living with mental health conditions
- Continue to foster an anti bullying culture
- Combat the stigma
- Promote positive and proactive Mental Health & Wellbeing



## Initiatives

**Mental Health First Aiders:** we have trained and certified a number of employees who act as a first point of contact for an employee experiencing a mental health issue or emotional distress. We use our first aiders as the working group to implement and advise on our mental health strategy and are looking to expand our number of volunteers across the organisation, ensuring we have a balanced and diverse representation of individuals.

**Breaking down the stigma:** We encourage senior leaders and managers to speak openly about mental health in the workplace by actively endorsing and participating in activities and events aimed at reducing stigma, as well as inviting employees with a personal experience of recovery and management of a mental health condition to share their story. This includes our annual R U OK? Day morning teas, and a recent internal campaign where we asked our people to share why mental health either affects them or is important to them.



**Line manager training:** We have launched a program offering education and training in mental health for our leaders, so they are equipped to deal with any challenges appropriately and proactively.

**EAP support:** Our EAP has high utilisation – demonstrating that our employees are seeking the help they need. We are taking this to the next level by encouraging staff to speak to our EAP proactively before life gets too hard – as an additional wellbeing tool.

**Mindfulness:** As part of our wellbeing program we bring in mindfulness practitioners and promote apps that our people can download, and we encourage them to take a moment to be mindful in our wellness room. Mindfulness has been proven to help support those with mental health challenges such as anxiety.

**Employee surveys:** Hearing what our people have to say and acting on their feedback is an important factor in ensuring we are listening to, and therefore looking after our staff.

**Flexible working arrangements:** We have been long committed to having a truly flexible workplace. Encouraging our staff to work flexibly can help those currently experiencing mental health challenges, and those transitioning back to work.

**Stay at work/return to work initiatives:** We develop stay-at-work or return-to-work plans for staff who have been diagnosed with a mental health condition. These plans are tailored to individual needs, incorporating any reasonable adjustments to work and they are regularly reviewed.

**Wellbeing stewardship meetings:** Our leaders are asked to hold quarterly wellbeing meetings with their teams, which are tracked and reported on. We support them to raise mental health as a topic to help break down the stigma.

We have many future initiatives that we are looking to roll out as part of our three-year strategy, building upon our current plan, and ensuring we are addressing the needs of our workforce.

## Case study 7: AECOM's Mental Health Journey



At AECOM Australia and New Zealand (ANZ), our journey towards focusing on, improving and enhancing the mental health of our employees has been building momentum for the past few years. We recognise that mental health issues will affect everyone at some point in their lives, either directly or indirectly. By creating a positive, supportive and safe workplace, we will give our valued team members the best environment to deal with the challenging periods in their lives, particularly as the average person will spend 30% of their life at work.

AECOM's focus on mental health comes from three levels of our organisation: our global leadership team; our ANZ business; and all of our local offices across Australia and New Zealand.

### Global focus

During the past few years, AECOM's global leadership team have increased their focus on the mental health of all of our employees worldwide. The inaugural Global Wellbeing Week was held from 11-15 June 2018, and focused on all things related to wellbeing, including mental health, plus other factors that contribute to mental health, such as paying attention to one's physical health and learning good financial practices. Activities included team competitions using 'squeezy' anti-stress building blocks, five-minutes-a-day wellbeing ideas, and onsite visits from our wellbeing partners, including a leading health insurer, BUPA and superannuation provider. In addition, one of our company's seven corporate 'values', Safeguard, was highlighted, not just in the context of physical safety, but also of mental wellbeing. This focus was reinforced through internal communication campaigns, and the company's compulsory online safety training focusing on mental wellbeing; this represented a broadening of our standard physical safety training to help employees appreciate the importance of looking after their mental health.

### Australia New Zealand initiatives

At a local ANZ level, ongoing and longstanding initiatives such as our EAP, which allows employees to access a range of confidential counselling, legal and financial resources and services, are being complemented by more-targeted initiatives. Regular 'lunch and learn' webinars on mental health and personal development topics are made available to our teams, as are online, self-paced skills training in stress/resiliency, and work/life balance. During the fit out of all new tenancies, and planning for upgrading older tenancies, considerable attention has been given to providing access to natural light, greenery and fresh air, as well as end of trip facilities such as bike racks, showers, as these have known benefits to staff wellbeing.

Resources are being developed to help our 'people managers' better understand, recognise and deal with mental health issues in themselves and their teams. These are supplemented by training sessions, information to be disseminated to teams through team briefs, and with a supporting intranet page with internal and external support information for ANZ staff.



### Office-based initiatives

Campaigns such as R U OK? Day and Work/Life Balance Day are promoted locally by teams in each of our office locations across ANZ, to open the conversation about mental wellbeing and maintaining a healthy work/life balance. For example, R U OK? Day was recently promoted in our Melbourne office with a bake sale to raise funds for mental health initiatives, and speakers on the topic of mental health and how AECOM can support employees who are experiencing personal or professional challenges.

These initiatives are just the tip of the iceberg, and as the conversations become more frequent and open, we will continue on this journey to become a happier, healthier, safer, more supportive, and accepting workplace.

# Research, other sectors and international practices

In addition to learning from each other, the research and practices by NGOs, universities, in other industries and internationally provide a useful insight for Consult Australia member firms on how to improve mental health in the workplace, particularly around how mental health should be viewed, how to design a mental health strategy for the workplace, the benefits of a proactive approach centred on 'thriving', and how government frameworks and direct measures can provide overarching support to industry.

This section of the report also informs the recommendations for industry and governments outlined in the report's next two sections. Key findings from a review on best practices are outlined below.

## Corey Keyes' mental health continuum

Mental health should be pictured as a continuum, where people are flourishing at one end and languishing at the other. This concept was developed by Corey Keyes, and emphasises that the difference between being mentally healthy and experiencing mental illnesses is not 'black and white' and we instead shift along this continuum day-to-day based on our experiences.<sup>24</sup>

A breakdown of the continuum highlighted below is as follows:

- The green end is a high level of resilience and wellbeing;
- The yellow area indicates people may be experiencing difficulties coping;
- The orange area indicates people may be experiencing more difficulties coping and symptoms may increase in severity and frequency; and
- At the red end, people may be experiencing severe symptoms and may be at risk of self-harm and suicide. Symptoms for people at the red end of the continuum are:
  - Disturbed sleep,
  - Social withdrawal and irritability,
  - Feeling overwhelmed, hopeless and/or worthless,
  - Reduced productivity, and
  - Alcohol and drug use.<sup>25</sup>

The continuum highlights that action on mental health should not simply be about addressing concerns when people are experiencing symptoms at the red end, but should also be about delivering measures focused on encouraging employees to 'flourish' and building resilience to limit the severity of mental illnesses.

In Beyondblue and Heads Up's report on *Developing a workplace mental health strategy*, the workplace is highlighted as an influential environment when it comes to mental health and wellbeing and where people are sitting on the continuum. A positive and mentally healthy workplace can be the difference between someone being in the green end or in the yellow area of the continuum,<sup>26</sup> regardless of whether these concerns are work-related or to do with other areas of their life.



<sup>24</sup> Corey Keyes, *The Mental Health Continuum: From Languishing to Flourishing in Life* (2002)

<sup>25</sup> Beyondblue and Heads Up, *Developing a workplace mental health strategy: a how-to guide for organisations*

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*

## Case study 8: Mates in Construction



Mates in Construction was a charity established in 2008 to reduce the high level of suicide among Australian construction workers. The charity has delivered an integrated programme of training to raise awareness that there is a problem with suicide and the contributing risk factors in the construction industry, and support to provide clear pathways to help and case management processes that ensures workers are getting the appropriate help.

The training for the programme falls into three categories:

- General awareness – delivered to at least 80% of workers on-site to introduce workers to the nature of the problem and to provide practice guidance on how they can assist;
- Connector – provided to volunteers to help keep someone in a crisis safe and to connect them to professional help; and
- ASIST – comparable to first aid officers on site, these volunteers engage with workers who are contemplating suicide with the goal of making them 'safe'.

All training is accredited, and construction worksites must have a minimum of one connector for every twenty workers and must have access to an ASIST resource. Trained staff are easily identifiable with a Mates in Construction badge on their uniform.<sup>28</sup>

## Being proactive instead of reactive to mental health in the workplace

Building on the mental health continuum and the idea of 'keeping people in the green', there are benefits to addressing mental health in the workplace through a preventative approach rather than reacting to concerns as they develop. An approach focused on preventing concerns and promoting good mental health is more cost-effective for organisations, as it is more efficient than treating one individual at a time through a treatments-focused approach.<sup>29</sup>

### Thriving organisations

A proactive approach becomes cost-effective because while these initiatives are focused on preventing mental illnesses, they also help improve the productivity and resilience of the organisation and provide staff an opportunity to 'thrive' in the workplace. A focus on employees having a positive state of mental health can drive the organisation's performance and deliver a competitive edge.<sup>30</sup>

In their report titled *The opportunity to thrive*, the University of Western Australia and PwC highlight that positive mental health at work is more than feeling happy and relaxed, and is instead about employees having positive experiences where they feel:

- engaged and empowered to perform at a high level;
- confident and capable enough to pursue challenging goals; and
- able to integrate work effectively into an overall healthy life.

This report also highlights that only through an approach focused on ensuring an organisation thrives can other initiatives focused on improving the mental health of employees, such as flexible working arrangements, deliver a positive impact in the workplace.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Mates in Construction, How Mates Works

<sup>29</sup> Everymind, Prevention and Promotion Approaches

<sup>30</sup> University of Western Australia and PwC, The Opportunity to Thrive (2015)

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

## Beyondblue's strategic approach to creating a mentally healthy workplace

Beyondblue and Heads Up's report on *Developing a mental health strategy*<sup>32</sup> provides comprehensive advice on creating a mental health strategy. This report outlines the benefits to organisations from having a mental health strategy in place, primarily around making the workplace more attractive to staff, the potential for a significant return on investment, and simply to meet WHS legal requirements. Key components of Beyondblue's approach are an integrated model, senior leaders being proactive and owning the change, ensuring ongoing meaningful participation from all stakeholders, and embedding changes through ongoing communications. Further details on these components are below.

### An integrated model

Activities and measures focused on mental health in the workplace should be included into the broader WHS, human resources and wellbeing approaches, and the broader organisational strategy. The model should focus on 'protection', 'promotion' and 'support' – three key areas required to integrate a workplace mental health approach into the organisation.

### Proactive senior leaders owning the change

A mental health strategy needs a strong, visible and long-term commitment from senior leaders. An organisation's chief executives and senior leaders are in a position to strongly influence the work environment, management arrangements, the day-to-day experiences of staff, and ultimately the success of a mental health strategy. This can be achieved by leading by example, such as demonstrating good work-life balance.

Beyondblue's tips on how senior leaders can lead the way on mentally healthy workplaces are:

- A visible and active commitment;
- Speak openly on the topic, including any personal experiences;
- Make mental health an objective of the organisation;
- Treat mental health the same as physical health by integrating health and safety practices in all business decisions and practices;
- Provide sufficient resources for the change and performance measures;
- Set a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and discrimination; and
- Provide flexible working conditions that promote mental health.

### Ongoing meaningful participation

The success of a mental health workplace strategy is dependent on meaningful input from its target group – the employees of an organisation. The strategy should therefore be co-designed with all stakeholders, by promoting the different ways staff can participate in its development, implementation and review. This is critical for ensuring staff 'own' the approach and have a buy-in to achieve the intended results.

To improve participation of employees, Beyondblue suggests:

- Identifying champions and support from early stages from a wide variety of levels and disciplines;
- Encouraging staff to have a voice, particularly those with less power in the organisation;
- Providing communication forums that are safe and open;
- Providing access to all information and progress made in developing and rolling out the strategy;
- Providing regular feedback opportunities for staff on the strategy – through the existing management structure and more confidential avenues; and
- Informing staff on changes being made at other levels of the organisation.

### Ongoing communication

Lastly, a successful mental health strategy requires ongoing communication with the workforce. Informing employees on what is happening in their workplace will naturally result in more engaged staff. An ongoing communication approach will also help break down barriers to addressing mental health challenges in the workplace and reduce stigmas on the topic.

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<sup>32</sup> Beyondblue and Heads Up, *Developing a workplace mental health strategy: a how-to guide for organisations*

Beyondblue identifies five key questions to answer when communicating about an organisational change initiative, such as a mental health strategy:

1. Why change and why now?
2. What happens if we don't change?
3. What will change look like?
4. What's in it for me?
5. What can we expect?

Without answers to these questions, it is difficult to build momentum and achieve broader organisational buy-in for a mental health strategy and related initiatives.

Additionally, Beyondblue provides the following tips on improving ongoing communication for a strategy:

- Highlight the benefits the strategy can have for customers, clients and stakeholders, staff and the organisation more widely – reiterating the 'what's in it for me?';
- Avoid a reactive approach – being driven by incidents or using language that identifies a problem or crisis has the potential to limit communication and engagement, particularly from those requiring the most support;
- Frame issues in positively and negatively, by discussing what is and what is not working;
- Don't define individuals as reasons for the strategy, instead focus on the influence of the work environment and the nature of the work;
- Communicate the evidence behind the strategy; and
- Regularly reiterate key messages.

## Case study 9: Energy Networks Australia



Energy Networks Australia is a peak national body representation gas distribution and electricity distribution and transmission businesses. The sector is undergoing a rapid transformation as customers embrace new technology and services enabled by the energy network, and this significant change runs the risk of stretching the mental health and wellbeing of its workforce.

In 2017, Energy Networks Australia released its mental health and wellbeing strategy which sets a vision for the future in the industry and wider communities and provides clear expectations for members. The strategy is centred around a model of embedding mental health initiatives into risk reduction, digital innovation, organisational commitment, systems and design, and building people capabilities.

The strategy includes a toolkit to support its implementation by members of Energy Networks Australia.

## International practices

There are a number of examples of practices in other countries focused on improving mental health in the workplace. These examples provide a number of relevant lessons on workplace mental health frameworks and initiatives for the consulting sector providing services in the built and natural environment, and more broadly for industry and governments in Australia.

Research by Deloitte UK, in their 2017 report titled *Mental health and employers: the case for investment*,<sup>32</sup> include Germany and Canada as examples of countries with effective common frameworks on mental health initiatives, delivered in partnership between governments and industry, and Sweden as an example of embedding employee mental health and wellbeing protections in legislation. Further detail on these examples is below.

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<sup>33</sup> Deloitte UK, Mental health and employers: the case for investment (2017)

## Germany – the ‘Arbeitsprogramm psyché’ initiative

This German initiative on improving mental health in the workplace focuses on requiring psychosocial risk assessments in the workplace and sharing information and best practice examples. ‘Arbeitsprogramm psyché’ was a five-year programme introduced in 2013 by the German Federal Government and it is delivered in partnership with company stakeholders, other German governments, insurance companies, and the medical sector. The purpose of linking the programme with insurance and medical sectors is due to their extensive experience reducing mental illnesses. The programme’s stated aim is to reduce work-related stress through four components, delivered through the linked commitments in the table below.

### The four components and current commitments of Germany’s ‘Arbeitsprogramm psyché’ initiative<sup>34</sup>

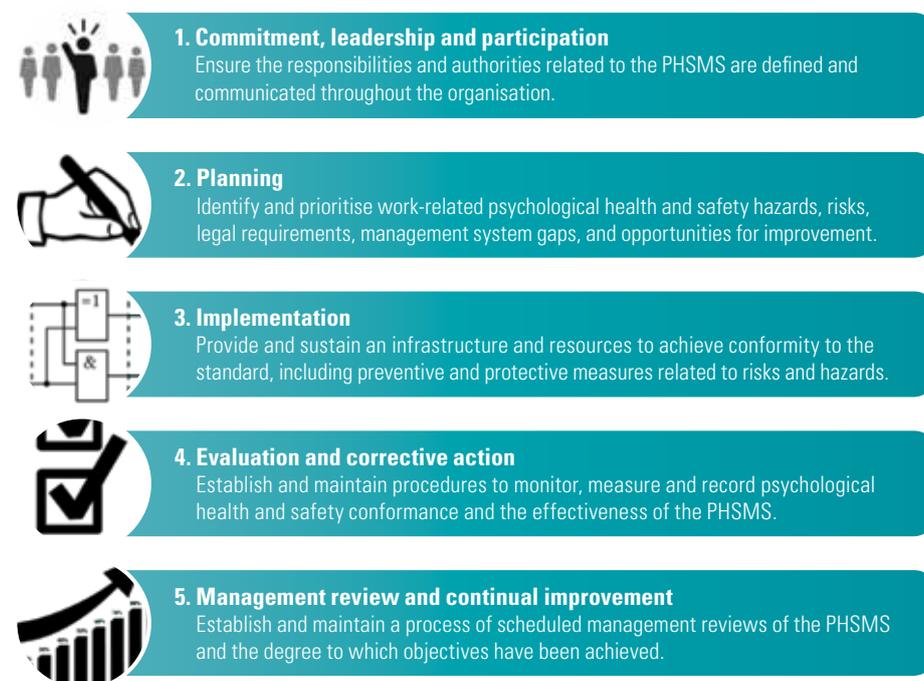
<p><b>Information, sensitisation, motivation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform employees and employers.</li> <li>• Motivate employers to manage work-related mental strains.</li> <li>• Inform the public via the media.</li> <li>• Create a central resource covering all aspects of work-related mental strains.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Qualification</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualify 6000 labour inspectors in psychological stress and strain to support and supervise enterprises.</li> <li>• Qualify occupational physicians and OHS officers responsible for consulting enterprises.</li> <li>• Qualify employers and employees in measures carried out by organisations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create guidelines for considering psychological stress in workplace risk assessments.</li> <li>• Information sharing on good practice.</li> <li>• Practicable instruments to measure psychological stress and strain.</li> <li>• Identify functions/occupations with high risk of work-related mental stress.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Control</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target of 10,000 enterprises be reviewed between 2015 and 2017</li> <li>• Review will focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Inclusion of mental load in the assessment of work conditions</li> <li>◦ Long working hours or work in the night</li> <li>◦ The risk of traumatisation by accidents or violence.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Canada – the Psychological Health and Safety Management System (PHSMS)

PHSMS is a nationally-agreed mental health framework that employers across Canada can voluntarily sign up to. The framework also includes a formal national standard titled ‘CSA Z1003/BNQ 9700-803 Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace – Prevention, Promotion and Guidance to Staged Implementation’, introduced in 2012 as the first of its kind in the world.<sup>35</sup>

The framework has currently been implemented by over 40 employers across Canada. It focuses on delivering interventions in the workplace built on a nationally agreed five-step:

### The five steps of Canada’s PHSMS framework<sup>36</sup>



<sup>33</sup> Deloitte UK, Mental health and employers: the case for investment (2017)

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Canadian Mental Health Commission, National Standard

<sup>36</sup> Deloitte UK, Mental health and employers: the case for investment (2017)

Canada's PHSMS provides employers the freedom to implement interventions in the workplace tailored to their environment. This allows measures to be vary based on gaps identified in the planning stage or on resources available to support the implementation stage.

Participating employers have achieved 75% compliance with the five elements of the standard, in comparison to 55% at the baseline stage. Of the 40 organisations that piloted the new framework, 34 have implemented the standards across their whole organisation.<sup>37</sup>

### **Sweden – Government intervention to improve effects on employment and mental health**

Sweden has primarily focused on introducing direct measures to improve employment conditions and mental health in the workplace, primarily focused on work-life balance.

One well-publicised measure was a two-year trial of six-hour work days by the Gothenburg City Council for 70 assistant nurses. This trial was one of a handful across Sweden. While a review of the trial highlights a reduction in sick leave and a productivity boost, these benefits did not outweigh the costs of the trial (additional wages for more staff). The scheme concluded at the end of the trial period with the city council conceding it would not be economical to expand and continue the trial across the municipality.<sup>38</sup>

Sweden's generous parental leave scheme has also been flagged by Deloitte UK as another measure which aims to improve mental health in the workplace through employee work-life balance.<sup>39</sup> Under this arrangement, a couple can split 480 days of paternity leave at 80% of their normal pay, with the leave not expiring until the child turns eight and 90 days reserved for fathers.

Despite Sweden being a good example of a country with a number of direct government interventions to improve employee conditions, and mental health as a result, it has been noted the country has room to improve the overall capacity of the mental health system in the workplace and particularly resources to deal with mental illness.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Deloitte UK, Mental health and employers: the case for investment (2017)

<sup>38</sup> BBC News, What really happened when Swedes tried six-hour days? (2017)

<sup>39</sup> Deloitte UK, Mental health and employers: the case for investment (2017)

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

# Recommendations for our industry



From the review of existing practices by Consult Australia member firms and best practices in other sectors, the following recommendations are designed to support consulting firms operating in the built and natural environment create mentally healthy workplaces. These are primarily around Consult Australia putting in place measures to improve the broader industry's approach to mental health. The recommendations for our industry are outlined below.

## **1. Consult Australia to establish a Mental Health Leaders Network focused on championing mentally healthy workplaces in the sector, related industries and beyond.**

A key finding from research on creating a positive workplace culture around mental health is the importance of having leaders with visible and active commitments to the cause. This includes a willingness to speak openly on the topic, including any personal experiences, and to set the tempo for how a firm, sector and industry can respond to challenges around mental health.

While many member firms have leaders in a position to champion good mental health practices, the sector as a whole would benefit from having active leaders willing to share stories and promote good practices beyond their own organisations. To this end, Consult Australia will establish a formal Mental Health Leaders Network to champion good practices across the whole sector and beyond. These leaders will oversee the development and sharing of resources on creating mentally healthy workplaces, and will also look for opportunities to share personal experiences about addressing mental health concerns or promoting good wellbeing practices with other member firms and through broader public engagements. The network will also champion Consult Australia's ongoing efforts to support mentally healthy workplaces in the sector going forward.

The Mental Health Leaders Network will be an open group for interested representatives from Consult Australia member firms in leadership roles.

## **2. Consult Australia to develop a sector focused mental health strategy. The strategy will need to be a scalable framework that can be implemented by firms of all sizes.**

While some Consult Australia members have mental health strategies in place, particularly larger firms, many smaller and medium sized firms, whilst having a number of formal and informal initiatives in place, do not have an overarching strategic approach informed by extensive research.

To support member firms of all sizes strategically implement a broad range of initiatives focused on creating mentally healthy workplaces, from preventing mental health concerns arising and promoting wellbeing practices, Consult Australia will develop a sector focused mental health strategy centred on providing a scalable framework that can be implemented by member firms.

Consult Australia will seek the knowledge and support of member firms with mental health strategies in place, to ensure lessons learned are incorporated into the sector wide strategy.

The Mental Health Leaders Network will have direct oversight of the development of the strategy, and will work with member firms to help with the implementation and review of the strategy.

## **3. Consult Australia to develop a 'Mental Health Knowledge Hub' on its website, providing relevant resources for member firms in one central location.**

The range and depth of material available on improving mental health in the workplace is significant. This includes training material, case studies, 'toolboxes', research reports, and other statistics and resources developed by NGOs, government agencies and other organisations. Many Consult Australia members have also been willing to share experiences at their firms.

Consult Australia will create a one-stop 'Mental Health Knowledge Hub' on its website providing a range of relevant materials to help member firms create mentally healthy workplaces. These resources will include bespoke material for the sector developed by Consult Australia, and best practice material developed by NGOs, government agencies and other organisations. A focus will be on materials that share personal stories about mental health and tackle the mental health stigma.

The Mental Health Leaders Network will provide oversight of the knowledge hub.

## **4. Consult Australia to promote a greater understanding of mental health challenges through its communication channels**

Consult Australia's research on mental health has highlighted that there is still a clear stigma around the topic. Tackling this stigma is the first step to creating a workplace environment conducive to mental health, and must be a central theme to all mental health initiatives and activities. A key challenge is the lack of understanding on the scale of the challenge facing workplaces around mental health.

To this end, Consult Australia will promote a greater understanding of mental health challenges and seek to address stigmas through its communication channels, such as the fortnightly update and quarterly Consulting Matters magazine. This work will include highlighting the activities of the Mental Health Leaders Network and the Mental Health Knowledge Hub to broader Consult Australia membership.

## **5. Consult Australia to investigate developing a training package to help 'frontline' managers and operational leaders deal with mental health concerns in the workplace.**

Some of the case studies provided by Consult Australia's larger member firms highlighted the effectiveness and benefit of rolling out training and support to 'frontline' managers and operational leaders on handling mental health concerns. Managers and operational leaders are in the best position to promote a positive workplace culture around mental health, address stigmas and change perceptions in the workplace, and to have an effective conversation with someone who may be struggling.

Consult Australia will work with the member firms who have these training packages in place to investigate if they can be rolled out across the whole sector, particularly for smaller and medium sized firms who may not have the resources or capacity to individually develop and implement a similar arrangement.

# Recommendations for governments

Consult Australia's review of how governments currently support mental health in the workplace, and international practices, has also identified a number of recommendations. These are outlined below.

## 1. The Australian Government and state and territory governments to develop mentally healthy workplaces strategies in line with the NSW Government.

Consult Australia believes the NSW Government has set the benchmark for an appropriate approach to mental health in the workplace through their Mentally Healthy Workplaces Strategy 2018-22. This strategy is Australia's first comprehensive and integrated approach and also provides a substantial funding commitment to improve mental outcomes for workers.

Consult Australia recommends all state and territory governments develop a mentally healthy workplaces strategy in line with NSW's approach, outlining how a government managed framework can support organisations improve mental health outcomes and how a targeted approach can turnaround outcomes by at-risk sectors. This strategy should be backed up by appropriate funding to deliver meaningful change across Australia.

These mentally healthy workplaces strategies should be complimentary between the Commonwealth and states and territories, and be developed through a hand-in-hand approach with industry.

## 2. The Australian Government and state and territory governments to increase funding for mental health in the workplace initiatives, focused on four areas: improving information, setting qualifications, providing support and direct control.

In line with Germany's approach, a substantial funding increase for government mental health initiatives (as outlined in the above recommendation) should focus on four key components. These components are:

1. Improving information, sensitisation and motivation around mental health;
2. Qualifications;
3. Supporting workplaces; and
4. Controls.

The first component should focus on initiatives that improve the understanding of employees and employers around mental health, and motivate employers to manage work-related mental health concerns.

The second component should centre on training and qualifying WHS and human resource professionals and other staff on mental health, and creating formal accredited qualifications.

The third component should focus on creating formal guidelines to allow workplaces to consider mental health in risk assessments, and identify job types and functions with a high risk of work-related mental health concerns. These guidelines should also include recommended responses to mitigate concerns identified in risk assessments.

Lastly, the fourth component should focus on how governments manage related legislative frameworks. An inspection and compliance approach should focus on outputs around mental health initiatives, noting an inputs focused and 'black and white' approach does not appropriately consider the nuance and differences for individuals around mental health.

## 3. The Australian Government and state and territory governments to increase funding for proof-of-concept trials by mental health NGOs and other organisations such as universities.

Research on the innovative mental health initiatives developed by NGOs has highlighted an opportunity for governments to support the significant expansion of this approach. Organisations such as Beyondblue are focused on developing



***Consult Australia recommends governments review procurements practices to ensure they are not potentially resulting in mentally challenging work environments at organisations providing services.***

initiatives backed up by service innovation and new research around behavioural change. These initiatives are road tested as proof-of-concept trials before seeking additional funding from governments to scale them up and embed them into the broader system.

Consult Australia believes more proof-of-concept trials by a range of NGOs, and other organisations such as universities, could result in significant improvements and a more comprehensive evidence base towards mental health practices in the workplace. Consult Australia therefore calls on governments around Australia to provide funding for these proof-of-concept trials by establishing a fund focused on researching new innovation in mental health initiatives. This seed funding should focus on the most likely hazards for industries, aligning to Safe Work Australia’s research on at-risk work functions.

#### **4. The Australian Government and state and territory governments to ensure procurement practices are not resulting in ‘downstream’ problems around mental health.**

SafeWork Australia identified a number of conditions that can have an adverse impact on mental health, including high demand and high intensity work, and poor clarity around scope of work. A challenge facing consulting firms operating in the built and natural environment is that procurement arrangements with clients can create circumstances where these conditions are prevalent, for example high demand and pressure timescales (particularly for key personnel) and a poor scope of work which creates uncertainty as to the requirements to be delivered. Therefore, mental health concerns can be a potential downstream impact of procurement arrangements that are unclear, have onerous risk allocation, tight timeframes or involve short tender periods.

Consult Australia recommends governments review procurements practices to ensure they are not potentially resulting in mentally challenging work environments at organisations providing services. This recommendation links to Consult Australia’s Model Client Policy, encouraging governments to improve procurement practices.

## **5. Standards Australia to develop a new standard on mentally healthy workplaces.**

In line with Canada's approach, Consult Australia believes there is merit in developing a formal national standard (or considering an international adoption, or a new international standard) specifically on mental health in the workplace.

The national standard on mentally healthy workplaces should be developed by Standards Australia through their normal collaborative approach with industry. The standard should be designed in a way that encourages as many organisations as possible to uptake the voluntary framework.

The national standard should include a detailed success measurement component, enabling organisations to determine improvements from the framework.

# Contact us

We would welcome any opportunity to further discuss the issues raised in this report. To do so, please contact:

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