



Mental health at work during the COVID-19 pandemic

Health obligations under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* extend to both physical and psychological health so Persons Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBU) have a responsibility to support their workers in the uncertain and changing times the COVID 19 pandemic is creating. It is important for PCBUs / employers to provide, so far as reasonably practicable, a mentally healthy work environment for their workers, ensuring that workers stay both physically and mentally healthy during this time.

What steps can I take as an PCBU /employer to minimise workplace mental ill-health during COVID-19?

The current COVID-19 pandemic can cause heightened anxiety and stress for workers. Managers, people leaders and workers have an important role in helping to support and mitigate risk factors that can lead to mental-ill health through the following actions:

Manage risk factors:

- **Be informed** on the current situation through official information sources such as [nsw.gov.au](https://www.nsw.gov.au), and [NSW Department of Health](#).
- **Implement** the advice and recommendations from [Safework NSW and NSW Health](#).
- **Identify and support** workers in your business that may be more at risk of workplace psychological injury (e.g. frontline workers or those working from home in isolation)
- **Understand** the [risk factors](#) of mental ill-health in the workplace

Lead Change:

- **Consult** with workers on how work will be conducted differently to enable social distancing and staying safe
- **Lead by example** by taking care of yourself and implementing the [5 ways to wellbeing](#)
- **Enable flexibility** and consider how [good work design](#) may help your workers manage their work, as well as their family and carer responsibilities.
- **Communicate** with your workers regularly about how your business is addressing COVID-19 and what control measures you are putting into place
- **Ensure clarity** around the entitlements that can be accessed particularly where they may have caring responsibilities of their family members or become unwell with the virus
- **Remember** workers who may be on extended leave or on workers compensation may also need to be kept informed and understand the impact on their situation

Provide support:

- **Be open and transparent** in your interactions with workers, let workers know they are not alone and that it is ok to not be ok
- **Encourage open discussions** to enable workers to share or learn from others
- **Share support services** ensuring workers know where support is available. Consider creating a central point of contact for workers to go about any concerns. Promote an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if available and encourage workers to use its services. Share available free services as listed:
 - Beyond Blue [NewAccess](#) | Free online mental health support program
 - Black Dog Institute [Online Clinic](#) | Free online mental health assessment tool for people over the age of 18
 - [myCompass](#) | Personalised self-help tool for your mental health
 - [Headspace](#) | Guided-meditation app

How can I provide a mentally healthy work environment with my workers working remotely, or from home, during the COVID-19 situation?

Where businesses have been able to implement working remotely to manage the social distancing controls, it is important to understand the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* still applies. The isolation that can be experienced with working remotely can contribute to mental-ill health and measures should be taken to address this by taking these actions:

- **Consult** with workers on working from home arrangements
- **Understand** the importance of social connections to maintaining good mental health through the [icare social connections toolkit](#)
- **Stay connected** through regular real time communication by phone or videoconferencing instead of relying on text or email communication can help to be more personally connected
- **Recognise the signs** that that may be indicating someone is struggling by being aware of behaviour and communication changes. [RUOK?](#) Provide helpful information on how to do this remotely
- **Promote a positive and inclusive culture** by setting up regular virtual lunch/morning/afternoon teas to encourage social interactions
- **Encourage a routine** ensuring start and finish times are clear, including breaks and time for physical activity
- **Educate** staff of ways to stay mentally healthy while working from home and share tools and resources with them such as the [Black Dog Institute - Managing your mental health at home: Working from home during COVID-19](#) and [working from home safely](#).

What resources can I use and share to stay mentally healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Beyond Blue – [Looking after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak](#)
- Australian Psychological Society – [Tips for coping with coronavirus anxiety](#)
- Headspace – [How to cope with stress related to coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- Black Dog Institute - [Coronavirus Anxiety Resources](#)
- Smiling Mind – [Supporting yourself and others through Coronavirus](#)
- HeadsUp- [Small Business mental health for employers and employees](#)
- [WayAhead workplaces](#)

What resources can I refer to for help through change of employment circumstances and uncertainty?

- [Superfriend](#) - Communication and control through change
- Staying mentally healthy when you are [out of work](#)
- [A head for Business](#): Support for small businesses affected by adverse events
- [Fair Work Australia](#): Coronavirus and Australian Workplace laws

What if one of my workers is displaying signs of mental ill-health and needs help right now?

Contact the services below if crisis support is needed urgently:

- Lifeline Australia – 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline (for under 25's) – 1800 55 1800
- MensLine Australia – 1300 78 99 78
- Suicide Call Back Service – 1300 659 467
- [Beyondblue](#) – 1300 22 4636



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