

HEALTHY MINDS - THRIVING WORKPLACES

An integrated mental health and wellbeing strategy
2019 - 2022



HEAD OF SERVICE MESSAGE



Colleagues,

Mental health and wellbeing are important to how we function and participate in our lives at home and at work. In the ACT public service, our people are our greatest asset, and our workplaces provide an opportunity to positively impact and support the mental health of all our people.

To improve the mental health and wellbeing of all our people, we need to prioritise mental health in all aspects of our business. *Healthy Minds – Thriving Workplaces* will create this focus, coordinate our efforts to improve mental health and wellbeing, and hold us accountable for what we set out to achieve.

Healthy Minds – Thriving Workplaces will help bring together efforts already occurring across ACT Government to build mentally healthy workplaces, will work out what is and isn't working, will help us identify risks to our mental health, and will make sure we are trying new ideas to address the needs of our people.

Successfully addressing mental health in the workplace means putting everyone's mental wellbeing at the centre of our thinking and our culture. *Healthy Minds – Thriving Workplaces* will help us move past an approach of simply reducing and managing risks to mental health, to one that prioritises fostering wellbeing and engagement in the workplace.

We all have a role to play in improving the mental health and wellbeing of people in our workplaces. For us to change the way we think, talk and act about mental health, our workplaces must make peoples' mental health and wellbeing a priority. I urge you to actively participate in the activities of this strategy and help us to start the conversation about mental health in the workplace today.

Kathy Leigh

Head of Service



EXECUTIVE CHAMPION MESSAGES

Across my working career I have come to realise how important mental health and wellbeing is to really thrive in the workplace. We all need to work in an environment that supports positive mental health and wellbeing and ensures we can operate at our best. Even with our best intentions there will be times when we feel the impacts of mental stress, whether this is ourselves personally, caring for people we love or through supporting members of our teams.

We need to make sure we have the right strategies and tools to respond. People experiencing mental health issues and conditions often need minimal or no support in the workplace but there may be times we need to do more to help keep people well and coping at work.

Healthy Minds – Thriving Workplaces looks not only at protecting people from harm in the workplace and supporting people who are experiencing a mental health condition, but it includes strategies to promote good mental wellbeing for all of us. It will allow us to build our understanding of mental health in the workplace, raise awareness of supports and resources available, and reduce the current stigma that surrounds mental health in the workplace. It will help make us better managers. Managers who know our teams, who can identify when someone is struggling and who lead to create a service where we are not afraid to share our stories with each other and step up to help when needed. The strategy will help us understand the current mental health and wellbeing needs of our people and where the risks to mental health lie for our workforce so that we can do all we can to protect our people from being injured at work.

Creating culture change in any organisation requires senior leaders to be actively involved. Given the importance of the mental health and wellbeing of our people I am really pleased to be an *Healthy Minds – Thriving Workplaces* Executive Champion. I encourage all our people, especially our leaders across the service, to become actively involved in this strategy.

I am hopeful that by taking a whole of government planned approach to mental health and wellbeing we can build the wellbeing of our people, really making the ACTPS a safe and supportive place to work.

Stephen Miners

Executive Champion - *Healthy Minds - Thriving Workplaces*

Deputy Under Treasurer, CMTEDD

MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

What is mental health?

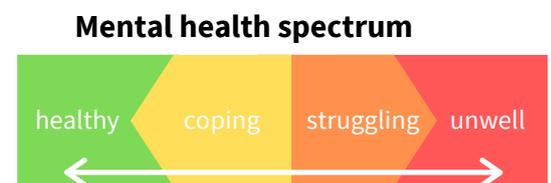
"Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their own community."

adapted from World Health Organisation

Mental health is often described as a spectrum.

At one end people feel good and function well, at the other there are severe symptoms of mental health conditions.

We can all move back and forth along the spectrum from day to day in response to different family, work or life circumstances. It is important to identify what area of the spectrum we are in as mental health concerns identified and treated early may be temporary and reversible.



Adapted from the Centre for Mental Health

The state of our mental health is not fixed and can vary at different times in our lives.



1 in 2 Australians will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime.



At any point in time, 20% of people in our workforce will be experiencing a mental health condition.

Describing mental health

The language we use in our workplaces when we are talking about mental health is important. The words we use can play a critical role in promoting mental health as a priority for us all, as well as increasing awareness and reducing stigma around mental health conditions.

We have focused on language in this strategy. We have used language to reduce stigma around mental health and encourage early intervention and support.

The strategy will also include approaches to educate our people about the influence of language on mental health, how it promotes good mental health or supports people on their journey of recovery.

You can change the way you talk about mental health in the workplace

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| ✓ Mental health conditions | ✗ Mental illness |
| ✓ Mental wellbeing | ✗ Mental disorder |
| ✓ Anxiety / Depression | ✗ Anxiety disorder / Depression disorder |
| ✓ Seek support | ✗ Get help |
| ✓ Supporter / carer | |

Good work and mental health

We spend a large amount of our lives at work. Our workplaces, the type of work we do, and the supports we have at work can have a significant impact on our mental health and wellbeing.

Research tells us that being in work is a social determinant of health. That means that just being in work can be good for our health. However, the quality of work that we do is important - **good work** is good for our mental health.

"'Good work' is healthy and safe work where the hazards and risks created by the work are eliminated or minimised so far as is reasonably practical and where the work design optimises human performance, productivity and job satisfaction."

Safe Work Australia

Our performance at work and the quality of our workplace (including the support we are provided) can be closely linked to our physical and mental health. Work that is good has benefits for our mental health and wellbeing.

Good work:

- is safe and healthy
- matches our skills and abilities
- provides independence
- can help in recovery from illness and injury

Workplaces that provide good work foster wellbeing, personal development, autonomy and meaning. However, good work doesn't happen by chance. Rather, good work occurs through purposeful and effective design of work and positive leadership.

Effective design of good work considers:

- The **work** we do – how work is performed including the physical, mental and emotional demands, task duration, frequency and complexity and the context and systems of the work.
- **Where** we work – the vehicles, buildings and structures that are workplaces.
- **What** we use to do our work - the technology, plant and equipment.
- The **people** we work with – physical, emotional and mental capacities and needs.

Work stressors have a clear impact on mental health in the workplace. People who are exposed to higher levels of trauma and distress in their lives are at a higher risk of experiencing mental health concerns. Demands on our family and personal lives and pre-existing health concerns also come with us into the workplace and can add additional pressures on our mental health.

Workplaces that support people by assessing and managing stressors can reduce the impact on mental health.

MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

Mentally healthy workplaces

Workplaces play a very large part in the health of workers and can contribute positively to people's mental wellbeing by providing good work.

Mentally healthy workplaces design work and support people in their work by ensuring that:

- people are **protected** from harm to their mental health;
- the work and workplaces **promote** good mental health; and
- people are **supported** to continue to contribute to, and engage with work when they are experiencing mental health conditions.

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE

PROMOTE

PREVENT

SUPPORT

An integrated approach to better mental health, based on Tony LaMontagne's integrated approach model.

Mentally healthy workplaces benefit all of us and consider how work can positively influence our mental health.

Creating mentally healthy workplaces

We want to create mentally healthy workplaces where our people:

- feel they have some level of say or control over the work they do;
- have variety in their work and social support from their supervisors and team mates;
- have structures in place to support them to learn the skills they need to do their job and progress in their careers;
- feel they are provided with predictable employment, job security and their wages adequately align with the work they complete; and
- feel that work and home life balance is encouraged and they have access to flexible working arrangements.

Our mentally healthy workplaces should encourage consultation so that our people can be involved in changes and decision making about their work.

Creating mentally healthy workplaces will benefit our people through the health benefits of good work but also benefit the ACT Government and the services we deliver through improved attraction and retention of talented people, improved productivity, and high levels of staff engagement.

WHAT OUR PEOPLE TOLD US

"People are less likely to admit to needing mental health days unless there is a cultural change/stigma reduction first."

"Develop a culture that allows people to make time for other people's support or wellbeing."

"What would you do if you see someone on a crutch walking towards a door? You go to the door and help to open it. A mental health issue is the same as the crutch, you take leadership by stepping up to help them."

"Digital options are important."

"Leaders are suffering from mental health issues themselves, pressure from above and below, and are unable to offer help."

"Individualise responses – don't just send people to EAP when giving bad news or when staff are struggling."

Our staff told us that the priority actions of our strategy must consider:

- the importance of workplace pressures;
- the important links between physical and mental health and wellbeing in our actions; and
- the importance that human relationships in the workplace play in mental health and wellbeing.

"Front line staff are getting constant abuse."

"Culture change isn't going to happen overnight."

"Good managers know their teams and how each person operates / their strengths."

"You can't tell people not to have that stigma – you have to educate and create an ongoing conversation."

Our people told us that **supportive and positive leadership** and **respectful and inclusive workplaces** were the most important priorities.

Our people also told us that it was important to ensure that:

- the strategy is resourced appropriately to ensure it is rolled out as intended;
- mental health in the workplace is prioritised and people are allowed time to participate in activities to promote mental health;
- mental health education is included as part of creating a respectful and inclusive workplace culture;
- mental health messaging is simple and resources are easy to find; and
- supports and actions are designed to face the constantly changing risks.

Developing our strategy

Why we need a strategy

We care about the health and wellbeing of our people.

We have a legal obligation under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* to manage risks to the physical and psychological health of all our workers.

Good mental health and wellbeing makes good business sense. Workplaces that are mentally healthy attract and keep good people, and are positive and productive.

What we already knew

We knew that good work is valuable in maintaining mental health and wellbeing and providing our people with good work can have a significant impact on their overall health.

Whilst work can promote, protect and support mental health and wellbeing, it can also contribute to poor mental health.

We need to understand the risks that our people are exposed to and manage them so as to promote and protect, and not harm, their mental health.

We need a proactive, planned approach to promote mental health in all our workplaces.

We looked at the evidence

We looked at our data to see what it told us about where, why and when people were being harmed and how we supported them to continue in or return to work.

We looked at what was already happening across the ACTPS to improve mental health and wellbeing and where we could build on what was working.

We reviewed the research evidence to assess what better practice recommends.

We looked at where we had gaps and what else could be put in place to create mentally healthy workplaces.

We asked our people

We developed a draft strategy based on the evidence, the experience of existing ACTPS initiatives and our data, and asked our people what they thought of the strategy, what were the risks to their mental health at work, what else we could implement and if there were any gaps.

We also consulted with a range of stakeholders within and external to the ACTPS to provide subject matter expertise, identify operational challenges and build connections.

Our future vision

The ACT Government understands that everyone faces challenges with their mental health from time to time, whether experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition or not.

We want to create workplaces where mental health and wellbeing is promoted, supported and improved. We can do this through:



Good leaders who lead supportive teams, design good work and create physical environments that are safe and make us want to come to work each day.



A **workforce** who have the skills and knowledge to look after each other, who act respectfully towards one another, and can use their skills to support the business.



Managers who people can trust and who can get the best out of their teams through understanding and regard for the work they do.



Designing **our work** to create mentally healthy people and workplaces.



Integrating **our systems** to support a culture of risk identification, prevention and early intervention.

We all play a part in promoting, supporting and protecting mental health in the workplace.

The priorities in our strategy enable us to make changes to our habits, work and workplaces that promote positive mental health.

If we all make small changes that focus on improving mental health and wellbeing, and supporting our colleagues who are experiencing mental health concerns, we can make our workplaces healthy and safe for everyone.

OUR PRIORITIES

Priority 1

Make mental health a priority in the workplace.

We must address mental health in the workplace as its own priority. Having a clear mental health and wellbeing strategy will ensure we have focus on what needs to be done and allows us to track our progress.

KEY ACTIONS

- Focus our efforts on mental health in our workplaces through adoption of *Healthy Minds - Thriving Workplaces*.
- Develop a workplace mental health and wellbeing policy to outline roles and responsibilities.
- Implement processes for consulting, tracking and reporting on progress.
- Establish Executive Champions to drive implementation of *Healthy Minds - Thriving Workplaces*.

Priority 2

Use data and worker input to identify and manage work and workplace risks to mental health.

To ensure safe and healthy workplaces, we need to actively look for risks to our mental health at work. Our people are best placed to understand the specific risks of their work and workplaces.

KEY ACTIONS

- Identify opportunities for improved data collection.
- Implement a whole of government tool that screens for work and workplace risks to mental health of our people.
- Review and simplify our safety reporting systems.
- Establish a mental health and wellbeing community of practice to share better practice, tested and tried approaches and obtain feedback.
- Develop and report on indicators of organisational mental health.

Priority 3

Build an inclusive and respectful workplace culture that promotes mental health.

Respectful and inclusive workplaces improve staff morale and job satisfaction, improve teamwork, improve retention and help to attract high quality staff.

KEY ACTIONS

- Establish a culture that makes the mental health of our workforce a priority through our Executive Champions.
- Build on the capability of managers to be able to identify and manage inappropriate behaviours early.
- Build on team capability to manage conflict.
- Ensure processes are described and followed.
- Identify and address challenges to inclusivity.

Priority 4

Design jobs, work and workplace supports to protect and improve mental health.

Work can have significant impacts on people's wellbeing. We need to consciously design work to best use people's skills and provide the support they need to ensure their work promotes good physical and mental health and prevents harm to mental health

KEY ACTIONS

- Raise awareness and understanding of the health benefits of good work.
- Focus on strengths, opportunities and resources to contribute to a positive work environment.
- Develop tools, training and resources to support managers to utilise good work design.
- Implement systems to make sure that our people are consulted in work design processes.

Priority 5

Promote mental health and wellbeing.

Education and awareness of common mental health condition signs and symptoms, suicide awareness and prevention, positive coping strategies, available mental health supports and resources will help protect our people from mental health risks.

KEY ACTIONS

- Educate our people on their responsibilities under the *Work Health and Safety Act*.
- Implement mental health literacy and suicide awareness and prevention training for our people.
- Raise awareness of workplace risks to mental health and promote positive ways to maintain good mental health and staying well.
- Educate our people on the links between work and home life and positive actions for good mental health.
- Link our workplaces into public mental health promotion campaigns.

Priority 6

Remove stigma around mental health and create environments where people feel safe to seek help.

Workplaces can play a very important role in encouraging staff to seek early support for mental health concerns. Early intervention can significantly reduce the severity, duration and recurrence of mental health conditions.

KEY ACTIONS

- Challenge inaccurate stereotypes about workplace mental health and wellbeing in training information and in conversation
- Share stories from real people about their experiences.
- Promote zero tolerance for discrimination.
- Evaluate changes in levels of stigma.

OUR PRIORITIES

Priority 7

Develop leaders with a positive management style who can model behaviours that promote good mental health.

A positive leadership style can help to develop a psychologically healthy and safe work environment.

KEY ACTIONS

- Equip managers with tools to self-assess their own levels of positive leadership attributes.
- Encourage 360-degree feedback opportunities.
- Influence recruitment and promotional processes to prioritise positive leadership skills.

Priority 8

Support people living with a mental health condition and their supporters.

Work is an important part of recovery from mental health conditions and can create protective social connections, give structure and purpose to day to day life. Returning to work after a period of absence helps with recovery.

KEY ACTIONS

- Provide clarity around roles, responsibilities and procedures when someone is returning from leave.
- Provide workplace supports to mental health early intervention, reasonable adjustments and suitable duties to allow people to recover at work.
- Provide supporters and carers with resources that will support them in their role and allow them to balance work and caring duties.
- Educate managers on people's continued capability to work with a mental health condition.

How to seek help

If you or someone in your workplace is in crisis and you think immediate action is needed, call **Emergency Services on 000**, contact your doctor, the Access Mental Health team on 1800 629 354, or go to your local emergency department.

Where to go to speak to someone

You can call:

- Lifeline - 13 11 14
- Beyond Blue - 1300 22 4636
- MensLine Australia - 1300 78 99 78
- Kids Helpline - 1800 55 1800

Local resources

Adult Community Mental Health Teams - 1800 629 354

There are five adult community mental health teams located throughout Canberra. These multidisciplinary teams include doctors, nurses and other health care professionals. They provide services for people experiencing mental health issues.

Next Step - Capital Health Network - 20 6287 8066

Next Step is a free and confidential support service to help people tackle day to day pressures. The service is delivered by the Capital Health Network and provides a range of evidence-based services to people over 18 years of age who reside, work, or study in the ACT and are not accessing other mental health services.

Employee Assistance Program

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a free, professional and confidential service paid for by your employer and accessible to you and your immediate family members. The ACT Government has one EAP provider, **Converge International - 1300 687 327**.

More resources

More resources are available on the Mental Health and Wellbeing page.

HEALTHY MINDS - THRIVING WORKPLACES

An integrated mental health and wellbeing strategy

2019 - 2022

Mental health affects us all, whether it's in our personal life, in our families, at work, or in our communities. We all have different needs and challenges impacting our mental health, but there are common principles that can support everyone's mental health and wellbeing at work.

We need to take an integrated approach to mental health in our workplaces that ensures we are **preventing** harm and **protecting** the mental health of our people, **promoting** the positive aspects of work and people's capabilities in the workplace, and **supporting** people who are experiencing mental health conditions.

OUR PRIORITIES

1. Make mental health a priority in the workplace.
2. Use data and worker input to identify and manage work and workplace risks to mental health.
3. Build an inclusive and respectful workplace culture that promotes mental health.
4. Design jobs, work and workplace supports to protect and improve mental health.
5. Promote mental health and wellbeing.
6. Remove stigma around mental health and create environments where people feel safe to seek help.
7. Develop leaders with a positive management style who can model behaviours that promote good mental health.
8. Support people living with a mental health condition and their supporters.

WHAT WE WILL DO

- Consider mental wellbeing in all policy and practice.
- Collect and report on mental health data to give a picture of where our risks lie and how we are progressing in this area.
- Support leaders with the skills and resources required to foster healthy workplace relationships and harmonious teams.
- Deliver mental health education and real examples to build an understanding and skills in our workforce.
- Provide our people with the resources and support they need to create a safer work environment that promotes mental wellbeing.
- Clarify and document roles and responsibilities of people who support recovery from mental health conditions.
- Make clear that flexible working arrangements and reasonable adjustments are available to support people in the workplace.

OUR FUTURE VISION

We want to create a workplace where mental health and wellbeing is promoted, supported and improved. We can do this through:

Good leaders who lead supportive teams, design good work and create physical environments that are safe and make us want to come to work every day.

A workforce who have the skills and knowledge to look after each other, who act respectfully towards one another and can use their skills to support the business.

Managers who people can trust and who can get the best out of their teams through understanding and regard for the work they do.

Designing **our work** to create mentally healthy people and workplaces.

Integrating **our systems** to support a culture of risk identification, prevention and early intervention.

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE

PROMOTE

PREVENT

SUPPORT

WHAT WE KNOW

1 in 5 Australians experience mental health issues each year.



Groups who are exposed to higher levels of trauma, or experience distress in their lives, are at a higher risk of experiencing mental health issues.



Job stressors have a clear impact on mental health in the workplace.



The majority of ACTPS mental health claims relate to work pressure or bullying and harassment.



Creating mentally healthy people and supportive workplaces to deliver the best outcomes for the ACT Community.