

# **The Heads Up initiative ...helping Australian businesses save up to \$11 billion each year.**

HAVING A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE IS IMPORTANT TO AUSTRALIANS,  
BUT ONLY HALF (54%) OF US BELIEVE OUR WORKPLACE IS MENTALLY HEALTHY.

## The impact of poor mental health in the workplace is difficult to ignore!

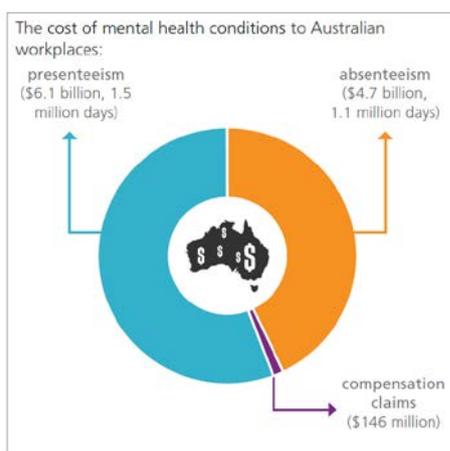
Depression and anxiety conditions are the **second leading cause of disability and mortality** in Australia<sup>1</sup>.

Nearly **three million people** in Australia experience depression and/or anxiety each year<sup>2</sup>.

At a population level, around **45 per cent of Australians** will experience a mental health condition at some point in their lifetime<sup>3</sup>.

The **cost to Australian businesses** of poor mental health is estimated at **\$11 billion per year**<sup>4</sup>.

Unlike many physical illnesses, depression and anxiety conditions impact people during their prime working years. From a business perspective, there are significant financial impacts incurred via absenteeism and presenteeism. These far outweigh costs incurred via compensation claims (by around 75 to 1)<sup>4</sup>:



## While the majority of Australians *want* to work in a mentally healthy environment, this is not always their experience.

Australians recognise the need to create mentally healthy workplaces. In fact, nine in ten employees / managers (91%) and senior leaders (89%) believe mentally healthy workplaces are important. However:

- Only half (56 per cent) of employees / managers believe their senior leaders value mental health as much as they do.
- And, **only half (54 per cent) of employees / managers believe their workplace is mentally healthy.**

## What does a mentally healthy workplace look like *to your staff*?

At an overall level, a mentally healthy workplace is one that does three things:



In recent research conducted among 1000 Australian employees by *beyondblue* and TNS (2014)<sup>5</sup>, staff consistently gave feedback on the importance of these three traits for a mentally healthy workplace:

1. **Promoting a mentally healthy environment starts 'at the top'**. For employees, '*supportive management and relationships*' were the single most important attribute that drives a mentally healthy workplace (70 per cent mention this when asked to identify the 'top 3 things that make a workplace mentally healthy').

*"I think the tone set by management which affects work culture is probably the biggest factor here."*

(employee, research participant, describing elements of workplace mental health)

In fact, within workplaces that were rated 'mentally healthy' by their staff, three quarters (73 per cent) agreed their senior management were approachable, compared to **only 12 per cent agreeing their senior management was approachable among those who rated their workplace as 'mentally unhealthy'**.

This signifies the uniquely important role of senior leaders in creating and driving change to promote and achieve mental health in their workplace.

2. **Creating a culture that is protective of staff wellbeing will also help to achieve a mentally healthy workplace.** Protection against negative behaviours (bullying, discrimination, abuse) is central to employee beliefs on what drives a mentally healthy workplace. The perceived presence of these negative behaviours was indeed the strongest contributor to what results in a mentally *unhealthy* workplace (mentioned by more than half - 56 per cent - of employees / managers when describing what makes a workplace mentally *unhealthy*).

However, **only half (46 per cent) of employees believe their workplace currently has an anti-bullying policy.** Australian leaders could immediately address this by either implementing anti-bullying policies or, by ensuring staff are aware they already exist.

3. **Staff need to feel empowered to access policies and programs about mental health.** *beyondblue's* research<sup>5</sup> consistently pointed to evidence that workplaces with information, policies and programs specific to mental health are mentally healthier.

This research<sup>5</sup> compared workplaces rated by staff as mentally healthy to those rated as mentally *unhealthy*. In workplaces that staff considered to be mentally healthy, there was significantly greater presence of mental health policies, training, information, and support for national mental health days like 'RUOK Day':

My workplace ...	is mentally healthy	is mentally unhealthy
Provides information about mental health support / services	53%	28%
Supports mental health days (like RUOK Day)	48%	20%
Has mental health policies	47%	22%
Has mental health information in common areas	44%	19%
Has mental health training	30%	13%

But of course, it's not just about having mental health policies and programs – it's about **empowering people to access them**. This happens through *active promotion and support* for them, so they become engrained within the workplace's culture. In workplaces where staff are supported to discuss mental health and are involved in the design of mental health practices, programs and policies, there is greater likelihood of achieving a mentally healthy environment:

My workplace ...	is mentally healthy	is mentally unhealthy
Takes action to minimise mental health risks	62%	14%
Supports disclosure of mental health	59%	16%
Encourages open discussion about mental health	47%	8%
Involves employees in discussions about mental health	37%	5%

### Human Resource leaders can play a valuable role in reducing the barriers to accessing mental health supports in the workplace.

Three quarters of employees (73 per cent) indicate that if someone in their workplace was experiencing anxiety or depression, they would recommend talking to someone in Human Resources. However, most people are more likely to recommend seeking help outside of the workplace in these situations.

This is because accessing mental health support in the workplace is impacted not only by the presence (or, absence) of supports and programs, but also by the perceived stigmas attached to experiencing anxiety or depression at work. Many staff hold a belief that workplaces can be discriminatory towards mental health.

*"It's a fear of unknown reaction and being vulnerable to someone who has authority over you, a decision maker who could either be supportive and help you or, on the other hand, use that information to pressure you and make your life hell.*

*It's a toss of the coin."*

(employee, research participant, describing disclosing in the workplace)

### When workplaces focus on mental health, there is real return on investment to the business.

In workplaces where senior leaders value mental health, the likelihood that staff will take time off because they were feeling mentally unhealthy halves. Statistically, according to the TNS research:

- In workplaces where there is a perception that senior leaders *do not value* mental health, one third (36 per cent) of staff will take time off because they were feeling mentally unhealthy.
- This compares to only 16 per cent in workplaces where senior leaders *do value* mental health.

In fact, PWC research shows **the average return on investment for every \$1 invested in creating a mentally healthy workplace is \$2.30<sup>6</sup>**.



### How can senior leaders and Human Resources create mentally healthy workplaces?

While creating a mentally healthy workplace is everyone's responsibility, mental health is a leadership issue, and change must start at the top. Business owners, organisational and Human Resources leaders play a critical role in driving policies and practices that promote mental health in the workplace. They have the capacity to positively influence workplace culture, management practices and the experience of employees.

Fundamentally, creating a mentally healthy workplace means focussing on:

1. **Promoting** mental health - raising awareness and reducing stigma;
2. **Protecting** mental health – minimising risk; and,
3. **Empowering** people – encouraging access of policies and programs, and actively supporting people with mental health conditions.

## How does Heads Up help workplaces promote and protect mental health, and empower staff?

beyondblue's 'Workplace and Workforce' program (W&W), and its most recent evolution – 'Heads Up' – provides resources to assist workplaces create mentally healthy environments.

Launched in May 2014, the Heads Up initiative is a social change program. It aims to highlight the benefits of mentally healthy workplaces and provide individuals and organisations with tools to take action. It was developed by beyondblue in collaboration with the Mentally **H**Healthy Workplace Alliance.

Heads Up is inclusive of:

- a dedicated website **headsup.org.au** which has free practical tools to assist organisations improve mental health in the workplace;
- **engagement** and **partnership** activities targeting business groups, industry associations, work health and safety regulators and other key stakeholders; [and](#)
- **marketing**, with the campaign initially focussing on encouraging organisational leaders and business owners to take action to create mentally healthy workplaces.

## There is evidence that Heads Up can help Australian workplaces be mentally healthy environments.

While it is relatively 'early' in assessing the impact of Heads Up (the evaluation data cited below was collected less than six months after its launch), there are several indications of the program's ability to support workplaces and individuals.

The **Heads Up marketing activity** generated a strong behavioural response. As a result of seeing the Heads Up marketing activity:

- Half of senior leaders (53 per cent) **thought about what they could do** in their workplace to make it more mentally healthy.
- One quarter of senior leaders (24 per cent) indicated they had **taken action in their workplace** to make it more mentally healthy.

Of those who had visited the **Heads Up website**:

- Four out of five (78 per cent) indicated the website was '**good / very good / excellent**'.
- Nine out of ten (86 per cent) indicated they would **recommend** the website to other people.
- Nine out of ten (86 per cent) who had used the **eLearning tools** (located on the website) indicated high levels of satisfaction with them.

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*"It is very factual and interactive and I think it does a good job at challenging the prevailing wisdom around mental health issues ...makes you confront and challenge your own perception of mental illness. There are certainly things in here that I didn't know."*

(employee, research participant, describing the Heads Up website)

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Additionally, in workplaces registered to Heads Up, there was early evidence of this **translating into reductions in the presence of stigma and discrimination**. In registered workplaces, there was significantly lower agreement with several discriminatory-supportive attitudes, for example:

Agreement that...	No exposure to Heads Up (n=354)	Registered to Heads Up (n=601)
... <i>depression</i> is a sign of weakness	48%	<b>25%</b>
... <i>anxiety</i> is a sign of weakness	57%	<b>33%</b>
...someone experiencing <i>depression</i> should try to 'snap out of it'	60%	<b>36%</b>
...someone experiencing <i>anxiety</i> should try to 'snap out of it'	71%	<b>46%</b>
...if I had <i>depression</i> , I wouldn't want anyone at work to know	54%	<b>31%</b>

As an early indicator of the initiative's potential to positively influence workplace mental health in a sustained way, and reduce the significant financial impact of absenteeism and presenteeism, this is a strong result.