

# MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE: DESIGNING A COLLABORATIVE, MENTAL WELLBEING PROGRAM

Creating mentally healthier workplaces is a shared responsibility and does not fall solely on employers. Insurers, healthcare professionals and government organisations also have an important role to play in a rapidly changing work environment, which now encompasses a surge in remote working. Through collaboration and partnerships between the public and private sector, a more holistic and human-centred approach to mental health in the workplace can be taken.

These strategic, long-term partnerships can improve communication, increase engagement and drive change to build a future, thriving workforce. This guide examines some of the things employers may do to design a collaborative, mental wellbeing program in their workplace or worksite environment.

## Engage with your employees

Developing a mental wellbeing program can be a great step in moving towards a thriving workplace. However, if the program is not developed in consultation with employees, it may prove of little worth.<sup>1</sup> In order to develop an effective and relevant wellbeing program, employees are often the best source of research. Employees could provide insight into:

- **Content:** What issues are employees experiencing? What do they need help with?
- **Interaction:** How will employees access the program? When will they access the program?
- **Communication and promotion:** How are you best able to raise awareness of the program and encourage employees to access it?
- **Culture:** Does the wellbeing program reflect your organisation's culture? Are the components something that would be accepted by employees or do you require a cultural element?



Employees may also shed light on other issues in the workplace that managers may not have been aware of. If there are inherent problems, a mental health wellbeing program may not be as effective as it could have been – i.e. are specific areas of the business understaffed, leaving those teams or individuals overworked? If resourcing requirements are not rectified, then employees may not benefit from a wellbeing program, hence why direct employee engagement is key.

**For example, consider conducting a short, all-employee survey to seek input into the design of a wellbeing program. This promotes employee engagement and limits any disconnect between 'head office' and those working remotely or at satellite branches.**

When discussing mental health, particularly whilst implementing wellbeing programs or initiatives, it's important to be mindful of the content and the audience. For more information on preparing for discussions regarding employees' mental health, read our [Mental Health in the Workplace: Raising Awareness & Encouraging Conversations](#) guide.

## Utilising available resources and potential partnerships

A survey of Allianz clients found that only 25 per cent of employers are currently using government or organisational tools to facilitate mental health discussions in their business.<sup>2</sup>

There are a number of ways to design mental health programs and activities that include input from, and collaboration with, third party experts in the public and private sectors. Here's a list of opportunities for businesses of all sizes, across all industries to consider:



**Tip: The third-party experts don't necessarily need to be mental health specialists. Mental health advocates may assist in identifying speakers who will add value to employees, with the long-term goal of their holistic wellbeing.**

### > Government and insurers:

Both have different resources available for businesses to access, including guides and research papers, as well as seminars and training. The WorkSafe Victoria practical toolkit is an example of an available resource which can support any type of business wanting to implement a mental wellbeing program.

### > Educational talks or training:

Hosting regular talks and short webinars/seminars for employees is a great way to include third party voices and initiatives, whilst demonstrating the value of mental health to the organisation.

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## Case Study:

### Allianz trials 'Here's a Thought'

#### The campaign:

To proactively address wellbeing with its own employees, Allianz Australia partnered with third party expert Matthew Johnstone, Director at Drawn from Experience, to pilot<sup>2</sup> a new corporate wellbeing initiative, 'Here's a Thought.' The collaboration was designed to educate staff on mental health and wellbeing, and help minimise workplace stress and pressure.

The program came to life through the delivery of a series of illustrations via text and email, all exploring different elements of mental health at work. All visual assets were accompanied by a corresponding question to engage employee attitudes to mental health at work, such as "would you feel comfortable asking for help at work?"

#### The results:

'Here's a Thought' was very positively received by Allianz employees, with staff stating they "want to see more of this" and that this type of program is "critical in our fast-paced environment."

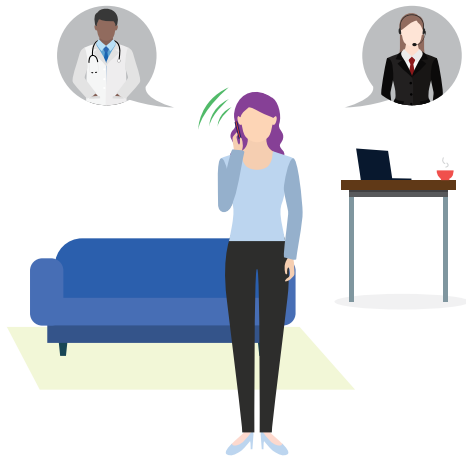
Feedback from the majority of Allianz participants in the pilot program showed it has left employees with an overall greater sense of perceived wellbeing as a result:

- **35 per cent** increase in staff confidence that they can deal with work and non-work related stress.
- **19 per cent** increase in staff confidence that they feel they could have a conversation about their mental health.
- **14 per cent** increase in staff knowledge around recognising that their mental health is declining in order to address it.

Learn more about [Here's a Thought with Matthew Johnstone.](#)

## Making collaboration a reality: The checklists you need

In the *Allianz Future Thriving Workplaces* report, only 29 per cent of employers rated their understanding of the impact of mental health issues on employees' work and quality of life as very good.<sup>3</sup> It is critical employers read and understand government workplace safety regulatory guidelines for mental health, regardless of the businesses size. A good place to start for support with building a mentally healthy workplace could be the organisation's workers compensation insurer and the aligned State government workers compensation body, as both provide practical assistance to employers seeking to limit the occurrence of psychological injuries in the workplace. In addition:



- > If already using some resources from a government or not-for-profit organisation, check to see if any updated materials or tools are available to update the organisation's mental wellness offerings. Research partnering with mental health specialists, like:
  - [Black Dog Institute: Community Business Partners](#);
  - [The Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance](#);
  - [Beyond Blue Business and Corporate support](#).
- > Participate in mental health awareness days, such as [R U OK? Day](#) or fitness events, such as Exercise Your Mood Walk.
- > Refer employees to accredited resources through [HeadToHealth](#).

### For employees:

- > Consider creating a personal mental wellbeing plan, which includes a list of partners to go to for extra help. [Beyond Blue](#) has a template that is easy to use and refer back to.
- > Connect with the right kind of help through [HeadToHealth](#).
- > When working from home, check in regularly with managers and team members to ensure a sense of connection.
- > If more help is needed, reach out to national helplines and websites like:
  - [1300 22 46 36 Beyond Blue; Support Service](#);
  - [1800Respect.org.au](#);
  - [Our Watch](#).



### References

<sup>1</sup>Spence, G. B. (2015). Workplace wellbeing programs: if you build it they may NOT come... because it's not what they really need! *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 5 (2), 109-124.

<sup>2</sup>25 per cent – Allianz (2019). Allianz Employer Pulse Check 'Mental Wellness in the Workplace Survey'.

<sup>3</sup>29 per cent – Allianz (2020). Future Thriving Workplaces Report. Manager Survey, Question 9.

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