



# Unschedule the Burnout

A practical guide for the professional services sector



# Industry overview

## Burnout in the professional services industry is likely increasing due to a 'perfect storm' of post-COVID workload intensification, financial pressures and job insecurity.

Well over half of surveyed professional services employees (62 per cent) say they have experienced some form of mental distress – such as anxiety, burnout or emotional exhaustion – because of work overload, which includes workload pressure, meeting overload or unrealistic deadlines.<sup>1</sup>

High-stakes client work, perfectionism and 'always-on' cultures raise burnout risk – especially for top performers who struggle to switch off. Meeting overload and vague roles drive unnecessary stress.

*“Look for your high performers who are emailing at 2am and say they can't switch off. Use role clarity and meeting discipline to reduce needless stress, and run regular stress-recovery check-ins.”*



Dr Helen Lawson Williams

## A snapshot of burnout in professional services



Psychological claims made up 21 per cent of overall claims in professional services in FY25, a relative increase of nearly 36 per cent since 2021.<sup>2</sup>



Mental stress and/or work pressure accounted for over 36 per cent of all FY25 psychological claims in the professional services industries.<sup>3</sup>



Nearly two in five (39 per cent) of surveyed workers still feel obliged to respond to work queries outside of normal working hours.<sup>4</sup>



41 per cent of surveyed professional services workers are worried about technology and AI taking over their jobs, creating stress in and outside of the workplace.<sup>5</sup>



Surveyed professional services workers spend on average nearly three and a half hours every week completing unnecessary tasks or attending unnecessary meetings.<sup>6</sup>

# Tips for the professional services sector

**Burnout is not inevitable – it is preventable with the right workplace culture and recovery strategies in place.**

For workers in professional services, constant client demands, tight deadlines, and the pressure to maintain high performance across long hours are contributing to rising levels of exhaustion and burnout.

Using Allianz's research-informed **Beyond Burnout framework**, we collaborated with burnout expert Dr Helen Lawson Williams to share practical tips and strategies to help mitigate the experience of burnout and promote employee wellbeing and productivity.

Dr Helen Lawson Williams holds a PhD in organisational psychology and has two decades of leadership experience in professional services. Her frustration with the persistent issue of burnout and the limitations of traditional wellbeing programs led her to develop the evidence-based TANK system, which empowers high performers to thrive without burning out. Her work is driven by a belief that sustainable success starts with smarter wellbeing strategies.

*"I think we're seeing a perfect storm. So, you have the carryover from COVID, where people all took it up a notch, and then you've got an increase in concern around AI and the disruption that comes with that. You've got financial insecurity, and those two things are really coming together with that existing baseline around stress."*

**Dr Helen Lawson Williams**



Nearly a third (31 per cent) of surveyed professional services workers cite unnecessary meetings or tasks as negatively impacting their job satisfaction.<sup>7</sup>



38 per cent say they can't take proper breaks due to their back-to-back schedule.<sup>8</sup>



Nearly half (45%) agree they often have to work beyond their scheduled hours in order to complete all of their work.<sup>9</sup>



## Creating a just workplace

A fair and equitable workplace fosters a sense of value and respect among employees and reduces feelings of injustice.

Rethink your high-performance culture and establish clear boundaries around work and recovery.

**Tip:** When scoping work in consultant industries, embed early collaboration with key business stakeholders into your process to ensure feasibility of project timelines and fair distribution of work. When reviewing workload analytics for billable hours, take a risk-based approach and implement corrective actions to reduce after-hours work across teams and prevent chronic overallocation to certain individuals.

**Tip:** Examine your performance review and career progression processes; they need to support all talent across your organisation equally. This means minimising implicit bias that comes with subjective assessment, through appropriate leader training and objective performance standards, and clearly communicating career pathways.

In smaller organisations, ensure role expectations are documented and agreed and schedule regular check-ins to provide opportunities for two-way feedback.

*"We need to break the idea that you have to do everything in order to be considered a high performer. Prioritisation and boundaries are actually really part of being a high performer."*  
Dr Helen Lawson Williams.



## Managing workload and work pressure

Ensuring manageable workloads and reasonable time pressure prevents employees from becoming overwhelmed and exhausted.

Within the workplace, there is good stress and bad stress. Good stress can help drive performance and learning, whereas bad stress can negatively impact employees and lead to distress or health issues.

**Tip:** Co-design systems that support both employees and leaders to identify unreasonable work load demands and provide guidance on how to discuss balancing demands whilst protecting wellbeing and sustainability. Establish a 'work intake committee' that evaluates and prioritises new projects against existing workloads before commitments and allocations are made.

**Tip:** Improve meeting culture. Set clear objectives, assign roles, and ensure pre-work is completed before meetings. If a meeting doesn't meet these standards, consider whether it's necessary at all. You can also adopt practical measures like scheduling 25-minute meetings instead of 30, giving people time to reset between discussions. These small changes help reduce meeting fatigue and create space for recovery during the day.

*"In that moment where you're actually sending a meeting invite, think about what's the purpose of this meeting? What are we actually trying to achieve here? And who needs to contribute what to that meeting in order for us to be successful?"* Dr Helen Lawson Williams.



## Effective workplace communication and support

Clear and open communication builds trust and collaboration, reducing misunderstandings and conflicts that can increase stress levels.

A supportive workplace culture and environment provides resources and emotional support, reducing feelings of isolation and promoting resilience.

**Tip:** Encourage teams to disconnect after hours and model healthy behaviours from the top. Under Australia's new Right to Disconnect laws, employees have the legal right to refuse work-related contact outside their normal hours, unless it's reasonable. Organisations should create a culture where people don't feel pressured to be 'always on' and know they're not expected to respond to emails or messages outside set working hours.

**Tip:** Implement a 'communication charter' for each team that establishes norms for response times, communication channels, and after-hours expectations. Create dedicated channels for different types of communication (urgent issues, collaborative brainstorming, social connection) to reduce information overload and manage the flow of emails and messages.

**Tip:** For managers, being able to recognise the warning signs of at-risk employees is key. Look out for increased errors from high performers, irritable behaviour, excessive work being completed outside of office hours, and the inability to switch off or take breaks.

It is also crucial to create a safe space for honest and open conversations between managers and employees. Actively listening to what your employee is experiencing, both at work and in their personal life, will help to empower them to set boundaries and redefine what 'high performance' means. This will also open up the opportunity for further conversation before employees reach their tipping point.



## Promoting autonomy

Empowering employees with autonomy promotes a sense of control and ownership, thus reducing frustration and disengagement that can lead to burnout.

Promote a culture of self-advocacy where employees feel comfortable setting boundaries.

**Tip:** Allow for self-directed work structures. Implement key results frameworks that focus on outcomes and quality of work. This allows employees to take a strengths-based approach to their work that improves engagement and satisfaction.

**Tip:** Establish 'entrapreneurship' programs where employees' can pitch and lead internal innovation initiatives and process improvements. Ensure that these activities have dedicated resources and the time is recognised and balanced with employees BAU responsibilities and expectations.

Further information is available in our [Beyond Burnout – a holistic guide to workplace wellbeing in the workplace](#). This is a comprehensive evidence informed guide for employers and employees to support the prevention, and necessary intervention, of burnout in the workplace.

## About the research

The research was commissioned by Allianz and conducted by YouGov in accordance with the Australian Polling Council standard. The 2025 survey comprises a nationally representative sample of 1,642 employees (middle managers and below) and 506 managers (senior managers and above) aged 18+ across Australia.

Fieldwork was conducted online between 28 July and 7 August 2025. Following interviewing, data were weighted by age, gender and region to reflect the latest ABS population estimates. Professional services, construction, education and healthcare cohorts were upweighted for analysis.

Allianz Workers' Compensation claims data for Financial Years 2021 to 2025 and across all Allianz portfolios including, Allianz Australia's Underwritten Workers' Compensation, NSW Managed Fund (for both private and public sector employees) and Victorian Managed Fund Portfolios.

<sup>1</sup> 62% of surveyed employees in the professional services sector stated they have experienced mental distress (e.g. anxiety, burnout, emotional exhaustion) as a result of work overload (e.g. workload pressure, meeting overload, unrealistic deadlines).

<sup>2</sup> According to Allianz Workers' Compensation data, Primary Active Psych Claims made up 21.2% of overall claims in Professional Services industries in FY25. This was the highest proportion of Primary Active Psych Claims in the Professional Services industries since 2021 and a relative increase of 35.89%.

<sup>3</sup> According to Allianz Workers' Compensation data, in FY25 Mental stress and/or Work Pressure accounted for 36.4% of all Primary Active Psych Claims in Professional Services industries.

<sup>4</sup> 39% of surveyed employees in the professional services sector agreed that they feel obliged to respond to work queries outside of contracted hours (i.e. the right to disconnect).

<sup>5</sup> 41% of surveyed employees in the professional services sector agreed they are worried about technology/artificial intelligence taking over their job.

<sup>6</sup> Surveyed employees in the professional services sector estimated on average that they spend 3.4 hours per week doing unnecessary tasks or attending unnecessary meetings instead of doing productive work.

<sup>7</sup> 31% of surveyed employees in the professional services sector selected unnecessary meetings or tasks as a contributing factor to them feeling negatively about their job.

<sup>8</sup> 38% of surveyed employees in the professional services sector agree that they can't take proper breaks due to their back to back schedule.

<sup>9</sup> 45% of surveyed employees in the professional services sector agree that they often have to work beyond their scheduled hours to complete all of their work.