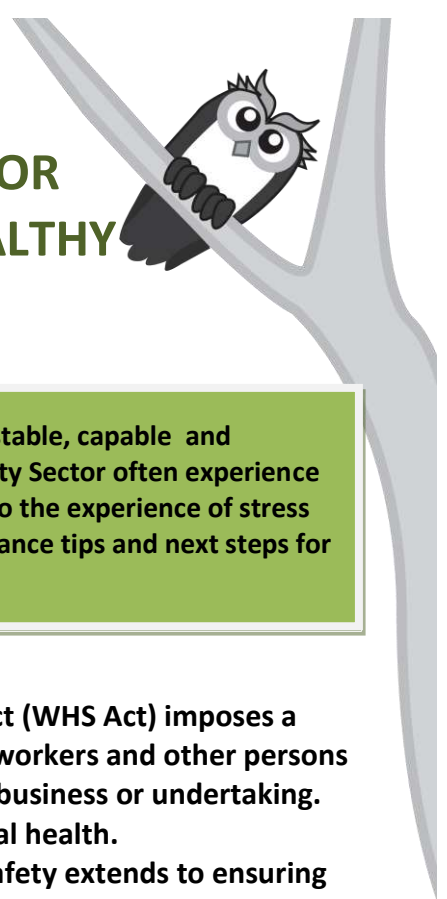


A COMMUNITY SECTOR EMPLOYER'S GUIDE FOR WORKING TOWARDS A PSYCHOLOGICALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE



The quality and effectiveness of all Community Sector services depend on having a stable, capable and sustainable workforce. There is increasing recognition that workers in the Community Sector often experience high levels of work-related demands and pressures and are particularly vulnerable to the experience of stress and burnout. This resource aims to provide some straightforward and practical guidance tips and next steps for employers to address some of the key issues of worker wellbeing.

Section 19 of the Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act (WHS Act) imposes a primary duty on an employer to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that workers and other persons at the workplace are not exposed to health and safety risks arising from the business or undertaking.

The WHS Act defines health as both physical and psychological health.

This means the duty to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, health and safety extends to ensuring the emotional and mental health of workers.

Tip 1: Identify psychological hazards in your workplace

- An employer is required to identify the hazards that may expose a worker to a health and safety risk. Examples of psychological hazards in the work place may be occupational stress, workplace harassment, occupational violence, fatigue, vicarious trauma or drug and alcohol use.
- An employer has an obligation under section 19 of the WHS Act to manage the risks as far as reasonably practicable. A failure to do so may result in a request for regulator response in the form of a complaint from a worker, which would be considered as psychosocial issues.

Tip 2: Fostering wellbeing in the workplace

- People want to work in organisations that take their wellbeing seriously. Organisations need to be values-driven and take the wellbeing of their employees seriously.
- Make sure family-friendly policies are put into practice and not just rhetoric. Encourage flexible working arrangements and make sure employees know it is OK to take leave if needed.

Tip 3: Act as positive role models

- It is in a manager's best interest to keep stress levels in the workplace to a minimum. Managers can act as positive role models - if a respected manager can remain calm in stressful work situations, it is much easier for their workers to also remain calm.
- One of the main factors generating pressure for workers is excessive hours spent at work, combined with the do-more-with-less mentality. Those managers and supervisors, who work long hours, for whatever reasons, set a bad example and make it difficult for others to go home at a reasonable hour.
- Manage technology and have clear boundaries around what is and what is not expected of employees who are given remote access, and develop a user agreement.

Tip 4: Improve communication

- Share information with workers to reduce uncertainty about their jobs and the future.
- Develop communication strategies that have clear and effective formal communication pathways.
- Clearly define employee roles and responsibilities and expectations.
- Make communication friendly and efficient, not bossy and trivial.
- Show that individual workers are valued. Praise good work performance both verbally and officially.
- Celebrate success; maybe offer rewards and incentives.



DID YOU KNOW?

There's accumulating evidence that time spent at work is negatively affecting our relationships, family and community life. We are also warned about dire health threats – diabetes, depression, obesity, to name a few. Yet no one is saying “watch out for the collective impact of a physically, mentally and emotionally exhausted workforce”.

Tip 5: Consult your employees

- Under the WHS Act an employer must consult with their employees so they have input into and influence on decisions that will affect or may affect their health and safety at work.
- Where practical give workers opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their jobs including scheduling and work rules.
- Be sure the workload is suitable to employees' abilities and resources; avoid unrealistic deadlines.
- Promote a work environment that gives employees more control, provides certainty and contributes to confidence-building.

Tip 6: Cultivate a fair work environment

- Encourage open communication between workers and management.
- Support the practice of peer and professional supervision.
- Establish a zero-tolerance policy for bullying, discrimination and harassment.
- Ensure dispute resolution procedures make employees feel confident that grievances will be addressed in a confidential, timely and fair manner.
- Make management actions consistent with organisational values.

For more information:

Sane Australia's Mindful Employer program aims to promote good mental health to people within their work environment by providing advice, information and referrals on mental illness. <http://www.mindfulemployer.org/>

Worksafe NT has excellent 'Information Bulletins' <http://www.worksafe.nt.gov.au/Bulletins/Pages/Default.aspx> and a Power Point presentation on their website which includes topics like due diligence and Codes of Practice that will be of interest to Boards and Executive Directors. <http://www.worksafe.nt.gov.au/Legislation/New%20Work%20Health%20and%20Safety%20Laws/Pages/Resources.aspx>

Mental health at work (mh@work) is an international organisation aimed at improving the wellbeing and productivity of people and workplaces. They offer unique workplace mental health and wellness strategies, awareness forums, mental health and wellbeing management workshops plus an e-learning tool. <http://www.mhatwork.com.au/>

Beyondblue National Workplace Program - beyondblue works to build the capacity of workplaces and individuals to know what to do to reduce the impact of depression and anxiety. http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link_id=4.1028



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