

Mental health at work

Work should be good for our mental health and wellbeing.

We all have a role to play in creating *mentally healthy work*. This is where the risks to workers' mental health are eliminated or minimised and wellbeing is prioritised. It is a legal requirement under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 for a business (PCBU) to manage risks to the mental health of its workers.

When work is mentally healthy, it does not cause psychological harm and may improve our overall wellbeing.



What can influence mental health at work?

There are a range of factors at work that can impact mental health. When these factors aren't managed effectively, they may become a *psychosocial risk*.

Psychosocial risk examples

- High job demands
- Low job control
- Insecure work
- Poor support for workers
- Lack of role clarity
- Poor organisational change management
- Inadequate recognition or reward
- Organisational injustice
- Traumatic events or material
- Violence and aggression
- Bullying and harassment

How do we manage mental health at work? Three key levels of intervention



Prevent (primary)

Eliminate or minimise **psychosocial risks** by addressing the work/workplace factors that may cause harm to the mental health of workers.



- Eliminate psychologically hazardous tasks
- Job-crafting and job redesign

Change the work

Promote (secondary)

Help build the individual psychological resilience, resources and tools of workers to deal with issues.



- Resilience training
- Wellbeing education and tools

Change the worker

Support (tertiary)

Reactively improve the health and wellbeing of employees who are experiencing mental ill-health.



- EAP programme
- Peer support
- Mental health first aid
- Return-to-work programmes

Creating mentally healthy work

- ✓ Leaders prioritise and resource psychological H&S
- ✓ PCBU has an integrated approach to mentally healthy work, using primary, secondary and tertiary interventions.
- ✓ PCBU has effective systems for identifying and managing psychosocial risks & assuring control effectiveness
- ✓ PCBU focuses primarily on changing the work, not the worker
- ✓ Workers feel safe to speak up and raise concerns about psychosocial risks and trust that leaders will take it seriously and take action.
- ✓ Wellbeing is seen as an outcome of healthy work

Roles and responsibilities

Everyone at work has a role to play. Some people have specific duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015.

Officers (e.g. Chief Executive)

Must take reasonable steps to understand the organisation's psychosocial risks, ensure risk management is prioritised and resourced, and verify that their systems and controls are in place and working effectively.



PCBU (the business)

Must ensure the lowest level of psychosocial risk reasonably practicable via risk assessments, safe systems of work/controls, monitoring, and learning and improving.



Workers

Must follow reasonable procedures to keep themselves free from psychological harm and participate in consultations to understand psychosocial risks.



Health and Safety Representatives

Represent the psychological H&S needs of workers back to management.



People leaders

Help to identify and manage psychosocial risks in their teams.



Health and Safety team

Advise the business how to best manage psychosocial risks and help to monitor and assure controls are in place.



Potential signs that psychosocial risks aren't being managed



Exposure to psychosocial risks can have serious negative impacts on both mental and physical health for workers; and can affect how an organisation functions, for example:

- Workers feel stressed and burnout
- High turnover
- Workers experience symptoms of mental and physical illness e.g. anxiety, depression, acute trauma, physical pains
- Low workforce engagement, motivation or morale
- Poor workplace relationships
- Poor work life balance
- Absenteeism and presenteeism
- Low productivity

Tools & resources



Government Health and Safety Lead

Guidance on mentally healthy work for health and safety teams



WorkSafe

Guidance on mentally healthy work for workers and PCBUs



Business Leaders H&S Forum

Framework and guidance for mental health by design



FlourishDx

Resources, tools and podcast on psychological health and safety

Useful websites

- healthandsafety.govt.nz
- worksafe.govt.nz
- safeworkaustralia.govt.au
- umbrella.org.nz
- mentalhealth.org.nz



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POCKETBOOK

