

Protecting and improving mental health and wellbeing in the workplace

THE NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE

Mental health can have a significant impact on the wellbeing and performance of workers. The New Zealand Health Survey¹ identified 7.6% of adults had experienced psychological distress in the last four weeks.

Through this case study, you'll see what the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) has been successful in achieving through their commitment to enhancing the mental health and resilience of its people.

NZDF workforce

The New Zealand Defence Force contributes to the defence, security and wellbeing of Aotearoa/New Zealand by maintaining well-trained and equipped armed forces that can react to crisis at short notice.

The nature of the NZDF's work can, at times, place unique demands on their people in comparison to most other occupations, and sometimes delivery of the NZDF's outputs means placing their people in harm's way. This can be in the form of working long hours, under stressful conditions and in locations geographically distant from their friends and families, contributing to periods of high stress and mental health concerns.

Given the NZDF's work environment, strong, self-reliant and in-control individuals become part of what makes them successful as a fighting force. While these attributes are central to the NZDF, they can also make it more

¹ Ministry of Health Annual Update of Key Results 2016/17: New Zealand Health Survey
<https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/annual-update-key-results-2016-17-new-zealand-health-survey>

difficult for people to seek help when needed, forming a significant challenge for NZDF.

Mental health initiatives

The NZDF recognised that keeping their people engaged, well-trained, healthy, resilient and enabling and encouraging family support was critical for a high functioning workforce. The NZDF also recognised that to be successful in managing mental health, a successful solution could not be implemented and achieved overnight. As a result, a strategic, mid to long-term approach has been developed and has given rise to initiatives across four themes:

- > Lead
- > Understand
- > Prepare
- > Care

Below are some examples of the initiatives delivered by the NZDF under their four themes:

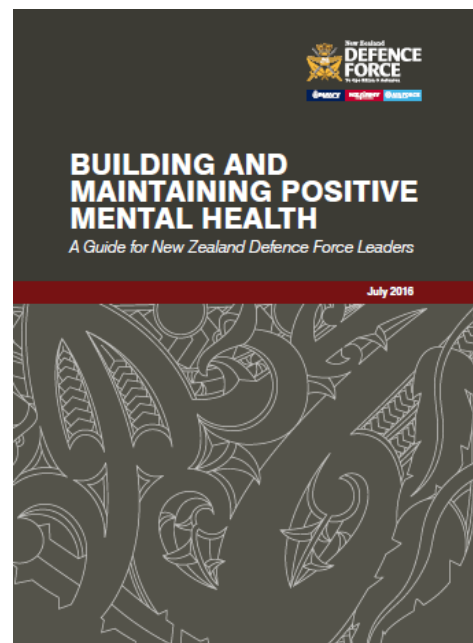
Lead

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

A guide for the leaders in NZDF was developed to support them in their roles.

The guide covers:

- > understanding/identifying mental health concerns
- > strategies for building and maintaining positive mental health
- > leading others – maintaining mental health in the workplace.



CULTURE CHANGE

The NZDF promoted across the organisation that seeking help is a sign of strength, rather than weakness.

In addition, operation RESPECT was launched in 2016 with the aim to reinforce expected behaviour across the NZDF. This programme reminded people that discrimination, harassment and bullying is not accepted or tolerated at the NZDF. It also reinforced their values and expectations to keep an eye out for each other, and if others appear unwell, provide support.

Understand

HEALTH AND WELLBEING SURVEY

The NZDF undertook a survey in four areas of health, one of which was mental health, to confirm how well current work programmes were meeting the needs of their force.

Prepare

A HEALTH ASSESSMENT PILOT PROGRAMME

The NZDF have commenced research into developing programmes with a positive health focus, to help identify and address physiological and psychosocial risk factors at an early phase to enhance the physical and mental health of its people.

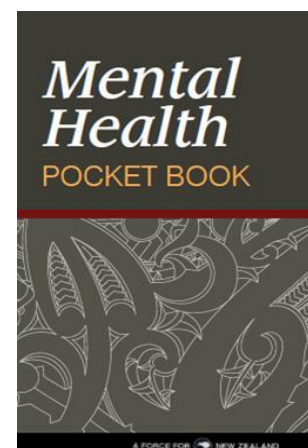
RESILIENCE TRAINING

Resilience training is now delivered to new recruits and leadership groups of the NZDF.

MENTAL HEALTH POCKET BOOK

A 'quick' pocket tool for building resilience was produced, which details information on:

- > indicators for each stage of mental health injury progression
- > tools for managing mental challenges
- > sources of help across the mental health continuum
- > supporting others
- > key contributors to positive mental health.



INDIVIDUALS' GUIDE FOR MAINTAINING HEALTH

A more comprehensive guide has been developed for individuals that focuses on 'Staying at the top of your Game'. This covers body, mind, soul and whānau and is based on Sir Mason Durie's Te Whare Tapa Wha model of Māori health.

SHARED STORIES

Anonymised case studies have been developed that profile the experience of the NZDF people who have experienced mental health challenges and want to share their journey to help others.

MENTAL HEALTH WEBSITES

Online resources have been developed and made available on the NZDF internal website. These resources explain what mental health is, how to recognise the signs, how to take action and where to find more help.

In addition, a website with information relevant to mind, body, spirit and whānau is now available to the broader defence community, including veterans and families.

SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

An online self-assessment tool is under development to engage with people who may find it difficult to talk about mental health or recognise when they are not ok. This reinforces the importance of maintaining health across the four domains of Te Whare Tapa Wha (spanning exercise, nutrition, sleep, social support, sense of purpose and belonging, as well as mental health) for overall health.

Care

0800 NUMBER

An external service is available to provide support to staff, civilians, veterans and their families, similar to an Employee Assistance Programme, but more targeted to mental health and the particular environment in which the NZDF's people operate.

Results

Soon after the programme was launch in 2015, there were signs of increased engagement around mental health issues, which was an early indication of its success. There were other signals that the programme was gaining traction; for example, places at the voluntary health assessment pilot programme were oversubscribed within 24 hours of opening.

The quality of the NZDF's Guide for Leaders has led to external organisations requesting copies of the document. Recognising demand, the NZDF have decided to develop a 'civilian' version of this booklet. This is now available to other public service agencies.



Finally, the NZDF has noticed that staff are talking more openly about mental health issues, and its mental health culture is becoming more collaborative.

Keys to success

The NZDF identified the following as key contributors to the success of their mental health initiatives:

- > Consensus within the organisation that mental health and wellbeing is a priority
- > Understanding the workforce demographics and matching the health initiatives to the target groups
- > Developing and investing in a strategic, sustainable approach that includes both the military and civilian workforce
- > Designing mental health initiatives to help more than just the current workforce, also thinking about future employees and those transitioning back into the broader community
- > Being successful doesn't require reinventing the wheel. An organisation can successfully use existing resources with a proven track record as an efficient way to develop a mental health programme. For example, the NZDF has collaborated with the Australian and Canadian Defence Forces to build on and utilise their pre-existing quality mental health resources.

More Information

For more information relating to this case study please contact Colonel Clare Bennett, Chief Mental Health Officer at the New Zealand Defence Force:

mentalhealth@nzdf.mil.nz

Useful resources:

NZDF'S MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM AND INDICATORS AT EACH STAGE

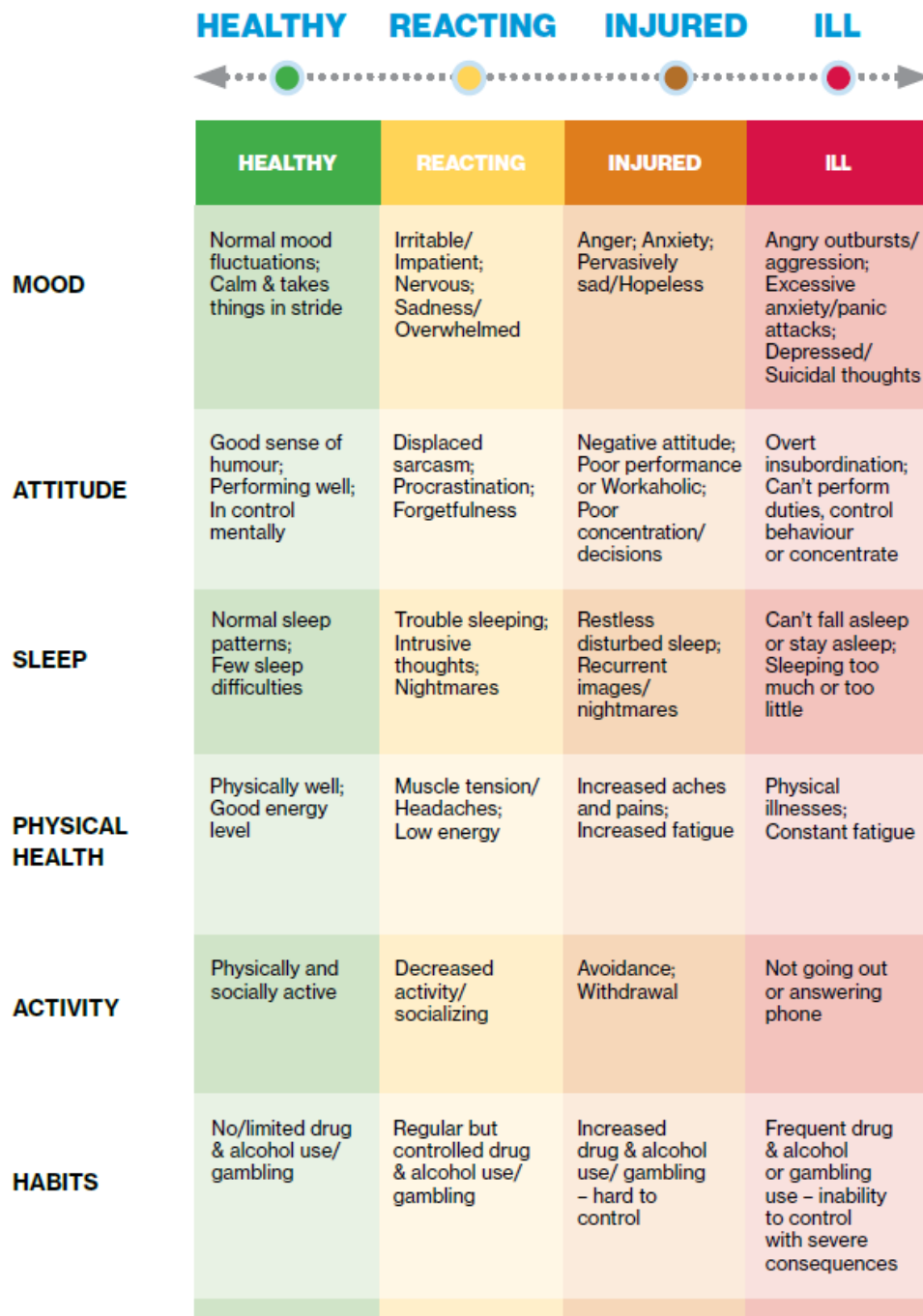


Figure 1: NZDF Mental Health Continuum

NZDF'S GUIDE FOR MENTAL HEALTH IN LEADERSHIP



HEALTHY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
Lead by example	Build resilience reserves		Involve MH resources
Get to know your personnel	Watch for behaviour changes		Demonstrate genuine concern
Foster healthy climate	Adjust workload as required		Respect confidentiality
Identify and resolve problems early	Know the resources and how to access them		Minimise rumours
Deal with performance issues promptly	Reduce barriers to help-seeking		Respect medical employment limitations
Demonstrate genuine concern	Encourage early access to care		Appropriately employ personnel
Provide opportunities for rest	Consult with Command and Health specialists as required		Maintain respectful contact
Provide mental health first aid after adverse situations			Involve members in social support
Provide realistic training opportunities			Seek consultation as needed
			Manage unacceptable behaviours

SHIELDING

SENSING

SUPPORT