

Mental Health and Wellbeing (MHW) Charter

Toolkit

Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter and Toolkit

Contents

Toolkit.....	1
Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter and Toolkit	2
Introduction.....	3
The Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter.....	4
The manager’s role in creating a positive MHW workplace	5
Embedding the MHW Charter.....	6
Ideas and support tools available to people managers to implement the MHW Charter.....	6
Taking care of yourself and your colleagues at work	7
Where to go for additional support.....	9
Additional MHW support resources outside of the Department:.....	9

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Education and Training (the Department) employs around 3,000 Victorian Public Service (VPS) staff in the centre and regions, who make up our corporate workforce. The mental health and wellbeing of our corporate workforce is crucial in the delivery of high quality education, health and wellbeing programs to those who use our services and to ensuring that the Department's Strategic Plan objectives are achieved.

The Department is committed to supporting safe and inclusive workplaces with a focus on wellbeing. This Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter (MHW Charter) is aligned to Objective 4 in the Department's VPS Investing in Our People Strategy 2016-2020 (liOP), which sets out the way in which we can all support the establishment of safe and inclusive workplaces, including ensuring a supportive psychological environment.

Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which an individual realises their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community (World Health Organization 2014). Mental health and wellbeing in a work context contributes to high performance, effective professional relationships and positive personal motivation.



Figure 1 -
liOP Strategy: Objective 4
Safe and Inclusive Workplaces

Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which an individual realises their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community (World Health Organization 2014). Mental health and wellbeing in a work context contributes to high performance, effective professional relationships and positive personal motivation.

Conversely, mental ill health can affect a person's wellbeing and ability to work productively. We will all be affected at some stage of our lives by mental ill health – either personally or in the workplace. Nearly 45 per cent of Victorians will experience mental illness in their lifetime. Mental health is one of the largest occupational health and safety (OHS) risks and causes of injury, illness and disease in the Victorian Public Sector (VPS) and in the Department.

PREVALENCE OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN THE ADULT POPULATION

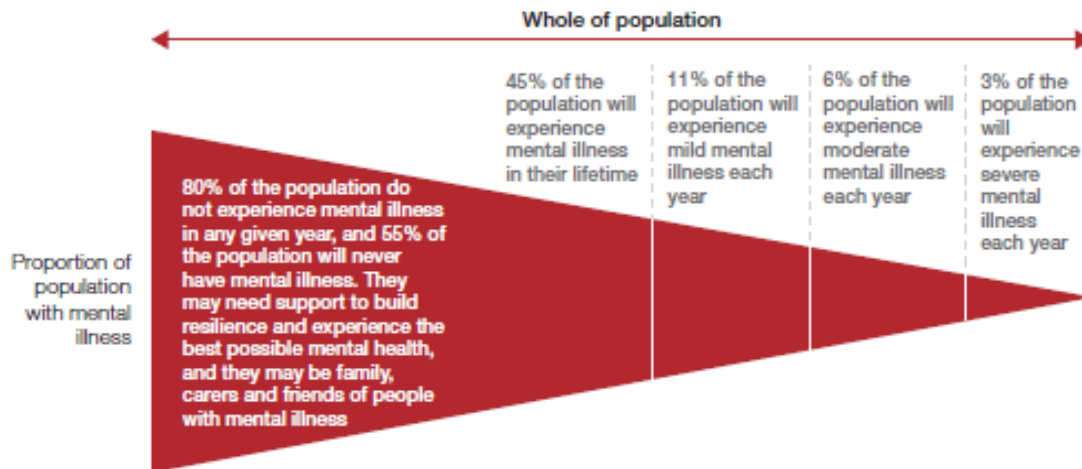


Figure 2: Prevalence of mental illness in the adult population. Source: Beyond Blue

Regardless of the cause, there are steps that we can all take to support ourselves, our colleagues and employees we manage to prevent or effectively manage mental health or injury in the workplace. Where mental injury and illness does occur, we can ensure action is taken to support sustainable recovery.

THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING CHARTER

The MHW Charter demonstrates the commitment of the VPS, including the Department, to having an engaged workforce that is physically and mentally safe and healthy.

The VPS is committed to achieving our vision by taking a holistic and inclusive approach to supporting mental health at work; promoting positive mental wellbeing, preventing mental injury and illness and where mental injury and illness occurs, taking action to support recovery.

As outlined in the MHW Charter, the VPS commits to achieving this through:

- identifying, measuring and treating MHW risks through our OHS system (OHSMS) in the same way as we do physical OHS risks
- leaders actively championing MHW initiatives
- developing a culture, skills and environment that empower workers to recognise and raise MHW issues in order to assist themselves and their colleagues
- the establishment of minimum data sets to enable reporting that improves our understanding of MHW in the VPS to inform continuous improvement in the programs and services offered to employees
- delivering evidence-based training programs that support the capability of managers and workers (including Health and Safety Representatives) in identifying, preventing, protecting and addressing mental injury and illness, as well as promoting positive MHW, and
- consulting, communicating and providing services that support MHW that can be accessed and used by all employees.

The MHW Charter was developed by representatives from the VPS and relevant unions, using the Canadian Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the workplace as a starting point. The

MHW Charter was endorsed by the Public Sector Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Leadership Group on 18 October 2016.

THE MANAGER'S ROLE IN CREATING A POSITIVE MHW WORKPLACE

As leaders in the organisation, Executives and managers play a critical role in championing the MHW Charter. The Charter has three key MHW related pillars:

- protecting against poor MHW
- promoting positive MHW
- addressing where mental injury and illness is occurring, taking appropriate action to support recovery and effective and sustainable return to work (RTW) rehabilitation.

Leaders at all levels are critical in creating a supportive culture of positive MHW. Pro-active leadership can be demonstrated through:

- raising awareness in your workplace to eliminate discrimination, reduce stigma and help people recognise early warning signs and knowing how to respond to risks associated with MHW
- promoting a culture of support, empathy and respect
- consulting with people on decisions about how their work is undertaken, including when changes happen that affect their system of work, which may result in concerns or uncertainty.

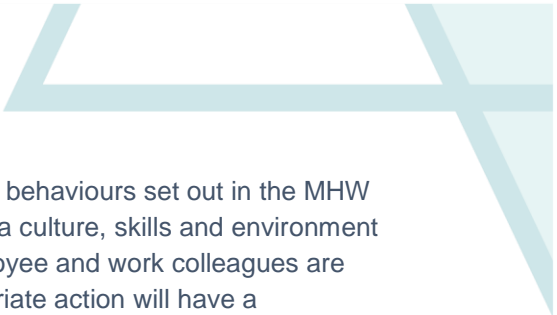
MHW in the workplace can be promoted through meaningful work, engagement and participation. The workplace can also negatively impact MHW through poor job design and exposure to work hazards. Managers can help by:

- managing work demands and resources
- matching employee capability with job design/requirements
- building supportive and rewarding working relationships
- promoting a healthy, positive work-life balance
- understanding and communicating relevant matters such as reasonable adjustment, flexible working and performance management to assist with employee understanding and to support a transparent and open process.

Mental health, like physical health, is a continuum. Sometimes people will display early warning signs of mental ill health or distress. Regardless of whether this is due to personal or work circumstances, where possible, the manager's role is to recognise and respond to early warning signs of mental ill health.

This could include:

- pro-actively identifying changes in behaviour, including mood and physical presentation
- identifying increases in absenteeism, the existence of presentism, or a decline in work performance
- getting to know your team and individual behaviours so it is easier to identify when things are not going well
- having an RUOK? conversation with employees who may be showing signs of vulnerability
- providing support to employees, including in facilitating a referral to a professional service advisor such as the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and manager Assist and the Live Well wellbeing portal.



Managers are important role models in demonstrating the values and behaviours set out in the MHW Charter with their work teams. The manager will assist in developing a culture, skills and environment that empower employees to raise MHW issues so that both the employee and work colleagues are supported to deal with the issue in the most appropriate way. Appropriate action will have a constructive effect on team morale, productivity and general employee mental health and wellbeing.

EMBEDDING THE MHW CHARTER

To support the effective implementation of the Charter, the Public Sector OHS Leadership Group has endorsed the following actions:

- **a minimum data set (MDS):** performance indicators relating to MHW to be determined for each department, including baseline and improvement measures, allowing for benchmarking across similar organisations
- **an education and training framework:** we will provide training for all VPS employees at every level on MHW, including recognising MHW risks and issues, creating healthy and safe workplaces, and responding to MHW related hazards in the workplace
- **leading the way:** updating our WoVG OHS framework to incorporate MHW on an equal level with other OHS issues
- **occupational violence (OV):** working together across Departments and government bodies affected by OV and related challenging behaviours to identify and implement best practice approaches to MHW.

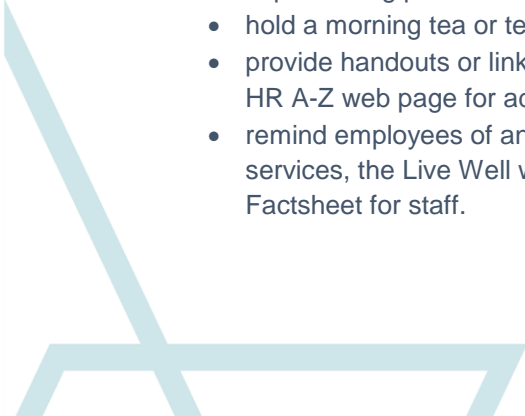
IDEAS AND SUPPORT TOOLS AVAILABLE TO PEOPLE MANAGERS TO IMPLEMENT THE MHW CHARTER

The aim of the MHW Charter is to provide a consistent and positive approach to MHW in all WoVG workplaces. Mental health is everyone's business and as a leader in the organisation, managers play a critical role in championing the Charter.

Here are some suggestions of ways managers can support the implementation of the Charter:

- **display** the Charter within your workplace
- **discuss** the Charter with all staff members within your team
- **distribute** the Charter to your team
- **demonstrate** the Charter's commitment to lead and support positive MHW in the workplace
- **enrol** employees in related Charter/MHW training when available
- **make** employees aware of the MHW calendar.

TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH EMPLOYEES

- promote the Charter in your workplace and encourage your team to have an open conversation about what the Charter means to them and what the team can do to support people experiencing poor MHW
 - hold a morning tea or team meeting to discuss MHW and promote awareness
 - provide handouts or links to the MHW information kit to your team and refer them to the Charter HR A-Z web page for additional information
 - remind employees of any existing supports to assist them with MHW, for example EAP services, the Live Well wellbeing portal and external resources listed on the supporting MHW Factsheet for staff.
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FURTHER IDEAS

- to reinforce the Charter, display the Charter poster in places frequently attended by employees. For example, tea rooms, lunch rooms, high traffic areas and any other informal meeting areas
- send regular emails to your team highlighting examples of positive behaviours in line with the Charter to encourage similar behaviours
- use team meetings to reinforce the Charter, its purpose and its use. Discuss how you can incorporate elements of the Charter into everyday work
- consider including MHW along with OHS as a standing agenda item at your meetings to highlight situations, or projects, where positive behaviours have been demonstrated
- invite guest speakers to present at forums or team meetings on the importance of taking action to promote positive MHW in the workplace
- ensure regular recognition of employees occurs at meetings, even for 'minor miracles', rather than 'superhuman' efforts
- provide new team members with the Charter handout and direct them to the Charter website and Live Well wellbeing portal (password: DETEAP)
- The Employee Safety and Wellbeing Unit (ESWU), within People Division, is the appropriate point of contact for new employees if they want to discuss the Charter with someone on a confidential basis
- encourage your team to come up with interesting and innovative ways to bring the Charter to life and promote positive MHW in the workplace (examples being: group MHW case studies focus, walking team meetings, charity related activities to encourage positive MHW and team bonding).

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF AND YOUR COLLEAGUES AT WORK

STRESS

Stress is a normal response and can be beneficial in short bursts (known as eustress). Stress initially can help us to stay alert and perform optimally. However, prolonged or excessive distress can be damaging to mental health and wellbeing creating a risk of injury, fatigue and burnout.

It is important to recognise the signs of stress/negative MHW so that appropriate actions can be taken to respond to, and alleviate stress before it has a negative impact on your MHW.

Signs and symptoms of excessive workplace stress/MHW distress can include but are limited to:

- feeling anxious, irritable, or depressed
- apathy, loss of interest in work
- problems sleeping
- fatigue
- absenteeism
- loss of confidence
- depression
- aggression/violent challenging behaviours
- frustration
- you against the world mentality
- persistent negativity/everything is too hard
- trouble concentrating
- muscle tension or headaches
- stomach problems and nausea
- social withdrawal/disengagement
- presentism
- tardiness/poor time management
- mood swings
- increased intake or reliance on artificial stimulants
- lack of direction/purpose
- closed/blinkered approach to decision making

If you experience an increase in stress/poor MHW distress at work, there are a number of things you can do to get yourself back on track:

- find someone to talk to – either a close friend, a trusted colleague, family member or contact the Department’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP) 24/7 service provider, OPTUM, on Ph:1300 361 008. Also consider utilising the Live Well wellbeing portal (password: DETEAP) for self-help guidance
- have a conversation with your manager to assist in identifying any contributing factors towards stress/MHW distress such as lack of direction, unclear parameters, job design, work schedule etc. and develop a plan to manage and address the concern/s in a mutually agreed timeframe
- prioritise and organise – create a balanced schedule, plan regular breaks, prioritise tasks, break projects into small steps and be willing to compromise, and delegate if possible.
- employ self-care activities for example: mindfulness, resilience, emotional intelligence, take lunch breaks, go for a walk, and set aside time for activities you enjoy
- learn to separate work and personal/home life issues
- log an injury/illness/incident report on eduSafe to formalise the issue and initiate an incident investigation process to seek rectification and to help prevent a re-occurrence of the issue.

If you notice any change in your thoughts, feelings or behaviour, or your experience of stress/MHW distress is persistent, see your GP or health professional to ensure you receive early and appropriate intervention to safeguard your MHW.

LOOKING OUT FOR YOUR COLLEAGUES

If you’re concerned that someone you work with doesn’t seem themselves, having an open conversation and checking they’re okay can make a real difference to you both. You may notice your colleague is:

- turning up late to work, often off sick or taking unexplained days off
- finding it hard to make decisions, manage multiple tasks or meet deadlines
- losing confidence and having negative thought patterns
- struggling to concentrate
- avoiding colleagues – either socially or in a group situation such as meetings
- acting differently including a change in their mood and/or physical presentation.

SELF-CARE

Caring for oneself is just as important as caring for others and doing so can put you in the best position to ensure your positive MHW is maintained. Some suggested self-care activities include:

- take your annual leave each year and make sure you have a proper break from work.
- set aside time for things you enjoy, such as exercising, meditation, reading, walking and patting your dog, gardening or listening to music etc.
- get out of the workplace for lunch – even if it’s just for a 10-minute walk
- resist the temptation to have your lunch at your workstation
- initiate positive, healthy and rewarding relationships
- think of positive activities that make you smile
- learn not to fixate on life’s hiccups and hurdles but have a resilient approach and focus on behaviours and outcomes that you can help control to assist with positive personal outcomes
- never forget the added value and positive impact you bring to your workplace, family and friends
- get moving, regular exercise is a powerful stress reliever, related endorphins are beneficial to one’s MHW
- eat well/healthily and get enough sleep
- balance your schedule and prioritise tasks.

WHERE TO GO FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

For guidance and support on how to integrate the MHW Charter into your work area and for further advice in relation to staff MHW refer to the MHW Charter web page or contact the Employee Safety Wellbeing Unit (ESWU) at employeehealth@edumail.vic.gov.au.

A MHW Stakeholder Committee and a MHW Calendar are in the process of being introduced in the Department to help ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of the Charter and to assist with obtaining optimal MHW outcomes for the department and its employees.

For a free, confidential support service, including critical incident debriefing, the department's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can be accessed 24/7 by contacting OPTUM on 1300 361 008.

Please also refer to the attached information sheet outlining external MHW related resources.

ADDITIONAL MHW SUPPORT RESOURCES OUTSIDE OF THE DEPARTMENT:

MHW EXTERNAL SUPPORT RESOURCES		
Heads up:		www.headsup.org.au
Heads up provides tools and resources to create mentally healthy workplace		
SuperFriend:		http://www.superfriend.com.au/
SuperFriend is a national mental health promotion foundation focused on creating mentally healthy workplaces to reduce the incidence of suicide and the impact of mental illness on individuals and organisations.		
Sane:		www.sane.org/employers
Resources and information for better mental health at work.		
MindHealthConnect:		www.mindhealthconnect.org.au
MindHealthConnect features mental health resources, information and online programs provided by a range of organisations, including a guided search tool which helps users to navigate their way to appropriate support.		
HELPLINES		
Lifeline:	Ph: 13 11 14	www.lifeline.org.au
A national 24-hour telephone and online counselling service for all ages, featuring an online chat service.		
Mensline Australia:	Ph: 1300 789 978	www.mensline.org.au
A national 24-hour telephone and online counselling service for men.		
Suicide Call Back Service:	Ph: 1300 659 467	www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au
A national 24-hour telephone and online counselling service for those feeling suicidal and those caring from someone who is suicidal, or those affected by suicide.		
ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION		
beyondblue:	Ph: 1300 224 636	www.beyondblue.org.au
A national organisation which aims to reduce the prevalence of anxiety and depression in Australia and the stigma surrounding the issues.		
Black Dog Institute:		www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
Expert information on depression and bipolar disorder for the public and professionals, including information on getting help for mood disorders and suggestions on ways of staying well.		
BlueBoard:		www.blueboard.anu.edu.au

An online support group for people affected by depression, bipolar disorder and anxiety disorders. It aims to reduce stigma, and to provide support, hope and opportunities for sharing successful coping strategies. The group is run as a moderated bulletin board with strict protocols to protect safety and privacy.

e-couch: www.ecouch.anu.edu.au
A self-help interactive program with modules for depression, generalised anxiety and worry, social anxiety, relationship breakdown, and loss and grief. It provides self-help interventions drawn from cognitive, behavioural and interpersonal therapies as well as relaxation and physical activity.

headspace: www.headspace.org.au
Information, support and advice for young people 12-25, and their families, on general health; mental health and wellbeing; alcohol and other drugs; education, employment and other services. Centres around Australia provide with access to youth-friendly health professionals.

mentalhealthonline: www.mentalhealthonline.org.au
Information about anxiety disorders, free automated psychological assessment and self-help treatment programs, plus low-cost therapist-assisted programs over 12 weeks.

MoodGYM: www.moodgym.anu.edu.au
A popular interactive program which incorporates cognitive-behaviour therapy for depression. MoodGYM has been extensively researched and its effectiveness has been demonstrated in randomised controlled trials.

Partners In Depression: www.partnersindepession.com.au
An innovative information and support group program for people who love, live with or support someone experiencing depression.

DRUGS AND SUBSTANCE USE

Australian Drug Information Network: www.adin.com.au
A central point of access to quality internet-based alcohol and drug information provided by prominent organisations in Australia and overseas.

headspace: www.headspace.org.au
Information, support and advice for young people 12-25, and their families, on general health; mental health and wellbeing; alcohol and other drugs; education, employment and other services. Centres around Australia provide access to youth-friendly health professionals.

SUICIDE

Living Is For Everyone: www.livingisforeveryone.com.au
A world-class suicide and self-harm prevention resource, dedicated to providing the best available evidence and resources. The LIFE website is designed for people across the community who are involved in suicide and self-harm prevention activities.

Reach Out: www.au.reachout.com
A national online youth suicide prevention program, featuring information and resources.

Mindframe: www.mindframe-media.info
National initiative to provide information and resources to help the media and entertainment industries report on suicide, mental health and mental illness.

TRAUMA AND GRIEF

Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health: www.acpmh.unimelb.edu.au
World-class trauma-related research, policy advice, service development and education. The centre's services help organisations and health professionals who work with people affected by traumatic events.

Australian Child & Adolescent Trauma, Loss & Grief Network: www.earlytraumagrieff.anu.edu.au
Resources and information for anyone involved in the care of children and youth and interested in the potential impact of trauma, loss and grief experiences.

OTHER RESOURCES

Australian Pain Society www.apsoc.org.au

An organisation featuring representatives of many medical specialties such as dentistry, psychology, nursing and general practice, the society aims to relieve pain and related suffering through education, research and public advocacy.

Beacon:

www.beacon.anu.edu.au

Provides consumers and professionals with information about e-health online programs for mental health and physical health disorders. Websites throughout the world are reviewed and ranked by a panel of health experts and by consumers.

Mental Health in Multicultural Australia:

www.mhima.org.au

An organisation linking a range of state and territory mental health specialists and services, advocacy groups and tertiary institutions to promote the mental health and wellbeing of Australia's diverse communities.

Carers Australia:

www.carersaustralia.com.au

The national carer organisation that works to promote the recognition of the important role of carers and to empower carers so that they will be better informed and resourced.

National Rural Health Alliance:

www.ruralhealth.org.au

A national body working to improve the health of Australians living in rural and remote areas.