

Coronavirus COVID-19: Employer Guide

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

As the health, operational and workforce impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak continues to evolve, your team members and employees may experience a high degree of uncertainty and stress about the health and safety of their loved ones, and how this pandemic may disrupt their work and personal lives.

This guide provides guidance, information and a number of credible resources to assist in key areas of workforce mental health and wellness.

COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

In times of uncertainty, people turn to those they trust. Employers are an important and vital source of trusted information and support.

Openly Communicate with Employees about the Organisation's Position

- Acknowledge the disruption to 'business as usual'.
- Reassure your employees that expectations will shift accordingly, and that's okay.
- Let employees know that the business is thinking and planning ahead.
- Offer to answer any questions an employee may have.
- Let employees know they can expect regular updates from the leaders and managers in the business.

Utilise Multiple Channels to Communicate with Employees

It is important to communicate with employees as much as possible and through multiple channels (such as email, intranet, text message, workplace social media platforms, toolbox talks). Worry and fear grow in the absence of up-to-date information.

Promote Sourcing Information from Trustworthy Sources

- Provide information and forums for team members to share and talk about their concerns.
- Communicate the relevant health, public safety and logistics internal and external sources of information the company uses and refers to in order to make decisions.
- Encourage team members to take information from source official information such as government and public health agencies.
- Discourage the spread of uncredited source information on the internet and social media. Refer to:
 - **Beyond Blue** – [Looking after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak](#)
 - **MindSpot** – [10 psychological tips for dealing with infectious diseases](#)
 - **Lifeline** – [Mental health and wellbeing during the Coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak](#)
 - **World Health Organisation** – [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#)
 - **Australian Government** – [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) health alert](#)

Inform Employees of Support Options

Let your staff know about your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and how they can access this. Reiterate that this is confidential and that employers do not know who has accessed the service.

If applicable, keep your EAP providers updated on your workplaces specific situation so that they can support any employees that might utilise their services.

Ensure employees are communicated on key policy and process information such as flexible work and working from home policies.

Demonstrate Care and Concern to Employees

- Recommend employees experiencing high levels of anxiety seek assistance to manage their mental health and guide them to reliable resources if needed.
- Empathise. Share and acknowledge that this is a challenging and stressful time. Recognise that it's okay to be anxious. Remind your employees of the resources available to them if they are having a stress response.
- Reassure as best you can. You can refer to government and public health provided information to provide factual information.
- Recognise when stress has become unmanageable for individual employees. Some team members may need to seek medical assistance or be encouraged to seek medical assistance.
- Encourage employees to practice self-care activities and reassure them that it's ok to take steps to manage stress.

Find Opportunities to Amplify Positive and Hopeful Stories

For example, stories of people who have recovered or who have supported a loved one and are willing to share their experience. It is important to remind employees that not all hope is lost and to keep morale up, especially when often media outlets are constantly releasing, often negative, stories.

CHANGE OF WORK PATTERNS OR WORKING REMOTELY

Altering working arrangements, such as reduced work teams and working remotely, has become increasingly important due to COVID-19. Here are some recommendations for managing these changes.

Clearly Articulate Each Team Member's Work Schedule and Provide the Necessary Resources to Complete Planned Work

- Affirm or re-affirm individual's role and responsibilities and pipeline of expected work.
- Discuss agreed outcomes and reinforce expectations.
- Be clear on how work output or outcomes will be measured.
- It is important for managers to remove any bias or predetermined ideas on working remotely.

Acknowledge Capabilities and Attempt to Address Any Challenges or Limitations

- Explore opportunities to be flexible to support each employee's situation.
- Use a range of communication tools and methods, and ensure employees understand and agree on the protocols and how they are expected to be used.
- Find the most appropriate frequency for communication. Are daily check-ins required? Consider the need for end-of-day updates from employees.
- Be clear on what can and cannot be done remotely and communicate any challenges and opportunities.

Inform Employees About Their Health and Safety in the Workplace

- Provide information and 'tips' on how to keep mentally and physically safe while working in a changed environment, group or location
- Reassure employees that their health and safety remain the priority. Safety audits may be required for employees while working remotely.

Encourage Positive Team Culture

- Discuss any relevant requirements, challenges and where practical or possible, offer to provide support.
- Acknowledge the importance of employee wellbeing even if they are not in the office.
- Celebrate achievements (both work and outside work related) to ensure a sense of belonging and comradery culture is maintained by discussing topics outside of work (this may require a unique channel being setup).
- Remember to check-in with employees. This can be an unsettling time, so remember to discuss challenges, opportunities, frustrations and general health and wellbeing.

LET'S GET THROUGH THIS TOGETHER

Ensuring the safety, mental health and wellbeing of our industry's people remains the top priority of AMMA, our members and the broader industry.

As the industry comes together during this current crisis, AMMA trusts this guide provides some clarity on how to best manage the challenges of this evolving situation in your workplace.

AMMA continues to work extensively with many of its members to manage long-term issues relating to the COVID-19 Coronavirus. Further updates can be expected as material developments occur.

If you have any specific questions about COVID-19 issues in your organisation, please contact 1800 627 771 to speak with one of AMMA's expert workplace relations consultants.

REFERENCES

- **Mental Health and Psychosocial Considerations During the COVID-19 Outbreak:**
https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af_8
- **Looking After Your Mental Health During the Coronavirus Outbreak:**
<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>
- **Coronavirus – 8 Ways to Look After Your Mental Health:**
<https://www.mhe-sme.org/covid-19/>
- **How to Help an Employee or Colleague Panicked by Coronavirus:**
<https://www.hrmonline.com.au/employee-wellbeing/how-help-employee-colleague-coronavirus/>
- **Coronavirus – How to Protect Your Mental Health:**
<https://www.bbc.com/news/health-51873799>
- **Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information for Australians:**
<https://www.psychology.org.au/COVID-19-Australians>

KEY RESOURCES AND SUPPORT SERVICES

- **beyondblue**
1300 22 46 36
Information and referral to relevant services for depression and anxiety related matters.
- **Black Dog Institute**
Information on symptoms, treatment and prevention of depression and bipolar disorder.
- **Carers Australia**
1800 242 636
Short-term counselling and emotional and psychological support services for carers and their families in each state and territory.
- **Embrace Multicultural Mental Health**
A national platform for multicultural communities and Australian mental health services to access resources, services and information in a culturally accessible format.
- **Headspace**
1800 650 890
Free online and telephone service that supports young people aged between 12 and 25 and their families going through a tough time.
- **Kids Helpline**
1800 551 800
A free, private and confidential, telephone and online counselling service specifically for young people aged between 5 and 25.
- **Head to Health**
An innovative website that can help you find free and low-cost, trusted online and phone mental health resources.
- **Lifeline**
13 11 14
24-hour telephone counselling service.
- **Mensline Australia**
1300 78 99 78
A dedicated service for men with relationship and family concerns.
- **MindSpot Clinic**
1800 61 44 34
An online and telephone clinic providing free assessment and treatment services for Australian adults with anxiety or depression.
- **National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)**
Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and Aboriginal Medical Services in each state and territory.
- **SANE Australia**
1800 187 263
Information about mental illness, treatments, where to go for support and help carers.