

## **Tackling mental health issues at work**

It is inarguable that awareness regarding mental health at work is becoming more mainstream. In Australia governments at all levels are either considering or have implemented additional funding in respect to addressing mental health. This is a step in the right direction considering that 1 in 4 people suffer a mental health condition. Much work needs to be done however to address organisational cultures that stigmatize mental health.

Whilst mental health is becoming more mainstream it is still regarded as a taboo topic - often not discussed in the workplace. Mind Share Partners, SAP, and Qualtrics conducted a study on mental health challenges and stigma in U.S. workplaces – I would argue the findings are applicable in the Australian context as well. The study found:

- Less than 50% of the 1500 study respondents felt mental health was prioritized at their company, and even fewer viewed their company leaders as advocates.
- 86% of respondents thought a company's culture should support mental health. An even higher percentage was found for Millennials and Gen Zers
- Half of Millennials and 75% of Gen Zers had left roles in the past for mental health reasons, both voluntarily and involuntarily, compared with 34% of respondents overall — a finding that speaks to a generational shift in awareness.
- As companies are not doing enough to break down this stigma, many people don't self-identify as having a diagnosable mental health condition. Low levels of self-identification mean that many workers do not seek treatment, and it might explain why disclosure rates in companies are low.
- Respondents were the least comfortable talking with their company's HR and senior leaders, although senior leaders, including CEOs, were just as likely to struggle with mental health symptoms as individual contributors.
- LGBTQ+ people, Millennials, and Gen Zers were more likely to experience mental health symptoms for longer durations and were also more open to diagnosis, treatment, and talking about them at work.

## **What steps can companies take to “de-stigmatize” mental health?**

Companies, and senior leaders in particular need to look past a tick in the box approach to mental health in the workplace. Some practical steps that could assist companies include:

- Recognising that mental health isn't only a HR issue but also a diversity, equity, and inclusion issue.
- Tailoring internal strategies for a more diverse demographic group.
- Implementing an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) – whilst recognising that an EAP is only part of an overall and holistic strategy.
- Driving a positive cultural change process from the top to ensure that leaders model appropriate behaviours to help engender a culture of openness, increased awareness around mental health and mental health resources (training, and key contacts)
- Implementing an over-arching mental health and wellbeing policy – but as a living document
- Sharing stories around mental health – there is power in senior leaders becoming vulnerable and recounting the challenges they may have faced (so start top-down)
- Investing in staff training – a great starting point is to provide Mental Health First Aid training for key people in the company. Also by providing general training around mental health awareness companies will create a supportive culture. The aim isn't to turn staff into therapists but rather to increase awareness and skillsets.

Source:

<https://hbr.org/2019/10/research-people-want-their-employers-to-talk-about-mental-health>

<https://www.hrmorning.com/articles/tackling-mental-health-issues/>