

Mental Health First Aid in the Workplace: Spotlight on Stigma

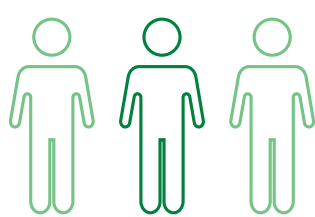


Current figures show that 45% of all Australian adults will experience a common mental illness at some point in their lifetime. That means that every day, millions of Australians go to work while experiencing a mental health problem, the most common of which are anxiety, depression and substance abuse.

A recent study conducted by the Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government found that:



37%
of people with a lived
experience of mental illness
reported experiencing
discrimination in the workplace.



1 in 3
people with a lived experience
of mental illness reported unfair
treatment in the workplace.



84%
of managers agree that
Australian workplaces need
more support to improve their
capacity to deal with mental
health problems.

Employers and managers can play an important role in promoting open and honest conversations about mental health to help break down stigma and barriers to help seeking.

What is stigma?

In the context of mental illness, stigma refers to the negative attitudes, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination towards those experiencing mental health problems. Ignorance about mental health problems is one of the main contributing factors.

Inspire change. Empower individuals and workplaces to build a positive workplace culture.

An open and inclusive workplace, where workers feel safe and supported to seek help early, is better for everyone.

Language Matters

How can employees address stigma?

Everyday phrases and the language used in conversation can contribute towards stigma.

Don't say:	Do say:
✗ "It could be worse"	✓ "Thanks for opening up to me"
✗ "Just deal with it"	✓ "I'm sorry to hear that"
✗ "Everyone feels that way sometimes"	✓ "I'm here for you if you need"
✗ "We've all been there"	✓ "I can't imagine what you're going through"

What can be done at each level of the organisation to address stigma?



Organisations (Executive Leaders)

Inspire change

People with lived experience of mental health issues are often the drivers of social change. Peer support can help those with a lived experience feel more comfortable about starting a conversation about mental health. This helps create a safe and supportive environment through open communication and leading by example.

Link actions to outcomes

Define what well-being looks like in your organisation and why it's important for your workplace culture. Having clear goals and communicating them to employees will help reach desired outcomes. Build an organisational culture that emphasises respect, trust, inclusivity, support and equity.

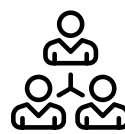
Establish a mental health policy and bring policies to life

Handle inappropriate behaviour with a zero tolerance.

Communicate the commitment from leaders

Promote good mental health in the workplace through commitment and communication from leaders to creating a safe and inclusive workplace culture. This will help employees feel more comfortable to discuss their mental health and seek support. Lead by example.

Understand it takes time Addressing stigma in the workplace takes time and often requires a multifaceted approach for best results. Consistency is key. Taking small steps on a consistent basis can create change.



Teams (Managers)

Education is key

Training for managers will increase their confidence to support their workers' mental health and build their capacity to promote training and education for all employees.

Address the culture

Allow MHFAiders to act as champions in the workplace by using their skills to improve mental health literacy and encouraging mental health conversations at work.

Language matters

Ensure workplace communications use appropriate and correct language.

Share stories

Have regular conversations with staff and check-in on their well-being. Speak openly about mental health in the workplace and help others feel more comfortable to do the same.

Increase awareness

Focus on promoting behaviour and attitude changes that are more supportive and inclusive of employees with experiences of mental health problems.

Build momentum

Implement strategies that build on the foundation of MHFA training in your workplace. Build a network of MHFAiders and encourage staff to be mental health champions.



Individuals

Educate yourself & other

Increase your knowledge of mental health problems and develop the skills to support people experiencing mental health problems. Challenge myths and stereotypes and educate others with facts.

Choose your words carefully

Be mindful of the language used in your conversations. The way we speak can affect the attitude of others.

Speak openly about mental health in the workplace

This can help others feel more comfortable to do the same.

Support others

Treat everyone with dignity and respect. Offer support and encouragement.

Include everyone

Build a workplace culture that is safe and inclusive.

Why is it important for workplaces to break down stigma?

Employers and managers play an important role in to reducing mental health stigma in the workplace. Promoting mental health benefits everyone, employees, managers and leaders. Everyone has a role to play in looking after their own mental health and creating a mentally healthy workplace for their colleagues.