



Mental Health

Background Information

www.workwell.health.nz

Overview

Mental health is more than just being free of mental illness or a mental health problem. Mental health and wellbeing involves happiness and flourishing. Having mental health and wellbeing can increase general health, wellbeing and resilience. Individuals diagnosed with mental illness can still experience positive mental health and wellbeing.

Implications for health and wellbeing

Low levels of mental wellbeing can reduce a person's ability to realise their potential, work productively and contribute to their community. Mental wellbeing can be improved with good social support, safety, access to community resources and by practising behaviours that enhance health, such as the [Five Ways to Wellbeing](#).

People with optimal mental wellbeing can be described as 'flourishing'; they experience positive emotions, feel able to deal with the ups and downs of life, have a sense of purpose and value, feel connected to their community and surroundings, and are interested in life and other people.

There are many factors that influence mental wellbeing including [mindfulness](#), stress, [Sleeping | Ministry of Health NZ](#), [Fatigue | WorkSafe](#), [alcohol and other drugs](#), [nutrition](#), [connecting with nature](#), [bullying and harassment](#).

Mental Wellbeing in New Zealand

The [New Zealand Health Survey | Ministry of Health NZ](#) survey identified that:

- More than half a million adults (16%) had been diagnosed with depression, bipolar disorder and/or anxiety disorder in their lifetime
- Almost 200,000 adults (6%) had experienced psychological distress in the past 4 weeks
- Women had higher rates of diagnosed mental health conditions and distress than men
- While older people were more likely to be diagnosed with a mental health condition in their lifetime, younger people were more likely to be experiencing psychological distress
- Māori and Pacific adults had higher rates of psychological distress
- Psychological distress was over three times more common in areas of high deprivation

In the workplace

Employment provides people with purpose, financial resources and a source of identity. It also provides opportunities to connect with others, develop personal skills and achieve goals. All of this can improve mental wellbeing.

However, work can also be a source of stress and unease, with work-related stress a leading cause



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of poor mental health.¹

Happier employees are more engaged in their work, stay with their employer for longer, have fewer sick days, and help make organisations more successful. Research suggests that a workplace culture that focuses on increasing positive emotions (eg. enthusiasm, optimism, contentment) is likely to have a greater impact on engagement, loyalty and performance than one that focuses on reducing negative emotions (eg. tension, worry, unease).

Key Messages

- Poor mental health and wellbeing can be caused by a variety of personal and work related factors
- The workplace can support staff in having positive mental health and wellbeing by developing a healthy culture
- Promoting mental health and wellbeing with staff can improve productivity
- Build the [Five Ways to Wellbeing](#) into the workplace to increase wellbeing

Incorporating Mental Wellbeing into your Workplace

Your efforts to promote and support mental wellbeing in the workplace should consider a multi-level approach to ensure it is effective and sustainable. A multi-level approach involves considering what is available at each of the following levels:

- Organisational (Policies and procedures)
- Environmental (Infrastructure and facilities)
- Individual (Opportunities, information and training)

¹ LaMontagne A.D., & Keegel, T. (2012). *Reducing stress in the workplace (An evidence review: full report)*. Melbourne, Australia: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation,