



Business Leaders'  
Health & Safety Forum

ZERO HARM WORKPLACES

CEO Guide to

# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING AT WORK

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Meeting obligations to prevent harm

Harnessing opportunities to thrive

# Making sense of the CEO's role

Workplace mental health and wellbeing is an area of increasing focus for CEOs. But many are unsure what they should be doing in this space. To support them, the Forum commissioned a framework CEOs and organisations can use to make sense of their role in managing mental health and wellbeing at work.

## How the framework was developed

This sense-making framework was developed for the Forum by Dr Hillary Bennett of Leading Safety, and draws on international research and local experience. It is founded on the following principles:

- Everyone who goes to work should go home safe and healthy, both physically and mentally. This is more than a legal obligation, it is the right thing to do.
- People spend much of their time at work every week, and their experiences at work can have a positive or negative affect on their overall mental health and wellbeing.
- Work should be a place where people thrive, not just survive. Having mentally healthy and well workers is an investment – they will perform better in their jobs.
- While a workplace may not be able to prevent all causes of poor mental health and wellbeing, it can take steps to reduce some of these causes.
- Work can be good for peoples' mental health and wellbeing. It can support recovery from mental health problems. Someone with a diagnosed mental health condition can thrive at work, with the right support.
- Anyone can suffer a period of poor mental health and this is not a sign of weakness. At any one time within an organisation, most workers will be thriving. But people can move between thriving, struggling and being ill, and possibly off work.
- To unlock a workforce's true potential, a mental health and wellbeing strategy should aim to both protect workers from harm, and include activities to foster and support wellbeing. This requires both proactive and reactive interventions.
- Creating a healthy workplace is the joint responsibility of the individual and the organisation.

## Why workplace mental health and wellbeing matters

There are legal, moral and business drivers for paying attention to the mental health and wellbeing of workers.

The Health and Safety at Work Act requires organisations to manage risks to workers – including risks to their mental health and wellbeing.

Poor mental health and wellbeing is costly for organisations and individuals. It is associated with increased sick leave, workplace conflict, cardiovascular disease, back pain and injuries.

In 2016, one in four adult Kiwis reported medium or high levels of psychological distress. Across the world, one in three workers has a mental illness or suffers mental ill health such as worry, sleep problems and fatigue. A 2014 study estimated that, on average, employees have nearly three times as many 'presentee' days as absentee days, adding to the 'hidden' costs of poor mental health.

Conversely, protecting and nurturing the mental health and wellbeing of workers has positive impacts on engagement, presenteeism, absenteeism, return to work and stay at work rates, and productivity – which all impact an organisation's bottom line.

# FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING AT WORK

This framework offers four approaches for managing mental health and wellbeing at work.

It will help CEOs meet obligations to prevent harm at work, and help them harness opportunities to ensure their people thrive.

An effective mental health and wellbeing plan will use all four approaches.



- PROTECT/FOSTER:** Use proactively to build resilience.
- RECLAIM/SUPPORT:** Use reactively once harm has occurred to restore health and wellbeing.

# Organisational assessment

## How are we managing mental health and wellbeing at work?

CEOs can use this assessment to review their organisation's mental health and wellbeing activities against the approaches in the framework – with a view to identifying strengths and areas for development.

### Protect

#### Aim

To identify risks to mental health and wellbeing, then eliminate or minimise at the source where practicable.

#### Examples

- Health and wellbeing policies – e.g. stress management, harassment, and bullying policies
- Organisational *just-culture* programmes
- Workplace psychosocial risk assessments
- Workplace wellbeing surveys
- Workload assessments
- Mental health incident reporting programmes
- Analysis of workplace data – e.g. annual and sick leave, absenteeism, incidents, personal grievances, H&S meeting minutes, work schedules
- Mental wellbeing as standing item within H&S meetings
- H&S representatives and forums
- Fitness to work programmes
- Operational risk management systems.

**What do we have in place to help us identify/eliminate/minimise risks to mental health and wellbeing? Where are the gaps?**

### Foster

#### Aim

To develop the mental health and wellbeing of individuals and teams.

#### Examples

- Capability building programmes – e.g. time management, conflict handling, dealing with bullying
- Promotion of positive wellbeing – e.g. *5 Ways to Wellbeing*
- Managers championing awareness of mental health and fighting to remove the stigma around it
- Developing an open, respectful culture
- Celebrating diversity / diversity and inclusion policies
- Stress management / resiliency building programmes / flexible work arrangements
- Physical fitness programmes
- Healthy workplace seminars
- Mental health awareness workshops
- Managing mental health at work workshops
- Coaching and peer support
- Involvement in national Mental Health Awareness initiatives
- CEO and leadership team blogs on wellbeing.

**What do we have in place to develop the mental health and wellbeing of individuals and teams? Where are the gaps?**

## Reclaim

### Aim

To restore the mental health and wellbeing of individuals and teams.

### Examples

- Promotion of positive wellbeing – e.g. *5 Ways to Wellbeing*
- Physical fitness programmes
- Healthy workplace seminars
- Coaching and peer support
- Mindfulness programmes
- Self-awareness programmes
- Flexible work arrangements.

**What do we have in place to restore the mental health and wellbeing of individuals and teams? Where are the gaps?**

## Support

### Aim

To provide access to appropriate workplace and clinical support.

### Examples

- Workplace changes – e.g. flexible working hours, role changes, workload adjustments, part-time work, modified workspaces
- Coaching
- Counselling
- EAP programmes
- Post traumatic incident support
- Medical treatment
- Rehabilitation programmes
- Psychological first aid
- Peer support
- Return-to-work programmes.

**What access do we provide to workplace and clinical support? Where are the gaps?**

# CEO assessment

Below are leadership practices that will support your own and others' mental health. These practices will protect and improve mental health and wellbeing in your organisation, and support workers experiencing mental health illnesses. They are drawn from the Forum's World-class CEO H&S Leadership model.

## Rate how well you are demonstrating these practices

0 Not at all    1 Do sometimes    2 Consciously do it

What can I do?	How should I do it?	How am I doing?
<b>Lead by example</b>	<p>Take charge of your own wellbeing. Be a role model to encourage behaviours that support mental health and wellbeing by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing the early warning signs of mental health conditions, which may include anxiety, not sleeping, emotional outbursts and weight change</li> <li>• Being more self-aware by regularly monitoring your emotional, mental and physical state</li> <li>• Having a trusted friend or mentor you can talk to and get objective feedback from</li> <li>• Prioritising and planning for enough quality sleep, regular physical activity and good nutrition</li> <li>• Asking for help when you notice changes – sooner rather than later.</li> </ul>	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Show you care</b>	<p>Through your words and actions, show you value and care about the mental health and wellbeing of all your workers. Approach mental health and wellbeing in the same way as physical health, and use a wellbeing lens to filter all work-related decisions.</p>	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Own it</b>	<p>Take personal responsibility for building a workplace where good mental health and wellbeing are seen as core assets.</p>	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Commit</b>	<p>Publicly commit to developing a proactive and holistic approach to protecting all workers, enhancing mental health and wellbeing and supporting the recovery of workers experiencing poor mental health.</p>	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Plan</b>	<p>Produce, implement and communicate a mental health and wellbeing at work plan that promotes good mental health for all workers, and outlines the support available for those who need it.</p>	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Normalise the conversation</b>	<p>Start the conversation and encourage open discussion about mental health and wellbeing to reduce the stigma often associated with mental health, and to reinforce that mental health and wellbeing is not a taboo topic. Make talking about wellbeing an everyday thing. Share your own mental health stories.</p>	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Make it positive</b>	<p>Explain that protecting mental health and wellbeing is more than a legal obligation, it is the right thing to do and is good for business.</p>	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2

What can I do?	How should I do it?	How am I doing?
<b>Influence up</b>	Keep the Board informed of the approach taken to protect, enhance and support the mental health and wellbeing of workers. Report on mental health and wellbeing to the Board to increase the focus and subsequent prioritisation.	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Hold to account</b>	Nominate a health and wellbeing lead at Board or leadership team level, with clear reporting duties and responsibilities. Hold senior managers responsible for not only protecting workers' mental health but enhancing it.	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Build awareness and capability</b>	Check that managers can develop the knowledge and skills to recognise and support workers struggling with mental health problems as well as the wellbeing of all workers generally. Develop mental health awareness among workers by making information, tools and support accessible. Use awareness days that focus on stress, bullying and mental health as external nudges to educate workers about these important issues.	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Good working conditions</b>	Actively seek out information about the full range of psychosocial risks, to ensure the working conditions, working arrangements and culture support mental health and wellbeing.	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Track</b>	Routinely monitor worker mental health and wellbeing by understanding available data, talking to workers, and understanding risk factors. Ask for an annual report on mental health and wellbeing.	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Cover all bases</b>	Use the Forum's framework to ensure both obligations and opportunities perspectives are being used to develop a workplace where workers are protected from harm, can enhance their mental health, and are supported if they are unwell.	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Value diversity</b>	Value and encourage a diversity of perspectives, including from those with lived mental health experiences. Encourage the reporting of any discrimination or harassment. Clarify that discrimination on the grounds of mental health status is illegal and as unacceptable as discrimination on the bases of race, gender, sexual orientation or disability. Ask for a mental health and wellbeing work plan.	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Work with others</b>	Ask for, and listen to, workers' ideas on how to improve mental wellbeing.	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Monitor language</b>	Be careful of the language you use about mental health. Words like "psycho" and "crazy," even when used casually or jokingly, can be extremely hurtful. Call out others if they use language that stigmatises.	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Uphold, and role model work-life balance</b>	Keep an eye on the hours people work both at work and at home. Identify ways to reduce heavy workloads, overtime and job-related travel time. Check that alternative work arrangements are widely available. These might include flexi-time, or the opportunity to work at home for some of the time.	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Look for opportunities to say thanks</b>	Take every opportunity to let people know they are valued.	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2
<b>Have mental health and wellbeing champions</b>	Have mental health champions throughout the organisation, including on the Board, to encourage a healthy dialogue about mental wellbeing.	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2

# What harms or supports mental health and wellbeing at work?

Research shows that a wide range of factors impact on a worker's mental health and wellbeing.

These include:

- **Work demands and organisation:** The mental and physical job requirements (e.g. job content, workload, work schedules and pace)
- **Autonomy:** The amount of input and authority a person has over the way their work is done
- **Support:** The level of support a person receives from the organisation, their managers and co-workers
- **Relationships:** The nature of interpersonal interactions, including social isolation, bullying and harassment
- **Role clarity/conflict:** The degree to which tasks and duties are clearly defined and not in conflict with other roles
- **Change management:** The communication and management of organisational change, including restructuring
- **Organisational justice:** A work environment characterised by fairness and consistency
- **Leadership:** Clear expectations of organisational goals; objectives and values set and communicated
- **Engagement:** People are valued and involved in decisions related to their work
- **Psychological competencies:** There is a good fit between personal competencies and job requirements
- **Growth and development:** Encouragement and support to develop interpersonal, emotional and job skills
- **Recognition and rewards:** Appropriate acknowledgement and appreciation of efforts in a fair and timely manner
- **Home/work balance:** A good balance between work and home demands
- **Physical work environment:** The physical work arrangements (e.g. layout, lighting, space, ventilation, temperature and humidity)

**Identifying and managing the full range of risks is a proactive way to protect the mental health and wellbeing of workers, so organisations are not simply fighting symptoms.**

## More resources

### WorkSafe

[www.worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/work-related-health/why-the-focus-on-work-related-health](http://www.worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/work-related-health/why-the-focus-on-work-related-health)

### Mental Health Foundation

[www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Our-Work/Open-Minds/Working-Well-guide.pdf](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Our-Work/Open-Minds/Working-Well-guide.pdf)

### Government H&S Lead

[www.healthandsafety.govt.nz/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/923923/A\\_Mental\\_Health\\_Guide\\_for\\_New\\_Zealand\\_Leaders.pdf](http://www.healthandsafety.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/923923/A_Mental_Health_Guide_for_New_Zealand_Leaders.pdf)