

The 'Mentally Healthy Workplaces' framework

Is it OK to use for psychosocial risk management?

The current 'Mentally Healthy Workplaces' framework is a useful resource for managing psychosocial risks in workplaces.

However, persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) who want to make their workplaces 'mentally healthy' **and** meet their legal obligations to protect workers from work-related psychosocial risks should:

- focus primarily on following the [four steps to managing psychosocial risks](#) specified by South Australia's Work Health and Safety Regulator - SafeWork SA.
- consider the 'Mentally Healthy Workplaces' framework as a resource to guide decisions on what mix of control measures to implement to manage the unique risks inherent of its workplace/s.

What is the 'Mentally Healthy Workplaces' framework?

This is a contemporary framework on which many occupational mental health programs are based. Under this framework, workplace mental health programs are commonly designed so that they feature measures that are designed to protect workers from harm, promote the positive aspects of work, and respond when workers become ill or injured.



The framework was first proposed in 2014 and 2018 respectively by mental health professionals with extensive experience in occupational and public health.ⁱ

Historical limitations

The original frameworks were evidence-informed but did not represent an adequate approach for managing psychosocial risks as a work health and safety process. Interventions targeted at supporting workers' resilience and health outcomes dominated the earlier frameworks, with comparatively little reference to the importance of identifying and managing psychosocial hazards. However, the frameworks have been influential in the formulation of occupational mental health policy and practice in Australia.ⁱⁱ

Current strengths and limitations

The 'Framework for Mentally Healthy Workplaces' was updated in 2024 in response, in part, to changes to work health and safety legislation in Australia to formalise a positive duty on persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) to protect workers from psychosocial hazards. Accordingly, the updated framework is more closely aligned with legislated work health and safety requirements in that it:

- highlights the need to identify and mitigate psychosocial hazards through risk assessment and management processes;
- sets out clear guidance on evidence-informed measures for protecting worker's mental health;
- has a greater focus on preventative, hazard focused measures; and
- reflects a stronger acknowledgement of the relationship between physical and psychological risks and impacts.ⁱⁱⁱ

However, PCBUs should note that the current framework does not adequately specify or operationalise requirements set out in the Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (SA) and the Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012 (SA) relating to hazard identification, risk assessment, worker consultation, managing risks through the hierarchy of controls, and maintaining and reviewing control measures. Also, it does not sufficiently caution PCBUs that, even if they are evidence-informed, an over-reliance on individually focused and reactive measures may, in some cases, constitute non-compliance with their legal obligations. For example, if a PCBU provides workers with mental conditioning programs to mitigate their stress but has not identified and managed the hazardous working conditions that are causing stress, in principle, this would constitute non-compliance.

ⁱ LaMontagne, A. D., Martin, A., Page, K. M., Reavley, N. J., Noblet, A. J., Milner, A. J., ... and Smith, P. M. (2014). Workplace mental health: developing an integrated intervention approach. *BMC Psychiatry*, 14, 1-11; Petrie, K., Joyce, S., Tan, L., Henderson, M., Johnson, A., Nguyen, H., ... and Harvey, S. B. (2018). A framework to create more mentally healthy workplaces: a viewpoint. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 52(1), 15-23.

ⁱⁱ Productivity Commission (2020). Mental Health Inquiry Report. Report number 95, Canberra, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report>; National Mental Health Commission (2021). Blueprint for Mentally Healthy Workplaces. Canberra, <https://beta.mentallyhealthyworkplaces.gov.au/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Deady, M., Sanatkar, S., Tan, L., Glozier, N., Gayed, A., Petrie, K., ... and Harvey, S. B. (2024). A mentally healthy framework to guide employers and policy makers. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 12, 1430540.



See the [SafeWork SA website](#) for more information about psychosocial risk management



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