

# Raising Awareness this World Mental Health Day

World Mental Health Day, observed on October 10th each year, serves as a global reminder of the importance of mental wellbeing. This occasion transcends borders and cultures, focusing on a shared human experience: mental health.

## UNDERSTANDING WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

World Mental Health Day was first established in 1992 by the World Federation for Mental Health. It has since become a vital platform to raise awareness about mental health issues, promote discussions, and reduce the stigma surrounding mental health disorders. The day also emphasises the importance of seeking help and support when needed.

The theme for 2023, set by the World Foundation of Mental Health, is '**Mental health is a universal human right**'.

## WHY DO WE NEED A WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY?

World Mental Health Day exists to address a critical need in our society – the recognition and support of mental health. Mental health is not a luxury but a basic human right, and a fundamental aspect of human wellbeing. However, for far too long, it has been relegated to the shadows, often viewed as a taboo subject. The day reminds us that mental health is an integral part of our lives and should be treated with the same importance as physical health.

## MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AT WORK

With 1 in 8 people living with a mental health condition globally, World Mental Health Day is a reminder that everyone has a right to be protected from mental health risks, and that includes risks at work.

Modern workplaces can either bolster or undermine mental health, depending on their policies and culture. Let's explore some of the ways in which workplaces can help or hinder wellbeing:

### HELPERS

**Mental health programs:** Progressive companies are investing in mental health programs that offer resources like counselling, mindfulness workshops, and stress management seminars. These programs reduce stigma and encourage employees to seek help when needed

**Flexible work arrangements:** In many organisations hybrid or flexible work arrangements can be offered to staff. In many others however, they cannot. Where flexible work options can be offered, they acknowledge and can help accommodate the diverse needs of employees,

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including those with diagnosed or unknown mental health struggles. It empowers them to manage their work and personal lives more effectively, reducing stress and burnout while continuing to fulfill their roles and responsibilities.

**Supportive leadership:** Leaders who prioritise mental health create and prioritise a culture of wellbeing. Encouraging open conversations about mental health and modelling self-care behaviours sends a powerful message to employees and builds positive and inclusive cultures.

### HINDRANCES

**Overwork culture:** Some workplaces foster an overwork culture where long hours and excessive expectations prevail. This can negatively impact mental health and lead to burnout in more extreme situations.

**Lack of boundaries:** Lack of role clarity and associated boundaries can be problematic for staff experiencing mental health difficulties. For example, remote work can lead to a lack of boundaries in a given role and may make it challenging for employees to disconnect from work. Perceived 'constant connectivity' can exacerbate stress and anxiety.

**Stigmatisation:** In some workplaces, mental health issues are still stigmatised, discouraging employees from seeking help. While substantial headway has been made in many organisations in recent decades, where stigmatisation perpetuates silence and suffering.

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## MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

As employees spend a significant portion of their lives at work, the workplace environment plays a vital role in shaping their mental wellbeing. The workplace can act as both a source of support and an environment for raising awareness and role modelling inclusion (all important protective factors). Employers can facilitate mental health awareness by promoting a culture of understanding, providing accessibility to resources, and implementing supportive policies and practices across their organisations.

### ACCESSIBILITY

**Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs):** Offering confidential counselling services and mental health resources through EAPs, ensuring employees have easy access to high quality professional support.

**Mental Health Training:** Conducting training sessions to educate employees and managers about mental health issues, raising awareness, reducing stigma, and creating a supportive environment.

**Flexible Work Arrangements:** Where these can be offered, they can provide more flexible work schedules or remote work options to accommodate appointments with mental health professionals or treatment along with other options to blend self-care with completing core aspects of their role.

**Peer Support Networks:** Establishing peer support networks or employee resource groups where individuals can connect with colleagues who have experienced similar challenges and mutually support each other when challenge or struggles emerge for themselves or others.

### CARE

**Clear Mental Health Policies:** Implementing clear policies against discrimination, harassment, and bullying related to mental health issues, as well as proactive support for staff to ensuring a safe and respectful workplace.

**Access to Mental Health Resources:** Providing information about available mental health resources, hotlines, and support services, making it easier for employees to seek help when required.

**Regular Check-Ins:** Conducting regular one-on-one check-ins with employees to assess their wellbeing over time, offering a listening ear, and connecting them with necessary resources.

**Workplace Wellness Programs:** Organising wellness programs that incorporate mental health components, such as up-to-date and relevant stress management workshops and mindfulness sessions.

**Social Activities:** Hosting social activities and team-building events to foster a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation. These are often organised by grass roots staff groups within the organisation supported by people culture and learning and the organisation's executive.

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## WHAT IF I HIT A LIFE HURDLE AND NEED SOME HELP?

If you're feeling stressed or burnout change for any accumulation of reasons, that's totally okay. It's important to take some time to make yourself feel better. You can do this by getting more rest, talking to someone about what's hard for you, taking care of your body and mind in a responsible and proactive way.

Most medium-large employers already have advanced levels of support for employees experiencing mental health and wellbeing. Remember, Converge is committed to support all organisations and their employees to optimally manage mental health and wellbeing. It's important to use events like World Mental Health Day as an opportunity to showcase and educate staff on what support and resources are available.

### Need help? Try our online booking!

Converge has recently launched an industry-leading online booking capability to enable staff to access mental health support quickly and simply. **Online booking** can be accessed through **Converge's website** or through our popular **health and wellbeing app**.

Of course, if you'd rather ring and speak to someone, you can simply call our central number **1300 687 327** and they will help you to secure confidential support through our large team of mental health professionals around Australia.



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