BURNOUT GUIDELINES

WHAT IS BURNOUT

Burnout among the helping workforce refers to a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion resulting from prolonged and excessive work-related stress. It generally manifests as a decline in performance, compassion fatigue, reduced professional efficacy, and a decline of positivity in the workplace. People experiencing burnout may struggle to meet the demands of their roles, impacting their overall well-being and effectiveness in providing support and assistance. Recognising and addressing burnout is crucial for sustaining a healthy work environment and ensuring quality service delivery.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) refers to burn-out as defined in the ICD-11, which is as follows:

"Burn-out is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions: feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; increased mental distance from one's job, feeling negative or cynical about one's job; and reduced professional efficacy".

WHAT IMPACTS ON BURNOUT

There are various factors that impact on people at work and circumstances that elevate people's feelings of stress. To consider what can help reduce stress levels, it is important to be aware of the triggers and psychosocial hazards in the workplace.

Safe Work Australia advises that a psychosocial hazard is anything that could cause psychological harm (e.g. harm someone's mental health). Common psychosocial hazards in the workplace include (but are not limited to):

Job Demands	Low Job Control	Poor Support
Lack of Role Clarity	Poor Organisational Change Management & Culture	Inadequate Reward and Recognition
Poor Organisational Justice	Traumatic Events or Material	Remote or Isolated work
Poor Physical Environment	Violence and Aggression	Bullying, Harassment, including Sexual Harassment
Conflict or Poor Workplace Relationships and Interactions, Exclusions in the Workplace		

WHAT IS VICARIOUS TRAUMA IN THE WORKPLACE

Vicarious trauma in the workplace refers to the emotional and psychological impact experienced by individuals who, while not directly exposed to a traumatic event, absorb the trauma of others through empathetic engagement. This secondary exposure, often encountered in helping professions, can lead to symptoms mirroring those of direct trauma, such as heightened stress, intrusive thoughts, and emotional exhaustion. It underscores the importance of support structures, self-care, and organizational awareness to mitigate the risk of cumulative stress and maintain the well-being of those indirectly affected by others' trauma.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF BURNOUT

Recognising signs of burnout is important for early detection and the ability to implement strategies to address concerns. Early detection and management is crucial for individual well-being and maintaining a healthy work environment. What are some signs to look out for (but are not limited to):

1. *Reduced Work Performance:* A decline in work performance, efficiency, and productivity.

2. *Persistent Fatigue:* Feeling consistently tired, both physically and emotionally, despite adequate rest.

3. *Cynicism and Detachment:* Developing a negative and cynical attitude towards work, colleagues, or clients, accompanied by a sense of detachment from the workplace.

4. *Mood Instability:* Heightened irritability, impatience, or a short temper in professional interactions.

5. *Neglect of Personal Needs:* Ignoring one's own physical and emotional needs, such as proper nutrition, exercise, and relaxation.

6. *Health Issues:* Frequent headaches, stomach aches, or other physical symptoms without an apparent cause.

7. *Concentration and attention difficulties:* Trouble focusing, making decisions, or maintaining attention to detail.

8. *Increased Absenteeism:* Taking more sick days or unplanned time off.

BURNOUT ASSESSMENT TOOL

It is helpful to check on your warning signs and get an idea of how your mental health is going, so here is a link to check for yourself:

https://www.beyondblue.org.au/mental-health/check-your-mental-health

#Please note that this is NOT a formalised assessment or diagnostic tool, it is a resource for wellbeing check in's. If you have concerns or are worried about your results, please consult with your GP or Mental Health Practitioner as soon as possible.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE WORRIED

For an employer/supervisor: If you are worried about a person you are supervising, it is important to approach the person with care, empathy and compassion and understand that some people do not want to discuss how they are feeling or their difficulties. Ensuring you are respecting people's right to privacy and dignity is important in being able to support them. Please see the following links and helpful resources for supporting someone in the workplace who be experiencing burnout –

Links to burnout info to be added……..

For a peer: If you are worried about someone you are working with and they have disclosed concerns about their own wellbeing to you, it is important to remember there are many options for support for them and yourself. You are encouraged to speak openly with them about the things you are worried about and give them hope that things can help them, then you can link them to the services below.

For an individual: If you are experiencing the above symptoms and feel that you are experiencing burnout, please take these signs seriously and seek support via your GP or mental health practitioner. Please see some helpful links below:

- [Beyond Blue - Find a mental health professional](#)
- [1300 MH CALL: Mental health access line | Health and wellbeing | Queensland Government (www.qld.gov.au)](#)
- [Find a GP (General Practice) near you | healthdirect](#)

#It is important to note that individuals and employers are not trained clinicians and are not required to be offering clinical support to people experiencing mental health concerns or high levels of burnout. Please refer to the organisations wellbeing policy for expectations of support roles within the organisation and how to best assist someone in the workplace.

WORKPLACE OBLIGATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

It is important to note that as of 2022 it has become a requirement that all entities undertaking any business functions within Australia must ensure (so far as is reasonably practicable) that workers and other persons are not exposed to risks to their psychological or physical health and safety, and must eliminate psychosocial risks in the workplace, or if that is not reasonably practicable, minimise these risks so far as is reasonably practicable (Safe Work Australia, 2022). As a result, Codes of Practice has been introduced for all businesses and these Codes of Practice are practical guides to achieving the standards of health and safety, required under the model WHS Act and Regulations.

This Code of Practice on managing psychosocial hazards at work is an approved code of practice under section 274 of the Work Health and Safety Act (Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (legislation.gov.au). Under the model WHS laws, a person conducting a business or employer, must manage psychosocial risks (e.g. risks to mental health) at work.

MENTAL HEALTH EFFECTS ON THE WORKPLACE

Negative implications for declining mental wellness	Positives of mentally well workplaces
In Australia, there have been significant improvements to become more mentally healthy at work, but there is more work to do.	Research has shown that investment in mental health has a positive return on investment. This can range from an average of $2.30 upwards for each dollar invested.
Nearly 1 in 5 people experience poor mental health each year. Nearly half of us will experience poor mental health during our lives.	Employees feel more engaged with the workplace and positive sense of wellbeing while at work.
Many people spend a third of their lives at work.	Is proven to improve productivity and outcomes.
Poor mental health costs the Australian economy from $12.2 to 22.5 billion each year (according to the Australian Government Productivity Commission).	Is more likely to attract and retain staff.

(Beyond Blue, 2022)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND LINKS