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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Webinar 11 November 2020

Anticipate and Plan for

ORGANISATION MENTAL HEALTH BEYOND COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

Whatever you've been dealing with in terms of the mental health of your workforce, and however you've been dealing with it:

- expect to see more people impacted; and
- that you'll need to do even more.

Why? Because even though most of us do bounce back well most of the time, the pandemic brings with it additional *'reasonably foreseeable'* psychological risks. The aim of the webinar was to help you mitigate them.

This document presents a few key takeaways for leaders, specifically:

- why we care;
- what a mentally healthy workplace is; and
- tips on how you can help flatten your workplace's mental health curve.

WHY WE CARE

- It's mandated: *"it's your legal duty to implement controls that eliminate or minimise the risk of psychological injuries being caused by work, but also over time, improve your organisation's approach to preventing psychological injury and supporting recovery".* (SafeWork Australia, 2019)

- The mental health surge is here e.g. in a study of 5000 adults by Black Dog and the UNSW during the first lockdown, 78% reported their mental health had worsened.

- The mental health surge is coming: *"We can expect surges of poor mental health, substance use and suicide risk presentations at around 3-6 months, 12-18 months, and up to 5 years post response phase".* (Australian National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan, 2020)

- It's a moral imperative. People care about where they work as much as what they do.

- It has great ROI. For example, Deloitte UK found that in 2019, the ROI of mental health initiatives was £5 return for every £1 spent. That's a 500% return on investment.

DEFINING A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE

What is a mentally healthy workplace?

I like SafeWork NSW's definition. And I quote: "In a mentally healthy workplace:

- mental health is everyone's responsibility
- mental health is considered in every way you do business
- everyone contributes to a culture where people feel safe and supported to talk about mental health
- mental health support is tailored for individuals and teams
- everyone can see you're finding better ways to support worker mental health."

What is Mental Health?

Mental health is something we all have, like physical health. It's something we need to look after and it's more than an absence of mental illness.

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Good mental health is the ability to cope with the day to day stresses of life, work productively, interact positively with others and realise your potential. Poor mental health is when you can't. If poor mental health persists or increases in severity, you may develop a mental illness.

Mental illness is a diagnosis such as anxiety or depression, or less common diagnoses like PTSD or a personality disorder. People with a mental illness can have good mental health, and make for great employees, as long as their illness is well managed.

HOW TO HELP FLATTEN YOUR MENTAL HEALTH CURVE

This is a wicked problem that we - you, me and every employee - are all going to have to continuously work at. It requires a sustained effort over time. If we adopt the SafeWork NSW definition as a strategic framework, here are some tips to help you execute it:

Mental health is everyone's responsibility
- Take the lead. If you see someone struggling, reach out with empathy, warmth and kindness. Listen and do what you can, within your limits. You don't need to be an expert. The point is that you try.
- Before you talk, get yourself present. Just like you don't send an email when angry, don't talk to someone about mental health without setting your own needs aside while you do. It's hard to be empathic otherwise.
- Be generous with your time. It's fine to have time limits, but it's not helpful if people sense that you're in a hurry to be elsewhere. If you need, let them know how long you have and reschedule if needed.

Mental health is considered in every way you do business
- Consider every decision though a mental health lens.
- Make mental health a strategic focus for your business, not an added extra.
- Measure your own ROI. If you're not getting a good return, especially over the mid-longer term, you may be missing the mark. The research points to a great ROI, which you should expect to get too.

Everyone contributes to a culture where people feel safe and supported to talk about mental health
- Start by building trust, one relationship at a time. Remember that: *"vulnerability is the birthplace of connection and the path to the feeling of worthiness. If it doesn't feel vulnerable, the sharing is probably not constructive"* (Brené Brown).
- Look for stories to share about how the company supports people with mental health. Include examples of how it doesn't take away from their reputation or limit their opportunities. The proof is in the pudding.
- Traditionally, talking about mental health is considered a career limiting move. What will you do if someone is vulnerable and then that trust is abused? What will be tolerated at your workplace?

Mental health support is tailored for individuals and teams
- Don't make assumptions about what people need. We're all different.
- Offer a range of initiatives, from preventing poor mental health to promoting wellbeing. Let them choose.
- Taking care of our whole selves –nutrition, movement, rest and social needs – impacts mental health too. It's smart to offer services beyond the traditional EAP.

Everyone can see you're finding better ways to support worker mental health
- Communicate what's available and how to access it. And then do it again. People forget and it helps to keep it top of mind. Plus, it shows you're serious about supporting mental health.
- Be a role model for healthy behaviour. It'll encourage those around you to be healthy too.
- Open up lines of communication so people can make suggestions about what they'd like to see you do to support mental health. Take them seriously, implement where you can and explain why not if you can't.

WANT MORE?

Contact me if you have any questions or would like to know more. You can also click here to schedule a call.