



# NSW MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACES STRATEGY 2018-22

#### Disclaimer

This publication may contain information about some of your obligations under work health and safety legislation. To ensure you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate legislation.

Information on the latest laws can be checked by visiting the NSW legislation website [www.legislation.nsw.gov.au](http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au)

This publication does not represent a comprehensive statement of the law as it applies to particular problems or to individuals or as a substitute for legal advice. You should seek independent legal advice if you need assistance on the application of the law to your situation.

This material may be displayed, printed and reproduced without amendment for personal, in-house or non-commercial use.

# CONTENTS

1. Ministerial messages	4
2. Executive summary	5
3. The Strategy at a glance	6
4. Background	7
5. Strategy	8
5.1. Vision	8
5.2. Objectives	8
5.3. Guiding principles	8
5.4. Target	8
5.5. Streams	8
1. Awareness raising	9
2. Evidence-informed interventions	9
3. Research	11
4. Building employer capability	11
6. Industry partners	12
7. Measuring progress	13
8. Delivery	14

# 1. MINISTERIAL MESSAGES

## *Message from the Hon. Matt Kean MP*

Work is such an important part of our lives. It can provide people with a living and a sense of purpose. We often meet many of our best friends through the workplace.

As the Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation, I am proud to announce the *NSW Mentally Healthy Workplaces Strategy 2018–2022*. The Strategy is the NSW Government's first comprehensive package to address mental health in the workplace. It also represents the biggest commitment made by any government in Australia's history to improving the mental health of Australian workers.

The Strategy will run for four years, and includes the design and delivery of workplace mental health programs, educational services, tools and resources for employers and workers, as well as training, skills programs and ongoing academic research.

Mental illness is something that affects our friends, families and community. I have been personally affected by the impact mental illness has on loved ones and work colleagues, and I am proud to launch this nation-leading initiative.

## *Message from the Hon. Tanya Davies MP*

Mental health care in NSW is amid a 10-year reform that puts people, not process, at the centre of the mental health care system.

We know mental illness does not discriminate and can touch the lives of people anywhere, including the workplace, which is why a key reform focus is to strengthen prevention and early intervention supports.

The *NSW Mentally Healthy Workplaces Strategy 2018–2022* provides an opportunity to turn our attention to new and collaborative ways to support better mental health in our workplace. A supportive workplace can be instrumental in keeping us healthy and well, and engaged and productive. The workplace setting provides a significant opportunity to promote psychologically healthy and safe practices, reduce stigma and improve mental health.

But this cannot be done alone. The NSW Government needs to continue to work with stakeholders in the mental health sector, experts in workplace mental health and people with lived experience of mental illness, to ensure the Strategy has far reaching impacts. It is only through our collective efforts that we can create workplaces that nurture and support the mental health and wellbeing of our workforce, and promote recovery from mental illness.

By developing a more responsive, person-centred system that is based in our communities, at work, at school or at home, we can move away from hospital based care and promote recovery from mental illness while still fully participating in the community.

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over half a million NSW employees, (275,000 men and 290,000 women) have poor mental health.<sup>1</sup> With one-third of adult life spent at work, the workplace can help improve mental health and reduce the impact and severity of mental ill-health. The workplace provides an opportunity to provide people with a sense of purpose, community, and satisfaction which can help improve mental health outcomes.

Mentally healthy workplaces can prevent mental ill-health and promote recovery. There can also be financial benefits to promoting mental health in the workplace, returning up to four dollars for every dollar spent on mental health initiatives, engaging workers, increasing productivity and reducing turnover.

The *mentally healthy workplaces in NSW benchmarking tool* established a baseline and the results indicated less than 20 per cent of NSW workplaces were identified as taking effective action. Only 8.8 per cent of workplaces had an approach to mental health that is embedded in an integrated and sustained way.

The *NSW Mentally Healthy Workplaces Strategy 2018-2022* (the Strategy) is the NSW Government's first comprehensive approach for workplace mental health. It constitutes the biggest commitment to mental health in the workplace by an Australian government, state or federal, with funding of \$55 million over four years.

The Strategy sets out a long-term vision to create mentally healthy workplaces across NSW. Its key objectives are to reduce the impact of mental illness on working age people, improve health and social outcomes for the people of NSW, improve capability and reduce productivity costs to employers. It is comprised of a four-year program, which will be delivered over four streams: awareness raising, evidence-informed interventions, research, and programs to enable NSW workplaces to act.

The Strategy will raise awareness of how work contributes to mental health and the financial and social benefits of mentally healthy workplaces. Collaboration between key Government agencies including icare, SafeWork NSW and the State Insurance Regulatory Authority (SIRA) will see the delivery of a range of evidence-informed interventions. SafeWork NSW will make access to practical, evidence-informed tools and resources available to all NSW workplaces. Workplaces can also access tailored, expert advice on site to build their capability and commitment to creating a positive workplace culture, designing work to be safe, assessing mental health risks and taking informed action to improve mental health.

### 3. THE STRATEGY AT A GLANCE

Vision			
NSW employers and workers take effective action to create mentally healthy workplaces.			
Target			
By 2022, more than 90,000 NSW businesses will be taking effective action to create mentally healthy workplaces.			
Streams			
Awareness raising	Evidence-informed interventions	Research	Building employer capability
Raise awareness of workplace mental health and direct employers and workers to the mentally healthy workplaces website for information and resources to create mentally healthy workplaces	Implement interventions for high-risk industries and small/micro businesses that have demonstrated improved mental health outcomes and a positive return on investment	Improve the knowledge base and build workplace capability to use evidence to inform decisions	Encourage and enable employers to build capability and take effective action through expert guidance, collaboration, recognition and leading by example
<p><b>Media campaign:</b> Increase awareness of the role of the workplace in mental health</p> <p><b>Website:</b> Provide access to prevention-focussed, practical guidance and evidence-informed tools and resources</p> <p><b>Prevention-focussed regulatory services:</b> For example, inspector training and collaboration with others to design and deliver initiatives</p> <p><b>Events:</b> Conduct promotional activities, including mental health awareness events, wellbeing champion workshops and conference participation</p>	<p><b>Manager training:</b> Improve mental health literacy, increase confidence to support workers with mental illness and increase capability to design and manage work to minimise harm</p> <p><b>Group/digital mental health skills program:</b> Help at-risk workers build strategies and capability to proactively manage their mental health</p> <p><b>Recovery at work program:</b> Support workers through the recovery at work process</p>	<p><b>Research investment:</b> Continue to improve the knowledge base about mentally healthy workplaces to inform decisions and improve outcomes</p> <p><b>Data driven:</b> Help workplaces use data effectively, including the benchmarking tool, to create mentally healthy workplaces</p> <p><b>Applied research:</b> Target high-risk worker populations, including small and micro businesses, frontline customer service and workers with an acquired brain injury</p> <p><b>Action research:</b> Consider factors that contribute to the health, wellbeing and recovery of workers with a mental illness</p>	<p><b>Workplace assessment:</b> Expert assessments and advice on-site to build capability to assess and manage mental health risks, create a positive workplace culture and design work to be safe</p> <p><b>Self-assessment tool:</b> An interactive self-assessment tool for workplaces to identify areas for improvement, enable benchmarking and inform action</p> <p><b>Workplace collaboration and mentoring:</b> Create opportunities for employers to collaborate and mentor each other to build capability</p> <p><b>Social connection:</b> Enable increased workforce participation and community engagement for at-risk workers</p>
Outcomes			
<p>Increased awareness and understanding of mentally healthy workplaces</p> <p>Increased capability of NSW employers to create mentally healthy workplaces</p> <p>Improved NSW workers' perception that their workplaces are safer and healthier</p> <p>Better promoted, preserved and restored social connections within the workplace and community</p> <p>Improved productivity, due to reduction in absenteeism and presenteeism, improved recovery at work outcomes and employer cost savings</p>			

## 4. BACKGROUND

### Mental health in the workplace

Nearly one in six Australian workers experience a significant level of mental ill-health in a four-week period. Due to the relapsing and remitting nature of many of these conditions, the proportion of the workforce experiencing such levels of mental ill-health over a year will be even higher.<sup>2</sup> If unaddressed, this can have long term impacts on an individual's mental health, quality of life and financial independence, which can in turn impact their family and the community.

One third of adult life is spent at work and the workplace can prevent mental ill-health and promote recovery or conversely cause or exacerbate mental illness. The rising expenditure related to workplace mental health often focusses on treatment, rather than prevention.

The workplace presents a unique opportunity to reduce the impact and severity of mental ill-health in NSW. Mentally healthy workplaces achieve better mental health outcomes and experience returns of up to four dollars for every dollar invested and additional benefits, such as improved staff retention, increased productivity and more engaged workers.

SafeWork NSW developed the *mentally healthy workplaces in NSW benchmarking tool* in collaboration with experts to measure the capability of employers to create mentally healthy workplaces. The Benchmarking Tool was used to survey 2,000 NSW small, medium and large workplaces to establish a baseline and the results indicated NSW workplaces were widely distributed across five capability segments. The five levels of capability to prevent and manage mental health at work are listed below with the distribution of workplaces:

- 
1. Basic Awareness – 19.05%<sup>3</sup>
  2. Intention – 29.25%
  3. Limited Action – 29.35%
  4. Effective Action – 13.55%
  5. Integrated and Sustained – 8.8%

Research identified evidence of risks and issues, which cause or contribute to mental ill-health in the workplace<sup>4</sup> and interventions, which were effective in improving mental health outcomes at work<sup>5</sup>. This evidence was shared with stakeholders including local and international workplace mental health experts, people with lived experience, industry peak bodies, employers, unions, workers compensation regulators and insurers, mental health academics, practitioners and advocates at a summit in November 2017. Research, the *mentally healthy workplaces in NSW benchmarking tool* and stakeholders have informed the Strategy.

### What does a mentally healthy workplace look like?

In a mentally healthy workplace, there is a visible commitment from the leadership to improve the mental health of workers. Work is designed to be safe and a positive workplace culture exists where workers feel valued and engaged.

Managers actively identify and manage risks to eliminate or minimise their impact on their workers' mental health. Workers have an awareness of mental health, including the risks and early signs of mental ill-health. They understand how work can contribute to mental health and what actions they can take to get or give support.

Policies and programs promote mental health, assist in preventing mental illness and connect people in need to support services early to improve their recovery. Employers support recovery at work and facilitate workplace adjustments, as required. They consider the needs of workers as carers of people with mental ill-health and support carers in line with the *Carers Recognition Act 2010*.

Employers actively consult workers and review and adjust initiatives to ensure they are effective.

A mentally healthy workplace is a workplace where:

- mental health is everyone's responsibility
- systems, policies and procedures are integrated, address mental health specifically and are embedded across the organisation
- interventions are tailored to each work group
- continuous evaluation and improvement is visible.<sup>6</sup>

Workplace mental health risks often overlap or interact. For example, workers have a higher risk of developing mental ill-health if their job is demanding but if they also feel they have low control over how they manage their work.<sup>7</sup> Interventions may impact multiple risks at once. There has consequently been a best practice shift toward identifying and embedding the characteristics of a mentally healthy workplace, to more effectively manage risks and improve mental health.

To achieve a mentally healthy workplace employers and workers should consider mental health in their management of workplace risks, when they develop and implement policies and processes, and in the education and training and support services they provide their workers.<sup>8</sup>

## 5. STRATEGY

### 5.1. VISION

NSW employers and workers take effective action to create mentally healthy workplaces.

In practice, these workplaces will be flexible, supportive and productive, their workers will feel safe, valued and connected.

### 5.2. OBJECTIVES

1. Reduce the impact of mental ill-health in working age people.
2. Improve health and social outcomes for the people of NSW.
3. Improve capability and increase productivity of workplaces.<sup>9</sup>

People are at the centre of the Strategy. Work can give people a sense of purpose, provide a place for self-expression and exposure to new people and ideas. Participation in the workforce enables people to use their skills and talents, be financially independent and help in their recovery from illness or injury.

Creating mentally healthy workplaces is a shared responsibility of employers and workers. Employers have legal obligations to provide workplaces that do not cause or exacerbate mental ill-health as far as reasonably practicable. Best practice workplaces are a positive environment that improves people's mental health. Workers also have the responsibility to work safely and raise work health and safety issues with their employer.

The NSW Government will enable NSW workplaces and workers to effectively manage mental health risks and hazards, and improve their capability to create mentally healthy workplaces. Employers that successfully implement mental health initiatives can expect a positive return on investment.

### 5.3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Strategy is underpinned by the following guiding principles:

- all workers, including people with lived experience, are treated with dignity and respect
- employers and workers have authentic conversations about mental health
- industry leaders, small business owners and managers 'walk the talk'
- any action taken will be informed by evidence-informed practice.<sup>10</sup>

### 5.4. TARGET

The Strategy's target is that: 'by 2022, more than 90,000 NSW businesses will be taking effective action to create mentally healthy workplaces'. The NSW Government will invest \$55 million-dollar to deliver the Strategy and achieve this target.

### 5.5. STREAMS

The NSW Government has developed four streams of work to achieve the Strategy outcomes:

1. Awareness raising (NSW-wide)
2. Evidence-informed interventions (high-risk industries and small/micro businesses)
3. Research (NSW-wide)
4. Building employer capability (NSW-wide)

The NSW Government will work with stakeholders on the methodology and timing for delivery. A summary of each stream is set out below. The NSW Government will consider small, medium and large workplaces; those operating in remote, regional and metro areas; and at-risk workers during design and delivery of the program.

## 1. Awareness raising

A campaign to raise awareness, motivate action and provide practical support to enable employers to create mentally healthy workplaces:

### Media campaign

Increase awareness of the workplace's importance in mental health and mental health concepts, and direct employers and workers to the mentally healthy workplaces website for resources.

### Website

Provide access to prevention-focussed practical guidance, and evidence-informed tools and resources to help create mentally healthy workplaces.

### Workplace health promotion

Encourage investment, promotion and participation in workplace health programs through provision of information and resources.

### Prevention-focussed regulatory services

Inspector training and collaboration with others to design and deliver workplace mental health programs, services and resources.

### Events

Conduct promotional activities, including mental health awareness events, wellbeing champion workshops and conference participation.

## 2. Evidence-informed interventions

Mental health interventions are chosen for their demonstrated effectiveness in improving mental health outcomes in the workplace and their positive return on investment:

### Manager training

Improve managers' mental health literacy, reduce stigmatising attitudes towards mental illness in the workplace, promote confidence to support workers with mental ill-health and increase capability to design and manage work to minimise harm.

### Group/digital mental health skills program

Help at-risk workers build strategies and capability of at-risk workers to proactively manage their mental health.

### Recovery at work program

Improved support for workers through the treatment and recovery at work process (including the claims process, where applicable).

### Peer support scheme

Increase support for at-risk workers, reduce barriers to help-seeking and reduce sickness absence.

### Develop Pathway/eHealth tools

Help managers and workers get information and refer or access appropriate support services to improve early intervention and treatment outcomes.

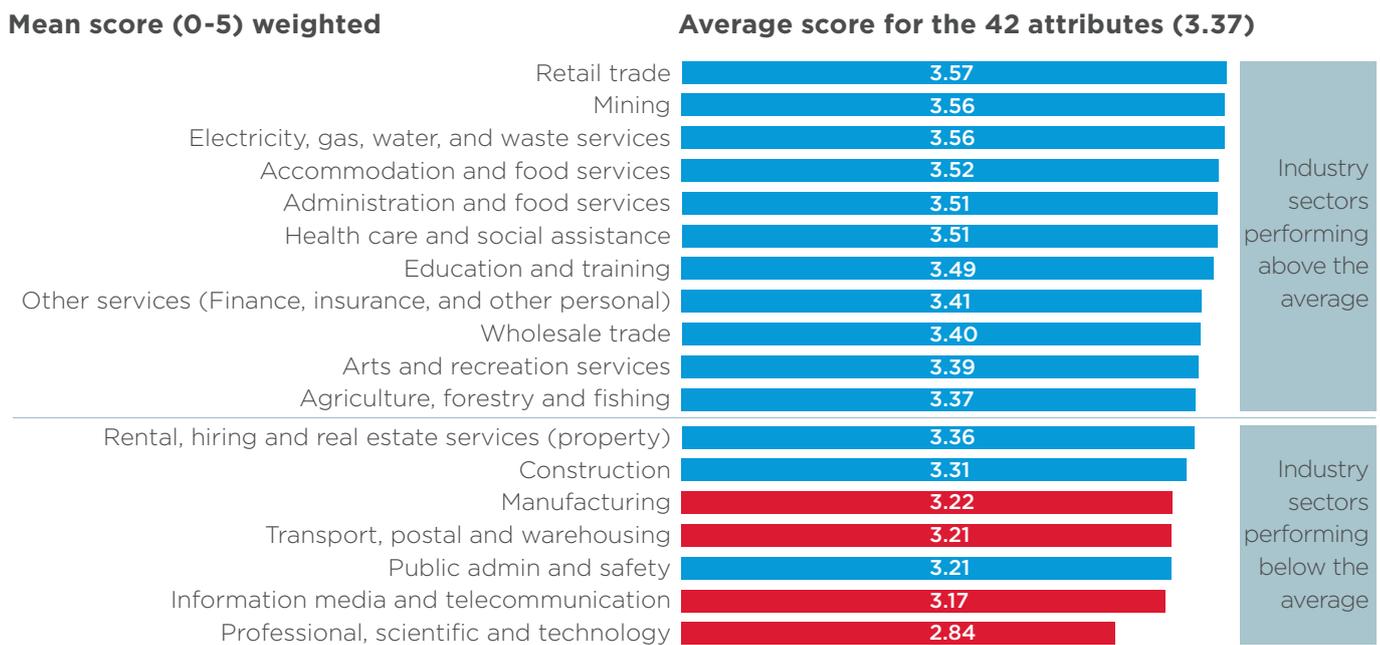
Some industries are at higher risk of poor mental health outcomes due to having a high prevalence of mental ill-health<sup>11</sup> and a low capability to create mentally healthy workplaces.<sup>12</sup> The evidence-informed interventions in this Strategy will target high-risk industries and small/micro businesses to focus efforts where they are most needed and effective.

The Strategy will focus support for the following high-risk industries:

- professional, scientific and technical services
- information media/telecommunications
- transport, postal and warehousing
- manufacturing.

In line with the NSW Government's commitment to build exemplar regulatory services, the Safework NSW Roadmap and the Government WHS Sector Plan, SafeWork NSW will lead best practice in the Government sector.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 1.** NSW mental health benchmark and sector impacts<sup>14</sup>



The Strategy will also focus on the challenges and opportunities for improving mental health of workers in small and micro-businesses in NSW, including:

- Small business owners and workers experience depression, anxiety and stress at concerning levels
- There are many stressors, for example, obligation to work when sick, financial stress, multiple responsibilities, challenges to work-life balance
- Health-related productivity losses are high
- Small business owners can be under immense financial pressure
- People working in small business can be time poor and work long hours
- The sector is very diverse, working across a wide variety of industries
- Stigma may be a barrier for owners and workers
- Online approaches should be explored, and
- Owners report taking work home and concerns about the impact on their families.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Research

Initiatives, interventions and decisions informed by evidence to improve workplace mental health:

#### Investing in research

Continue to improve the knowledge base about mentally healthy workplaces by repeating the benchmarking survey and undertaking research through the Centre for Work Health and Safety.

#### Data driven

Help workplaces use data effectively through development of a data framework, publishing of data and guidance about how to use data to inform decisions.

#### Applied research

Target high risk worker populations, including small and micro businesses, frontline customer service and workers with an acquired brain injury.

#### Action research

Consider factors that contribute to the health, wellbeing and recovery of workers with a mental illness in high-risk workplaces.

### 4. Building employer capability

Expert guidance, collaboration, recognition and leading by example, to encourage and enable employers to build capability and take effective action:

#### Workplace assessment

Expert assessments and on-site advice to build capability to assess and manage mental health risks, create a positive workplace culture and design work to be safe.

#### Self-assessment tool

An interactive online self-assessment tool for workplaces to identify gaps or areas for improvement and take informed action.

#### Public commitment

Enable and encourage employers, workers and the community to publicly commit to act to improve mental health in NSW workplaces.

#### Workplace collaboration and mentoring

Encourage and facilitate collaboration and mentoring between employers and across industries to build capability and implement mental health initiatives.

#### Social connection

Enable increased workforce participation and community engagement for at-risk workers.

#### Recognition

Contribute to awards to reward best practice and endorse and promote employers based on their capability to provide mentally healthy workplaces.

#### Lead NSW Government sector best practice

Include mental health in an integrated WHS framework and create and implement an action plan to improve outcomes and consider the impact on mental health in the design of future policies and processes.

## 6. INDUSTRY PARTNERS

NSW Government agencies, including SafeWork NSW, will partner with industry leaders committed to creating mentally healthy workplaces. They will share what they do and why they do it with the NSW community. They will also commit to act to achieve an integrated and sustained approach to workplace mental health.

To be an industry partner, employers will:

- demonstrate committed leadership
- proactively identify, assess and control psychosocial risks
- support workers with mental illness, or those living with mental ill-health
- demonstrate continuous improvement.

These partners will:

- Publicly support the Strategy, by:
  - providing comments, case studies and testimonials
  - making guest appearances at events

- actively contributing to the design and development of initiatives within the Strategy, by sharing what works and what does not work, contributing to workshops with SafeWork NSW and participating in programs where possible, and
- Commit to the four-year program, by:
  - sharing their internal strategy and action plans to achieve mentally healthy workplaces
  - promoting the benefits of creating mentally healthy workplaces to their network of stakeholders and customers, and
  - encouraging employers in their network to participate in icare, SafeWork NSW and SIRA initiatives.

SafeWork NSW will acknowledge employers who demonstrate best practice mentally healthy workplaces through a dedicated recognition program.

## 7. MEASURING PROGRESS

The NSW Government will measure progress towards the Strategy's outcomes by 2022 and beyond with the following current and potential data sources:

Outcome	Data sources
Increased awareness and understanding of mentally healthy workplaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SafeWork NSW self-report of available products, resources, training and services</li> <li>• SafeWork NSW website and customer service telephone data</li> <li>• SafeWork NSW customer satisfaction survey data</li> <li>• Stakeholder feedback via interviews and workshops</li> <li>• Advertising and communications evaluation data</li> <li>• Research data and reports</li> </ul>
Increased capability of NSW employers to create mentally healthy workplaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benchmarking tool results</li> <li>• NSW workers survey</li> <li>• Case studies</li> <li>• Inspector data</li> <li>• Workplace assessment data</li> </ul>
Improved NSW workers' perception that their workplaces are healthier and safer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NSW workers survey or existing data, e.g. Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey data</li> <li>• Intervention participants survey and evaluations</li> </ul>
Better promoted, preserved and restored social connections within the workplace and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Promote:</b> NSW workers compensation data; icare organisational safety culture tool</li> <li>• <b>Preserve:</b> NSW workers compensation data; icare social support inventory</li> <li>• <b>Restore:</b> NSW workers compensation data; community case studies</li> </ul>
Improved productivity, due to reduction in absenteeism and presenteeism, improved recovery at work outcomes and employer cost savings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NSW workers survey or existing data, e.g. HILDA survey data</li> <li>• NSW workers compensation data</li> </ul>

## 8. DELIVERY

A Steering Committee is responsible for delivering the Strategy, including funding and the strategic direction of the program. Its members include senior executives from icare, the Mental Health Commission of NSW, the NSW Ministry of Health, SafeWork NSW and SIRA. The Committee will report to the Ministers.

The Mentally Healthy Workplaces Implementation Committee drives the program to deliver planned outcomes and benefits. Its members include senior staff from icare, SafeWork NSW and SIRA. It will engage with stakeholders to maximise the reach and impact of the Strategy. It will use and complement existing evidence, programs, tools, resources and networks to share lessons learned across initiatives to maximise program outcomes, minimise duplication and drive continuous improvement.

icare, SafeWork NSW and SIRA will coordinate their own information, communication, monitoring and control activities to deliver their part of the NSW Government program, with staff experienced in project management and work health and wellbeing. They will engage the following stakeholders during the planning and delivery of the Strategy:

- people with lived experience
- at-risk workers
- employers
- unions
- industry-specific peak bodies
- small and micro business representatives
- mental health academics
- mental health advocates
- insurance regulators
- workers compensation insurers
- mental health and general practitioners, and
- other government organisations.

1 UTS & USyd 2017, *Mentally healthy workplaces: a return-on-investment study*

2 UTS & USyd, 2017 *ibid*

3 SafeWork NSW & Instinct and Reason 2017, *ibid*

4 The University of Sydney (USyd) 2017, *Review of evidence for psychosocial risks for mental ill-health in the workplace; Summary of key issues for SafeWork NSW emerging from the review of risks for workplace mental ill-health*

5 USyd 2017, *Review of evidence of interventions to reduce mental ill-health in the workplace*

6 SafeWork NSW & Instinct and Reason 2017, *ibid*

7 USyd 2017, *Summary of key issues for SafeWork NSW emerging from the review of risks for workplace mental ill-health*

8 SafeWork NSW & Instinct and Reason 2017, *op cit*

9 These program objectives are derived from the Mentally Healthy Workplaces in NSW Program Business Case (Mar 2018).

10 These guiding principles were identified from stakeholder feedback at the Mentally Healthy Workplaces Summit (Nov 2017).

11 UTS & USyd, 2017, *op cit*

12 SafeWork NSW & Instinct and Reason 2017, *Mentally healthy workplaces in NSW - benchmarking tool*, NSW Government, Sydney

13 Includes all NSW agencies grouped into ten clusters

14 SafeWork NSW & Instinct and Reason 2017, *Mentally healthy workplaces in NSW - benchmarking tool*, NSW Government, Sydney

15 Icare and Everymind 2017, *White paper: Can digital interventions help to improve mental health and reduce mental ill-health in small business?* Sydney



