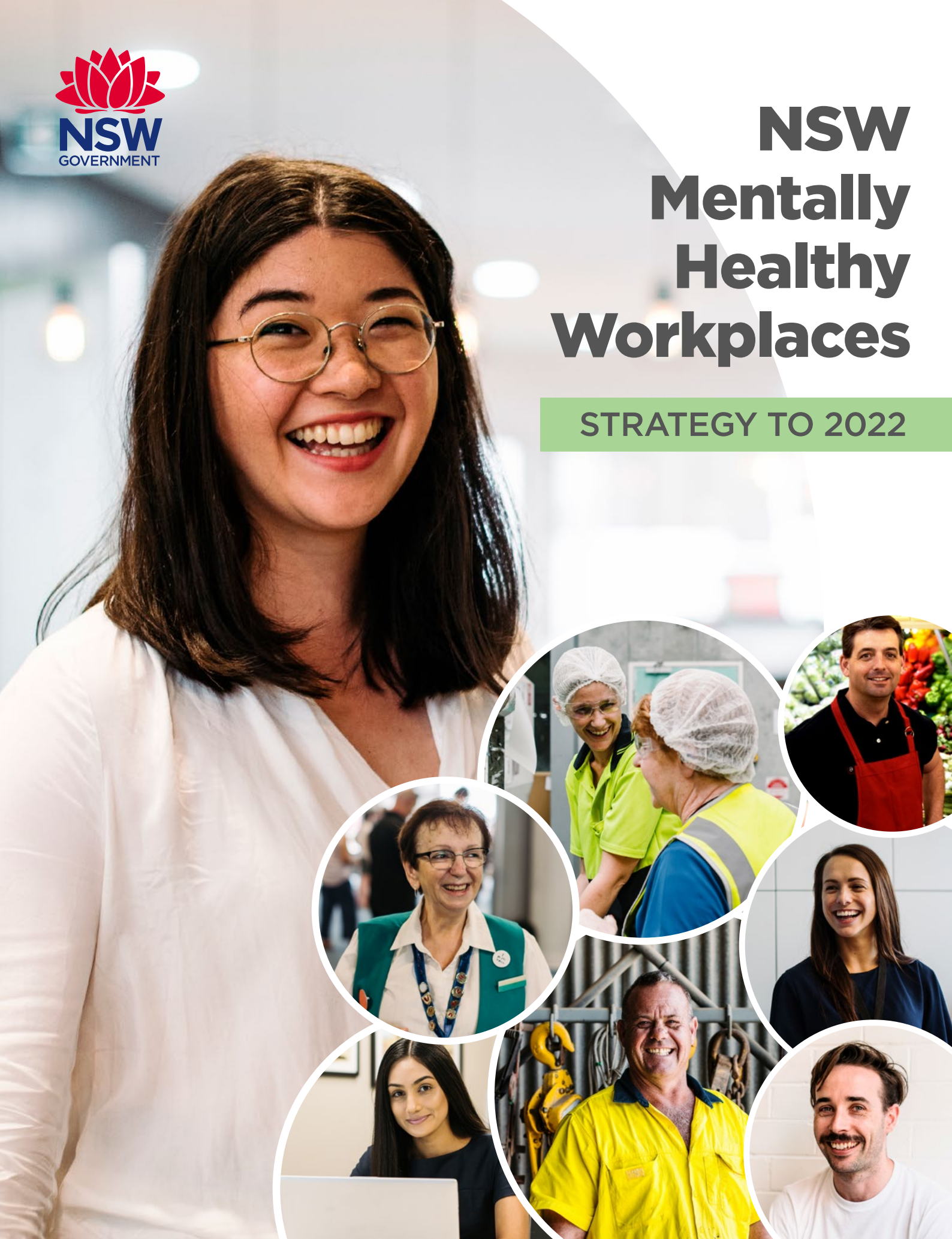


NSW Mentally Healthy Workplaces

STRATEGY TO 2022



Foreword

Most of us spend about one-third or more of our waking lives at work. It's a huge part of what we do and can have a significant impact on our mental health in a positive or negative way.

We all know that when we enjoy our work, it gives us a sense of belonging and social connection, a sense of achievement and confidence and the opportunity to keep learning and reach our full potential.

That's why healthy workplaces are so important. Knowing how to prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of staff is more important than ever, and can make a big difference to workplace morale and productivity.

This refreshed strategy comes in the wake of significant change in the workplace and beyond. Although the fundamentals remain, it has been enriched thanks to data, feedback and expert recommendations to ensure we are best placed to meet new and existing challenges together.

It is designed to help us ensure we are meeting the need for every single workplace in NSW to provide an environment that promotes and encourages good mental health.

Good mental health begins in the community and in the places and times we gather from day-to-day. From high-risk sectors to small and medium businesses, this means equipping each and every one to confidently deliver tailored, practical support to meet the unique needs of their staff from the ground up.

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From the desk of...

There's never been a better time to refresh our approach

**Hon.
Kevin
Anderson
MP**



...the Hon. Kevin Anderson MP

COVID-19 has impacted the world of work profoundly, and our workforce has shown a huge amount of flexibility and resilience in adapting quickly and efficiently to new ways of working.

We all know the challenges the pandemic has brought, but we shouldn't downplay the opportunities that it has also presented – what we're seeing now is widespread flexible working conditions that didn't exist before, and digital capabilities that most of us didn't utilise.

With these changes in mind, there's never been a better time to refresh our approach and develop new ways to support our workforce when it comes to mental health.

This refreshed strategy incorporates feedback we've had directly from businesses and employees, coupled with expert advice on how our workplaces are adapting, so that we can continue to meet the needs of our workers in the years ahead.

This year, the NSW Government will provide free and direct practical help for businesses to improve mental health at work. We're rolling out evidence-informed initiatives, most notably the introduction of a free, practical coaching service that is just a phone call away.

I am particularly proud that this strategy has a strengthened focus on supporting the mental health needs of our small and regional businesses. Your business size and where you're located should not affect the ways that you can support your staff, and this strategy is all about helping every single workplace in NSW be a mentally healthy one.



**Hon.
Bronnie
Taylor
MLC**

We
need to
address
all the
factors

...the Hon. Bronnie Taylor MLC

To live well, we need meaning and purpose in life. Work meets this need for many of us. When work is good, it not only gives us an income, but also a sense of belonging and social connection; a sense of achievement and confidence; the opportunity to keep learning and to reach our full potential.

That's why healthy workplaces need to be part of the solution as we support our community to recover from the challenges of recent years and move towards the Premier's priority of reducing suicide in NSW. Clinical services alone can't heal us. We need to address all the factors that support our wellbeing, including safe employment, stable housing, opportunities for education, healthy environments and connected communities.

We all benefit when we pursue this coordinated approach. Individuals, families, communities, schools and workplaces are likely to be more resilient. And when we or someone we love is diagnosed with a mental health condition – as almost half of us will, over the course of our lifetime – we are likely to recover sooner and continue to make a valuable contribution to society.

Executive summary

Before COVID-19 nearly one in six workers were experiencing mental ill-health in a four-week period. Following the drought, bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, as a community we're even more aware of how important support for mental health at work is. During this time demand has grown significantly for workplace mental health programs, services and resources to help businesses and individuals get back on track, recover and have healthy and safe workplaces.

Mentally healthy workplaces benchmarking tool data from 2020¹ compared with 2017² results showed an overall improvement in NSW businesses' ability to provide a mentally healthy workplace. The data showed small business in particular are in need of more support.

The target remains
more than
90,000
NSW businesses taking
effective action
to create a mentally
healthy workplace
by 2022

A lot has changed since the NSW Mentally Healthy Workplaces Strategy 2018-2022 (strategy) was launched in June 2018. To ensure the strategy is effective and on track to achieve its target and objectives, a mid-point review was completed with the recommendations informing this revised strategy.

The revised strategy will focus on high-impact projects in the final phase of delivery. The adjustments we've made were informed by evaluation data and new evidence, expert recommendations and stakeholder and customer insights.

The NSW Government's investment in the development of business capability around mentally healthy workplaces has been visionary in Australia.³

Professor Angela Martin



A priority initiative for 2021-22 is the development and implementation of **direct practical coaching** to address workplace mental health for micro, small and medium business in NSW



We aim to reach **1,000 businesses** by June 2022



Direct practical coaching

Online and interactive business support for micro, small and medium businesses.

Regional businesses

Recognising the unique needs of regional NSW.

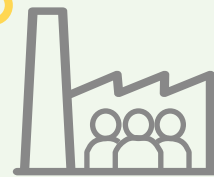


Small & medium businesses

Tailored workplace mental health support. Help they need when they need it.

Key industries

Focused collaboration with high-risk industry sectors.



Four focus areas will maximise our impact

Other new business and worker support services include:

- a digitised self-service tool to assess a workplace and get tailored actions
- a new and improved website with practical, tailored resources
- training to improve knowledge of work health and safety (WHS) responsibilities, confidence and skills to stay mentally fit and support others at work
- the development of a strategy for healthy workplaces and healthy workers to put in place for 2023 and beyond.

Existing projects have been refined to align with the new focus areas. SafeWork NSW regulatory services will be strengthened with improved compliance guidance and advice about what compliance looks like, encouraging businesses to embed support for mental health into 'business as usual'.

NSW Mentally Healthy Workplaces

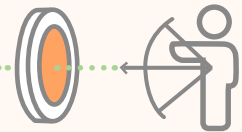
STRATEGY TO 2022

VISION NSW employers, leaders and workers take **effective action** to create mentally healthy workplaces.



STRATEGY TARGET BY 2022

More than **90,000** NSW businesses are taking **effective action** to create a mentally healthy workplace.



2021/22 PRIORITY TARGET

Reach **1,000** micro, small or medium NSW businesses with timely and personalised support.

FOUR FOCUS AREAS



Direct practical coaching

Online and interactive business support for micro, small and medium businesses.



Small businesses

Tailored workplace mental health support. Help them need when they need it.



Regional businesses

Recognising the unique needs of regional NSW.



Key industries

Focused collaboration with high-risk industry sectors.

STREAMS

Awareness raising

- Regional education
- Media campaigns and communications
- Website
- Ambassador program

Evidence-informed interventions

- Mental health at work training
- Recovery at work
- Peer support

Building employer confidence and capability

- Direct practical coaching
- Regulatory services
- Healthy workplaces check
- Social connection

Research

- Data guidelines
- Applied and action research
- Integrated healthy workplaces

OUTCOMES

Increased
awareness &
understanding

Increased
capability of
employers & leaders

Improved
workers'
perception

Better
social
connections

Improved
productivity & recovery
at work outcomes

More than half a million
NSW workers have poor
mental health



ON AVERAGE NEARLY
1 IN 6 PEOPLE ARE
EXPERIENCING MENTAL
ILL-HEALTH NOW

\$2.8
billion per year

Est. cost to NSW
of mental ill-health
at work

45%

of Australian adults have a mental
illness at some point in their life

Mental health at work matters

Mental health in the workplace



With one-third of adult life spent at work, the workplace can promote good 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.

Economic evidence suggests employers can save more than four dollars for every dollar they invest in evidence-based mental health interventions in the workplace, through increased productivity and reduced costs.⁴ Mentally healthy workplaces also help you attract and keep great staff.

Workplace spending on mental health often focuses on treatment, rather than prevention. This is despite evidence that prevention of mental illness and early help-seeking to support recovery reduces costs and impacts, and improves outcomes for the business and individual.

In June 2018, NSW launched the first Mentally Healthy Workplaces strategy in Australia. Research identified evidence of risks and issues which cause or contribute to mental ill-health in the workplace⁵ and interventions which were effective in improving mental health outcomes at work.⁶ 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.

The original strategy was informed by research, the mentally healthy workplaces in NSW benchmarking tool and stakeholders. This revision follows the mid-point evaluation⁷ of the strategy and an independent review⁸ conducted in late 2020, following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on NSW businesses and other natural and economic challenges faced by the NSW community.

A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE...
takes action, continually **promotes** good mental health, **manages** risks to mental health through safe work practices and a positive work culture, and **supports** early help-seeking and recovery



They are productive and great places to work

What does a mentally healthy workplace look like?

In a mentally healthy workplace, there is **visible commitment from the leadership** to promote healthy practices, prevent risks to mental health and support early intervention and recovery of workers. **Work is designed to be safe** and a **positive workplace culture** exists where workers feel valued and engaged.

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 the needs of diverse work groups
- continuous evaluation and improvement are visible.⁹

Managers actively **identify and manage risks** to eliminate or minimise their impact on their workers' mental health. They understand how work can contribute to mental health and what actions they can take to get or give support.

Proactive consultation including check-ins and discussion with workers about mental health is continuous, along with regular reviews of initiatives and improvements based on feedback and evidence to ensure they are effective.

Workplace systems, policies, programs and behaviours **promote good mental health**, help prevent 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 proactively **consult, check-in and talk** to their workers about mental health. Employers review initiatives and make improvements based on feedback and evidence to ensure they are effective.

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 while also feeling they have low control over how they manage their work.¹⁰ Interventions may impact multiple risks at once. There has been a best practice shift toward identifying and embedding the characteristics of a mentally healthy workplace, to manage risks and improve mental health more effectively.

To achieve a mentally healthy workplace, **employers, leaders and workers should consider mental health in the management of workplace risks**, when they develop and implement policies and processes, and in the **education, training and support services** they provide their workers – as is already commonplace for physical health and safety.¹¹



Strategy Achievements

655
businesses
received
expert WHS
Advice

**More than
12,000
individuals
have received
Mental Health
Training**

**More than
280,000
website
visitors**

**11 Mentally
Healthy Workplace
Ambassadors have
reached more than
300,000
readers through
media**

NSW has made progress – our workplaces are more mentally healthy

Since strategy activities began in 2018, considerable progress has been made in creating more mentally healthy workplaces in NSW. By December 2020, more than 12,000 individuals had received mental health training, 655 businesses used expert WHS Advice, and there were more than 280,000 website visits to mentalhealthatwork.nsw.gov.au. Business leaders and entrepreneurs partnered with the NSW Government to share in motivating change and influencing large businesses.

Overall, across the state the benchmarking tool indicated improvements in capability. In 2017, it was estimated 67,542 NSW workplaces were taking 'effective action' to create a mentally healthy workplace.¹² By 2020, that number grew to 75,958¹³ showing a positive increase in building employer capability across NSW. This is assumably attributable to a range of factors including, but not limited to, the activities within the strategy.



Safe Design Checklist

Consider mental health in...

- ✓ how you set up systems
- ✓ work practices
- ✓ managing workplace risks
- ✓ how you train your staff
- ✓ available support

Our refreshed strategy

Since the 2018 launch of the strategy there has been significant changes to how workplaces and society function. Drought, bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted businesses, and the mental health of the people who own, operate and work in them.

The mid-point review of the strategy was completed in December 2020. The conclusion was that the strategy remains relevant and especially important for NSW workplaces managing such significant changes and impacts.¹⁴

Changes based on the data, customer feedback and expert recommendations were made to enhance the strategy reach and impact towards June 2022.

The revised strategy has identified four key focus areas:



Direct
practical
coaching



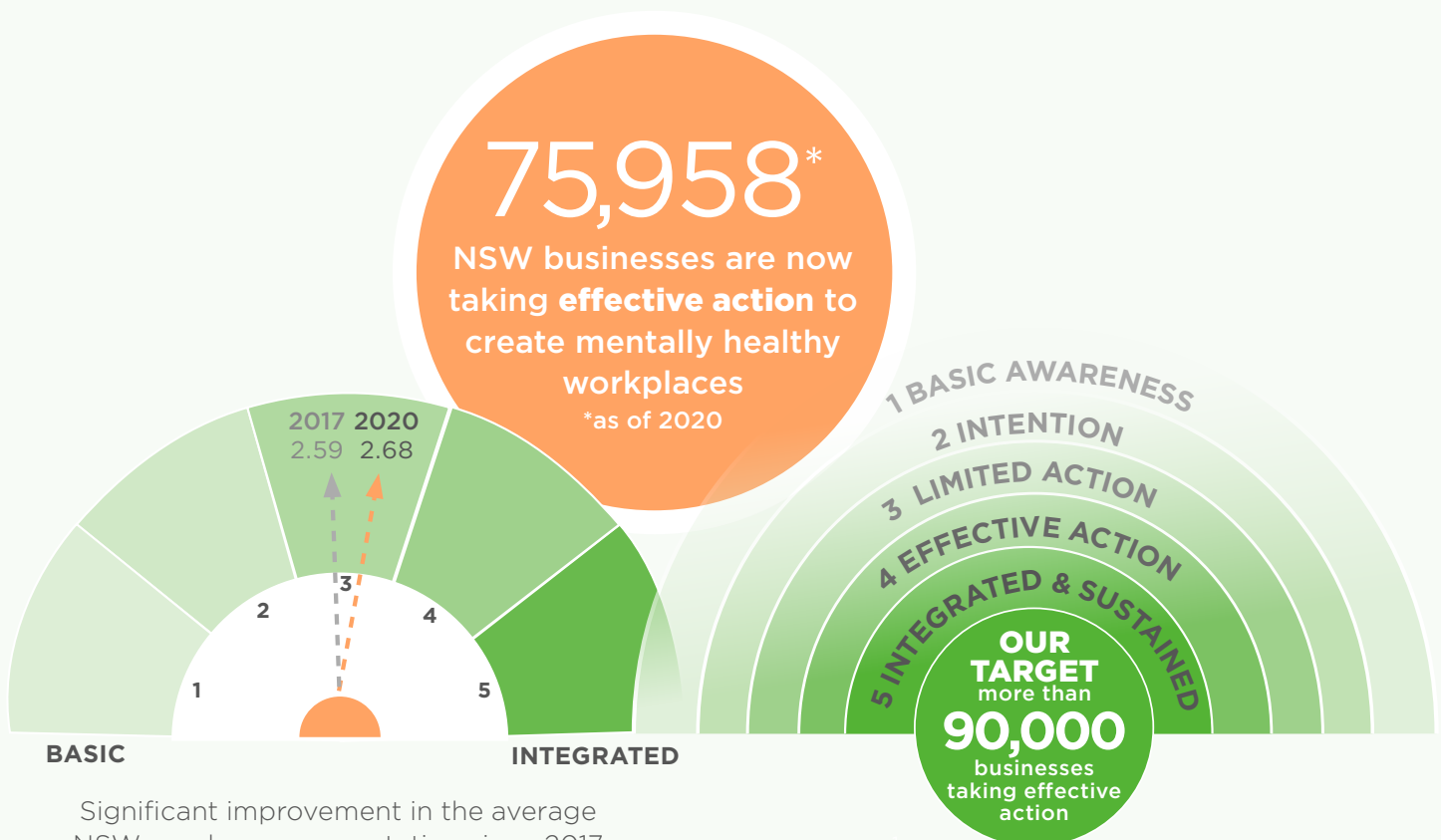
Small
businesses



Regional
businesses



Key
industries



Objectives

The NSW Government remains committed to the following strategy 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.¹⁵

In response to feedback, evaluation, and recommendations from the independent strategic advisor, a new objective has been identified as a priority for 2021 and 2022:

4. **Increase** the proportion of micro, small and medium businesses in NSW taking action to address workplace mental health by providing **direct practical coaching**.



Focus areas

In the final phase of the strategy the following areas have been identified as key areas of focus:



Direct practical coaching

People are at the centre of this 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 promote good mental health.

Workers also have the responsibility to work safely and raise WHS issues with their employer.

The refreshed strategy recognises the diverse interests in workplace mental health, varied knowledge, capability and motivation to change. The NSW Government will deliver improved customer-centric services that are practical, tailored and timely to the needs of the customer.

A new direct practical coaching service will be implemented to assist micro, small and medium business customers with tailored advice to resolve workplace mental health issues and support them to create a mentally healthy workplace. The strategy aims to reach 1,000 businesses by June 2022.



Small businesses

The mid-point review and 2020 benchmarking tool data showed small businesses need support. Evidence also shows small business owners face unique challenges¹⁶ including:

- small business owners and workers who experience depression, anxiety, and stress at concerning levels
- stressors, for example demands to work when unwell, financial stress, multiple responsibilities and challenges to work-life balance
- high health-related productivity losses
- people working in small business are time poor and often work long hours
- the sector is very diverse, working across a wide variety of industries
- mental health stigma may be a barrier for owners and workers
- online approaches should be explored
- owners report taking work home and concerns about the impact on their families.¹⁷



Regional businesses

Regional and remote businesses face unique challenges to improve mental health at work in these communities. Tailoring of programs, services and communications are required to suit their context and needs. Innovative solutions will be adopted to take the message to the bush and achieve upskilling of employers, industry associations and allied health professionals in regional areas.



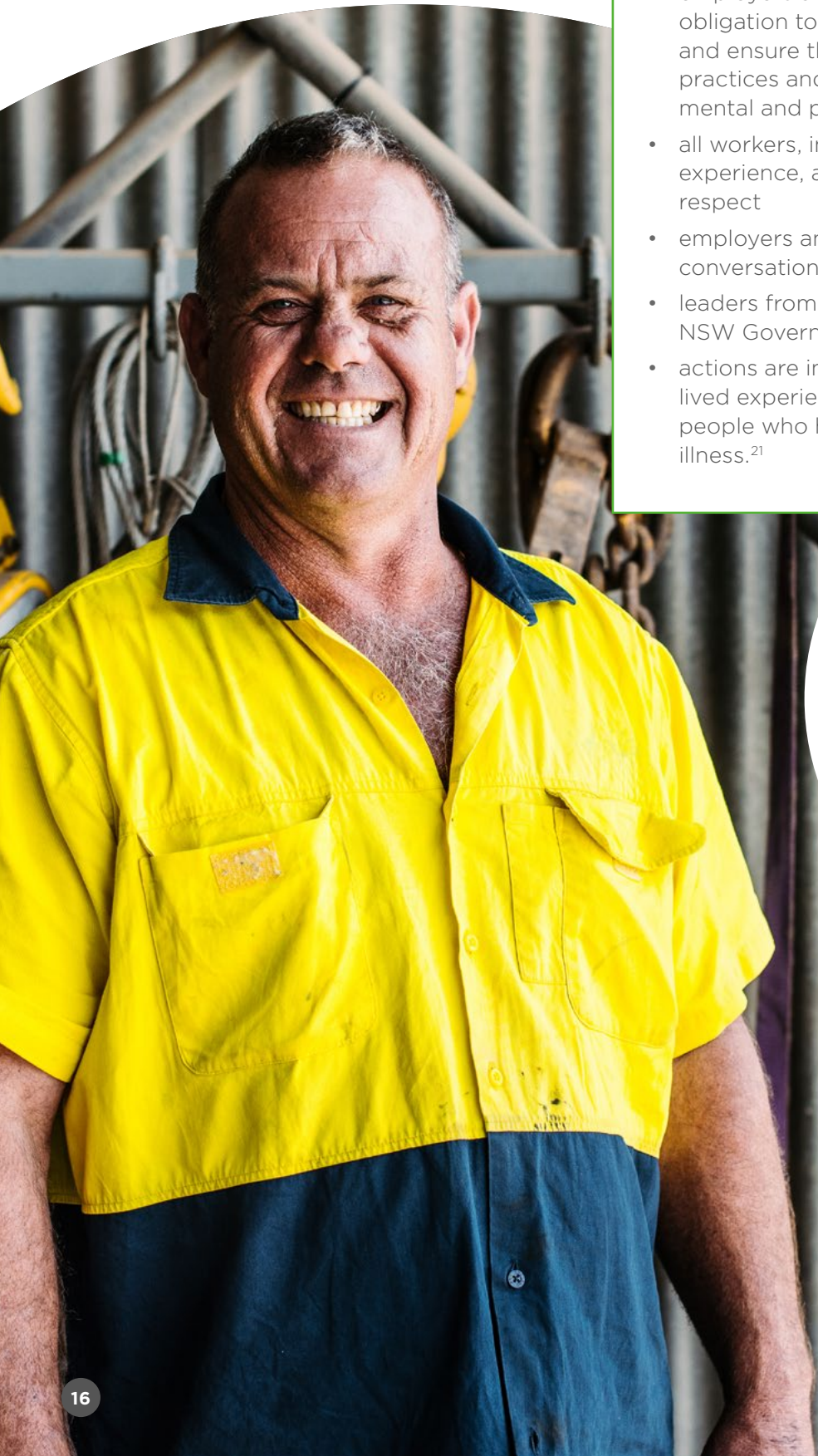
Key industries

2017 data identified industries that are at higher risk of poor mental health outcomes due to having a high prevalence of mental ill-health¹⁸ and a low capability to create mentally healthy workplaces:¹⁹

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

It is noted these industries have made progress since 2017.²⁰ The strategy will continue to focus on supporting these industries in addition to an increased focus on small business and businesses in regional NSW at higher risk of mental ill-health.

SafeWork NSW will continue to support the government sector in achieving mentally healthy workplaces. This will be in collaboration with the SafeWork NSW roadmap and the government WHS sector plan. Opportunities to support government agencies and pilot new initiatives will be conducted to promote and create change toward a mentally healthy public service.



Guiding principles

This strategy is underpinned by the following guiding principles:

- employers and their leaders have a legal obligation to consult with their workers and ensure their business systems, practices and work environment support mental and physical health and safety
- all workers, including people with lived experience, are treated with dignity and respect
- employers and workers have authentic conversations about mental health
- leaders from industry, businesses and the NSW Government lead by example
- actions are informed by evidence and the lived experience of customers including people who have experienced mental illness.²¹

It is acknowledged that government has a role to clearly articulate what is required to provide a healthy and safe workplace, to make resources easily accessible and to provide support and assistance to create a mentally healthy workplace

The NSW Government will develop new initiatives to support the achievement of strategy outcomes:

- Free 1:1 coaching for businesses
- Self-service online tools and resources
- Digital healthy workplaces check
- Future direction --> Integrated healthy workplaces

Streams

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

1. awareness raising
2. evidence-informed interventions
3. research
4. building employer confidence and capability.

The NSW Government continues to work with stakeholders on the development and delivery of programs within the strategy. A summary of each stream is set out below. During the design and delivery of the remaining and new programs, the NSW Government will consider small, medium and large workplaces; those operating in remote, regional and metro areas; and at-risk workers and working individuals with lived experience of mental health issues.

1. Awareness raising

The NSW Government will raise awareness of workplace mental health and direct employers, leaders and workers to support and resources to help create mentally healthy workplaces.

Regional education

Upskilling employers, industry associations and allied health professionals by taking the message to the bush.

Media campaigns and communications

Increase awareness of the workplace's importance in mental health by directing employers and workers to mentalhealthatwork.nsw.gov.au for online practical resources to improve the understanding that providing a healthy workplace is part of WHS obligations, and to motivate action.

Website

Provide a self-service hub with prevention-focused practical guidance and evidence-informed tools and resources with a focus on small and regional businesses.

Ambassador program

Collaborate with business leaders and entrepreneurs to use their influence, networks and communication channels to share key messages to motivate widespread employer action to create mentally healthy workplaces.

Events

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

2. Evidence-informed interventions

Implement interventions that demonstrate improved mental health outcomes and employer savings for non-government businesses with <200 workers and not-for-profit organisations.

Mental health at work training

Improve knowledge of mental health at work including WHS roles and obligations, improve confidence to support others who are experiencing mental ill-health, build skills to manage your own mental health and increase leaders' skills to prevent harm and embed support for mental health into their daily operations (systems, practices and work environments).

Recovery at work program

Support individuals' mental health at work with a focus on earlier help-seeking, support for recovery and stigma (including the claims process, where applicable).

Peer support

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

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, to improve the capability of businesses to create mentally healthy workplaces by effectively managing mental health risks and hazards.

Data guidelines

Help small and medium businesses use data effectively to create mentally healthy workplaces.

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.

Integrated healthy workplaces

Explore a vision of physically and mentally healthy and safe workers in NSW workplaces – an integrated model.

4. Building employer confidence and capability

Expert guidance, collaboration, recognition and leading by example, to encourage and enable employers to build confidence, capability and

take effective action towards a mentally healthy workplace.

Direct practical coaching

Provide micro, small and medium businesses with access to practical one-on-one coaching they need when they need it.

Regulatory services

Strengthen the Regulatory Framework and provide clarity on compliance to ensure employers manage psychological hazards and provide psychologically safe workplaces.

Healthy workplaces check

Full digitisation of the benchmarking tool to provide a self-service mental health capability assessment for workplaces to identify gaps or areas for improvement and take effective action.

Workplace assessment

Expert assessments and 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 check for workplaces to understand how their workplace measures against similar businesses to motivate informed action.

Workplace collaboration

Encourage and facilitate collaboration 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.

Lead NSW Government sector best practice

Lead positive change by modelling best practice and promote the actions taken using government communication channels. Provide templates and resources tailored for the government sector.



Measuring progress

The NSW Government will measure progress towards strategy outcomes by 2022 and beyond in line with the NSW Mentally Healthy Workplaces Strategy Evaluation Framework

Delivery

SafeWork NSW are the lead agency for the strategy, with active contributions from SIRA and icare. Leadership representatives from SafeWork NSW, SIRA, icare, the Mental Health Commission of NSW, the NSW Ministry of Health, BEING and Resilience NSW monitor, advise, inform and consult on design, delivery and performance of the strategy.

The NSW Mentally Healthy Workplaces Operational Board drives the program to deliver planned outcomes and benefits. Its members include senior staff from SafeWork NSW, SIRA and icare. It will engage with stakeholders to maximise the reach and impact of this strategy. It will help maximise program outcomes, minimise duplication and drive continuous improvement.

SafeWork NSW, SIRA and icare coordinate their own information, communication, monitoring and control activities to deliver their part of the strategy, with staff experienced in project management and work health and wellbeing.

They engage the following stakeholders during strategy planning and delivery:

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



The purpose
of the **WHS laws**
is to eliminate or
minimise risks to the
health and safety of
workers

‘Health’
is defined as meaning
psychological as well
as physical health.

Safe Work Australia²⁹

What motivated the strategy

More than half a million NSW workers (275,000 men and 290,000 women) have poor mental health.²² On average this means nearly one in six people are experiencing mental ill-health now. 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.²³ 45% of Australian adults have a mental illness at some point in their life.²⁴

These numbers show it is likely an adult will either experience mental illness or need to support someone they care for through mental health issues at some time. If unaddressed, mental ill-health 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.



The average time taken off work for psychological claims is 224 days compared with 50 days for a physical injury and the cost per claim is four times higher for psychological injuries



Mentally unhealthy workplaces cost employers

Not managing mental health at work impacts on a business' bottom line. The average yearly cost to employers of their workers taking time off work due to mental health issues is estimated at \$131-\$454 per person.²⁵

Presenteeism costs, where workers attend work under stress or experiencing mental ill-health, is up to 26 times the cost of absenteeism due to lost productivity.²⁶ In addition, there are further costs incurred from reduced capacity, recruitment and training of new workers and impacts on customer service delivery.

Mentally unhealthy workplaces cost the economy

The incidence and cost of mental health workers compensation claims are increasing and significantly exceed those of physical health claims. In the five years to June 2020, psychological claims increased 59% compared to physical injuries staying steady at 88,000 claims per year. The average time taken off work for psychological claims is 224 days compared with 50 days for a

physical injury and the cost per claim is four times higher for psychological injuries. Failing to improve mental health at work costs employers money.

Further trend analysis shows that the total number of psychological incidents is accelerating year by year. By 2021-2022, it is predicted to have 9,720 incidents compared to 7,349 incidents in 2019-2020, and 4,634 incidents in 2015-2016.²⁷

The estimated cost to NSW of mental ill-health at work is estimated at \$2.8 billion per year.²⁸



Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

World Health Organisation



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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

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.

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