

Managing mental illness for **best** outcomes

Attachment B

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A recent report released by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) found that while Australian employers are generally supportive of workers with mental illness, there is a need for guidance on how to manage these employees effectively.

One in five Australian adults experience mental health problems each year but despite this statistic almost half of senior managers surveyed believed that none of their workers experienced mental health problems at work.

After cancer and heart disease, mental health problems are the third biggest health problem in Australia, with anxiety and depression leading the reported mental health issue list.

There is a real business case for managing employees who suffer from mental illness. The AHRC report estimated that stress related workers' compensation claim costs exceed \$10 million per annum. In addition to this cost, businesses lose billions of dollars each year by not implementing early intervention strategies.

CCI, in conjunction with the report, has compiled the most common areas employers struggle with when managing staff who may be suffering from a mental illness.

Performance management

"Can I performance manage an employee if I suspect they are suffering from a mental illness?"

Can I performance manage staff with a mental illness if they are not performing?" These questions are common among employers regarding managing staff with a mental illness or suspected mental illness.

There is no legal obligation for an employee to disclose information about a mental illness. However, in situations where it is evident that an employee is not coping, an employer can consider ways to assist the individual in improving their performance. An employer is entitled to apply standard performance management procedures where there is a legitimate concern about the employee's performance.

When an employee discloses to their employer that they are suffering from a mental illness, an employer may consider

ceasing the performance management process and dealing with the issue in a more supportive and sensitive manner.

In this instance, it may be appropriate to discuss with the employee how they see their illness affecting their work and performance. The employer may then consider and explore work adjustments that may be made without compromising the core responsibilities of the position. It may also be appropriate to warn an employee that if their performance issues cannot be resolved, reasonable adjustments made or these adjustments do not work, then the issue will be revisited as a performance concern.

Making reasonable adjustments

When an employer is looking to introduce an adjustment for an employee who may be suffering from a mental illness, employers should consider what adjustments or changes can be made to the working environment to enable the employee to perform their duties more effectively.

In developing a reasonable adjustment an employer should objectively assess the inherent requirements of the employee's role, the employee's skills and abilities (where possible consider medical advice or recommendations) and consult with the employee.

Adjustments should ideally be tailored to each individual to meet the particular needs or issues of the employee.

Examples of a reasonable adjustment may include:

Offering flexible work arrangements. For example, job share, job rotation or flexible start and finish times.

Changing some aspects of the job or work tasks. For example, this may include exchanging a single demanding project for a job consisting of a number of smaller tasks.

Changing the workplace or the employee's work area. This may include moving the employee to a quieter work area.

Purchasing or modifying equipment. For example, suggesting the use of a personal diary or Blackberry to keep track of tasks or deadlines.

Performance managing an employee, including the termination of an employee who is suffering from a

mental illness, may expose an employer to the risk of an unfair termination claim, general protections claim or discrimination claim. For this reason, members are strongly encouraged to contact the CCI Employee Relations Advice Centre for assistance in determining the most appropriate way to deal with an employee who is suffering from a mental illness.

If you are not performing at 100%: don't do anything until you read this.



You may suffer from depression and anxiety without realising that you could have a real illness.

Do you suffer from:

- low self-esteem
- reduced concentration
- relationship issues
- sleep problems
- stressed, confused, irritable or restless?

HealthSteps programmes and Sentiens Clinic can help if you are experiencing these troubling and disruptive symptoms.

We are a specialist clinic providing face to face services and online programs.

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Sentiens.com

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Mental illness a growing challenge

There are also implications for the workforce with early identification leading to increases in the numbers of pre-retirement people diagnosed with dementia.



BY ALISON GARTON
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The growing rates of mental illness in the community mean businesses need to be aware of the issue and it's impact.

Two of the most common age groups who report mental illness are younger workers, under the age of 30, and older workers nearing retirement. The types of problems they experience differ and support to assist recovery or prevent decline should be provided. There is a mental health system that provides appropriate care and treatment to people with mental illness to enable them to lead productive and healthy lives.

Recent surveys of the health of Australians indicate that around 20% of children and young people have mental health problems that require treatment. The ABS national survey of mental

health and wellbeing showed that over 25% of 16 to 24 year olds experienced a mental disorder in the previous 12 months and that two thirds of all disability of people aged between 15 and 30 years is caused by mental illness. These illnesses range from anxiety and depression through to schizophrenia and psychosis, requiring various levels and forms of treatment. Having a mental illness means days off work with an average of three out 30 days for those with a mental disorder rising to five and a half days if coupled with a chronic physical condition.

Early identification leading to early intervention is known as most successful in the long term in preventing symptoms or behaviours deteriorating and becoming more acute or chronic. Early intervention prevents long term

social and economic consequences such as unemployment, homelessness, substance abuse, violence and crime. Early intervention has also been shown to lead to improved social and economic outcomes such as the development of long-term relationships and stable employment.

The WA population is ageing and there has been growth in the proportion of adults aged 65 and older. The prevalence of mental health problems in people over 65 is around 5% for males and nearly 10% for females. It is reported that 20% of older adults have clinically significant depressive symptoms.

An increasing number of people are experiencing dementia. WA is predicted to have an estimated 80,000 people suffering from dementia by 2050. Support for these older people from GPs and specialist clinics are essential for integrated care for dementia sufferers. Early signs of behavioural problems including memory loss related to the

onset of dementia must be identified for early referral to specialists such as psychogeriatricians. There are also implications for the workforce with early identification leading to increases in the numbers of pre-retirement people diagnosed with dementia, albeit off a very low base, as dementia in those less than 65 years of age is rare.

Residential aged care accommodation is not suitable for older people with a mental illness and specialised older adult mental health services need to be developed. This is particularly the case for people suffering dementia. Ways of delaying dementia include exercise, mentally challenging activities, a balanced diet and being socially active.

Any person or employee can experience a mental health problem or mental illness. What they are experiencing does respond to psychiatric and psychological treatment and people with mental illness should not be stigmatised or discriminated against and should be offered support such as employment, medical treatment and accommodation to aid recovery and maintain quality of life.