

Overdue for change

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.¹

- According to the ABS², in 2018/19³:
 - » 4.8m Australians (20.1%) had a mental disorder or behavioural condition – that’s one in five people;
 - » 3.2m Australians (13.1%) had an anxiety related condition (anxiety being the most common mental or behavioural condition);
 - » one in ten people (10.4%) had depression/feelings of depression;
 - » 1.5m Australians had suffered from both depression/feelings of depression and an anxiety condition concurrently;
 - » one in ten Territorians suffered from an anxiety condition;
 - » one in thirteen Territorians suffered from depression/feelings of depression.
- WHO⁴ estimates that globally, 300m people are affected by depression.⁵
- The ABS also reports that in 2018⁶:
 - » suicide accounted for 105 730 years of potential life lost;
 - » 76.2% (2320) of Australian suicides were male (approximately six men each day...) and 23.8% (726) female;
 - » the NT recorded the highest suicide rate in Australia at 19.5 deaths per 100 000 population;
 - » 169 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people died from suicide.
- In 2016, WHO estimates that 793 000 suicides occurred worldwide⁷ (approximately one death every 40 seconds...).

The cost to business:

- WHO estimates that anxiety and depression costs the global economy US\$1 trillion per year.⁸
- For every \$1 put into health and wellbeing programs/treatment, there is a health and productivity return of \$3-\$6.⁹

- Workers suffering from poor health and wellbeing are three times less productive than their healthy counterparts and are nine times more likely to be absent from work.¹⁰
- Workplaces with poor health and wellbeing practices are likely to have a higher staff turnover and are likely to lose staff within 12 months.¹¹

Living at work – visiting home sometimes

Many of us are time-poor and chasing that elusive ‘work-life balance’ fairy. Creating a harmonious blend of life and work doesn’t have a ‘one size fits all’ solution as each individual situation is different.

Although s62(1) of the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) states that “An employer must not request or require an employee to work more than the following number of hours in a week unless the additional hours are reasonable: ...”. What is ‘reasonable’ and *who* decides what ‘reasonable’ is?

The antiquated ‘48-hour work week’ grew from a distant time and from a predominantly male dominated workforce. Multiple gender-based studies are now concluding that not only is this figure higher than it should be and contributes to poorer states of mental health—there are also differences between men and women regarding the maximum hours they should work each week. According to a research entry in the journal of *Social Science & Medicine*¹², the maximum of hours worked each week should be no longer than 38 hours for women and 43.5 hours for men (this is due to the often unaccounted for dual-burden of domestic/caregiving duties that women are still generally responsible for). When looking at both genders as a whole: “Averaging over the sample, we find an overall threshold of 39 h per week beyond which **mental health declines.**” Additionally, “Our study reveals limits to contemporary workhour regulation which may be systematically disadvantaging women’s health.”

Conclusions drawn from The Australia Institute’s *Something for Nothing: Unpaid overtime in Australia 2009*¹³ states that:

Around one in three people who work unpaid overtime say that it moderately or severely affects their life outside of work. When asked what would happen if they didn’t work unpaid overtime, most say that ‘the work wouldn’t get done’, suggesting that the demands placed on employees are too much for many people. A majority of survey respondents who work additional hours said that if they didn’t work overtime they would spend more time with their families, and many said that they would do more exercise. →

If the average full-time employee in Australia works 70 minutes of unpaid overtime on a typical workday, this corresponds to 33 eight-hour days a year, or six and a half standard working weeks. This means that full-timers typically work more than their annual leave entitlement in unpaid overtime each year.

Across the [Australian] workforce, there are 2.14 billion hours of unpaid overtime worked a year, three times as many hours as Australians volunteer to community organisations. This corresponds to 1.16 million full-time jobs, making overwork a natural target for any government seeking to reduce unemployment. At a rate of \$33.70 per hour, across the economy employees are forgoing \$72 billion in wages, or six per cent of GDP.

These figures are astonishing and reflects an archaic, out-dated and unfair workplace 'culture'. (Note that these figures are ten years old and could be much higher today).

The bottom line is **'health is wealth'**. Your health, both mental and physical, should be a priority in your life. So whether you are able to make some adjustments to your work-life balance, eating habits, sleeping pattern or your level of physical activity—please take the time to analyse what areas can be improved to help you to live your best possible life. Small changes can make a huge impact towards your wellbeing. You only have one life—find something that nourishes your soul. ■

Further help

There are plentiful resources online to assist in addressing the rise of mental health (as well as health and wellbeing) issues in the workplace and how to address those issues. Some good places to start being:

- The NT Government's *Healthy Workplace Toolkit 2016* (<https://hdl.handle.net/10137/2725>) is a fantastic resource for organisations and provides a wealth of information on health and wellbeing from a workplace perspective as well as the basics of creating programs that benefit employees.
- Black Dog Institute's *Workplace Mental Health Toolkit 2016* gives a complete overview to mental health and how to manage it in the workplace. The document also contains short videos that help you to understand what it is like to suffer from anxiety/depression (as well as other short clips and links to apps).¹⁴
- There are numerous NT mental health support/information services for both corporate and individual needs. A detailed listing can be found on the NT Government's website at

<https://nt.gov.au/wellbeing/mental-health/support-services-for-mental-health>

LawCare: Caring for the legal profession in the Northern Territory

The Society funds a professional, confidential and free counselling service for members and their immediate family, provided through Employee Assistance Service Australia (EASA).

If you are experiencing workplace, personal or emotional issues which are affecting your work or personal life, please call LawCare via the EASA Program on 1800 193 123 or visit their website at: www.easa.org.au.

When booking an appointment please inform the operator that you are a Law Society NT member.

DARWIN: (08) 8941 1752

ALICE SPRINGS: (08) 8953 4225

KATHERINE: (08) 8941 1752

This service is completely confidential. The Law Society NT will only receive statistical data on numbers accessing the service.

1. Constitution, World Health Organization, page 1
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics
3. ABS 4364.0.55.001 – National Health Survey: First Results, 2017-18
4. World Health Organization
5. <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders>
6. ABS 3303.0 – Causes of Death, Australia, 2018
7. https://www.who.int/gho/mental_health/suicide_rates/en/
8. https://www.who.int/mental_health/in_the_workplace/en/
9. NTG Healthy Workplace Toolkit, page 18 <https://hdl.handle.net/10137/2725>
10. NTG Healthy Workplace Toolkit, page 8 <https://hdl.handle.net/10137/2725>
11. NTG Healthy Workplace Toolkit, page 8 <https://hdl.handle.net/10137/2725>
12. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S027795361730031X>
13. https://www.tai.org.au/sites/default/files/PB%207%20Something%20for%20Nothing_7.pdf
14. <https://blackdoginstitute.org.au/docs/default-source/education-resources/black-dog-institute-mental-health-toolkit-2017.pdf>