

# ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH IN THE RESOURCES SECTOR

*We Can Improve Outcomes*



The Australian minerals sector has maintained a vigilant focus on workplace health and safety. Historically, efforts were directed toward the identification and mitigation of physical safety risk, and the promotion of workplace culture that aims to prevent injury to the individual or their workmates. Over the past few years there has been a widening of this focus to include the wellbeing and mental health of those working in the resources sector. There is now a strong body of evidence that attention to mental health in industry can bring substantial benefits. This approach has been supported in principle by the Minerals Council of Australia in their 2015 *'Blueprint for Mental Health and Wellbeing'*.

The main concern with the approach outlined in this 'Blueprint' is that there are a number of areas that have been identified as *'possible actions that the minerals industry, companies, sites or employees may undertake'*. In the past five years there has been little change in the mental health and wellbeing in the resources sector, mainly because no clear actions were taken. In order to achieve a goal, research shows that you have to ensure that certain criteria are met. The Blueprint provided ideas about improving mental health, but didn't get into the specifics of ownership for the idea or the specifics of the what, where, when, how, who and why. Without specifics that are measurable, and holding someone to account for them, the chances of success pale into insignificance.

To achieve real and lasting cultural change for the sector, there must be specific interventions clearly identified that provide guidance about exactly what activities are going to result in improved mental health and wellbeing for the cohort. They require a timeframe for achievement and a plan for getting there. These outcomes need to be measured and monitored for ongoing and iterative improvement.

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## Mental Fitness

In fitness we understand that if a person engages in a 12-week body transformation challenge, they will see many physical and psychological benefits from it. We don't expect that those benefits will continue if they decide not to maintain their active fitness program and monitor their eating. Yet, we think that if we provide 'Mental Health First Aid' or some other one-off training to our people, we have ticked the box and they won't have any ongoing mental health challenges. It's a ridiculous notion. Maintenance of any skill requires regular use and reinforcement.

Workplace mental health programs have direct benefits in reducing absenteeism and improving productivity and workplace injury claims, alongside indirect benefits to recruitment, retention and staff wellbeing. Programs that address mental health in the workplace can also bring social benefits to the morale and culture of the workplace and to employees and their families. The wider impact of mental health programs in the workplace should not be underestimated. These pathways contribute to the impact on individual health, wellbeing and functioning and contribute to the delivery of broader health benefits to the community.

## It's Not Just Stigma

There is a great deal of focus in the sector that the problems exist due to stigma. Although it may be true that there is a significant level of stigma across the sector, it does not have to be a barrier to help-seeking. In fact, I published research about increasing help-seeking intention in 2018. We can increase help-seeking intention, especially in men, but they need to be hearing the right message.

## Sector Lacks Focus

Data on mental health needs within the minerals industry is limited. Research in affiliated sectors has been more robust and some of the outcomes can be extrapolated due to their correlation.

One in five Australian's report a mental health issue annually - for miner's it is one in three. That means that there are over 93,000 resources workers (predominantly men) who are likely to be experiencing a mental health issue at any given time. There are several reasons for this including higher than average levels of ex-services personnel, remote working conditions in FIFO/DIDO roles and anecdotal evidence around substance-use. The mental health impacts are not only on the worker, but can have influence on the mental health of their families. The sector employs 2% of the population, but influences over 9% of the population.

Conservative estimates of cost to the industry including lowered productivity are between \$320 million to \$450 million per year or around \$300,000 to \$400,000 annually for an average site. However, these numbers were based on the impact of only 10,000 affected employees. The real number is almost 10-fold.



**FIFO**

**41%**

Don't Seek Help  
Due To Stigma

**39%**

Stressed By Lack  
Of Services



## The Solution

In psychological terms we refer to three phases of intervention - promotion, prevention and early intervention. In order to improve the overall mental health of any cohort, we must address all three areas.

The exact interventions utilised in each area require consideration of each individual work environment. In essence, the first step is to undertake a 'Traumatic Injury Prevention Strategy (TIPS)' review. This initial piece of work involves review of relevant documentation, in depth discussions with senior staff and provision of a detailed Report that provides insight into what the risk factors are under each of the four areas (People, HR Management, Prevention and Agility). This report outlines a number of Recommended Actions, including the rationale for why these should be taken, backed up by emerging evidence and research.

This provides the organisation with an evidence-based roadmap of options for moving forward, including identification of the options that will afford the quickest return on investment, and improve outcomes for your people into the future.

Recommended actions are aligned with industry specific outcomes combined with the required interventions, to ensure that cultural change can be achieved with a clear plan of appropriate time frames and opportunity for review and iterative adjustments over the course of the project implementation.

## Cultural Change

*Awareness*

*Learning*

*Practice*

*Accountability*

Individual corporations need to ensure that these elements are in place, if they want to improve culture and enhance the mental health and wellbeing of their people

## Responsibility is Shifting

Implications of poorly managed stressors on the workforce have recently come under international scrutiny. In early 2020, two Directors of a French Company were found guilty of manslaughter for failing to intervene in the bullying and harassment of a staff member who ultimately took his own life. We know that the resources sector has high rates of suicide amongst its employees. How long will it be before these corporations are held to account for their failure to even attempt to improve the mental health of their workers?

***Depression and suicide risk were significantly higher in residential resource workers than in FIFO workers. Depression and suicide risk were directly associated with workplace bullying.***

## Workplace Culture

Research from Beyond Blue highlighted that a dysfunctional workplace is just as likely to cause a person to develop PTSD as being routinely exposed to traumatic experiences.

Male dominated workplace cultures do not support their people to express emotion or share the impact of their experiences openly. The only way that these people can maintain active engagement in the workplace, to which they want to belong, is to repress the impact of these experiences. This action requires the expression of the opposite emotion to suppress it, resulting in more aggressive behaviour in the workplace.

This results in adding further dysfunction to the work environment and over time, this becomes the new 'norm' and sets the culture of an organisation.



***Projects that involve significant cultural change take time, usually around six months then reviewed, and this may give rise to further recommendations. Initially, projects require more intensive involvement from us, assessing and providing education or training to your people. Our involvement eases off over time with regular feedback, review and assessment built into the project, ensuring that your objectives are clearly identified and we can demonstrate delivery in terms of outcomes.***

**A bespoke solution tailored to the needs of your organisation**



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