



# A healthy workplace is good for business

## MEN'S HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

### Why focus on men's health at work?

Research shows that Australian men generally fare much worse than women when it comes to health, education and crime.<sup>1</sup>

The reasons for these gender differences are complex, but in many cases, issues around social connectedness, capacity and willingness to seek help, and limited opportunities to get help through male-focused services and programs are contributing factors.

Men's core identity is often closely associated with their job, so work and work relationships play a very important role in the lives of working men.

Some industries, such as construction, manufacturing and transport, as well as some technical trades and professions, commonly have a high proportion of male employees. This makes these workplaces an ideal place to raise awareness of specific men's health issues, and gives these workplaces a chance to support their employees to improve their health and wellbeing.

### What can a workplace offer?

While women often naturally talk with and seek advice from their social networks about physical and mental health issues, men are far less inclined to do so. Men are also more inclined to wait for a health problem to become serious before they seek out help and advice.

Men will benefit from some encouragement to look after themselves and their mates, and to talk more about their health and wellbeing issues. Bringing a health and wellbeing program to the workplace can make it easier for men to talk about their health and discuss issues that they may otherwise ignore.

### Men's health: The facts

- Men are three times more likely than females to die from suicide.<sup>1</sup>
- Men are 1.5 times more likely than women to die from cancer.<sup>1</sup>
- 50% of men have experienced violence since they turned 15.<sup>2</sup>
- Nearly 50% of men have experienced a mental health problem.<sup>2</sup>
- 70.3% of men are overweight or obese, compared to 56.2% of women, and this gap is widening.<sup>3</sup>
- 45.8% of Tasmanian men aged 25-34 are smokers, compared to a national average of 18.1%.<sup>3</sup>
- Fewer men visit their GP, and of those that do, they visit their GP less often than women.<sup>4</sup>



If you aren't travelling well outside work, chances are you aren't travelling so well at work either. Mental and physical health issues may lead to safety risks at work.

The culture of a workplace can often dictate how comfortable men feel in discussing their health issues. A workplace that supports discussion around men's issues, and encourages open and honest conversation among employees will be more likely to inspire men to look after themselves, in whatever shape that may take.

Many men use humour to disguise mental and physical health issues, so it's important to be aware of when to prompt for more information. Humour can be a great way to make men feel comfortable about engaging in health-related conversation, but remember to take the issue itself seriously. Setting clear boundaries around difficult conversations will help both managers and employees know what to expect from each other – remember; you don't have to be a trained counsellor to have a positive impact on health and wellbeing in the workplace.

The following strategies and tips may be useful to help engage men in their own health and wellbeing.

- Don't beat about the bush. Be direct and ask specifically how they are going, or ask about a specific issue.
- When planning to talk to a male employee about a health and wellbeing issue, ensure it's in a relaxed, informal and private environment. Make sure they know this is a confidential discussion.
- If you know a man is experiencing a hard time, perhaps go for a walk, or talk while doing an activity. Many men prefer talking shoulder-to-shoulder, or while engaged in an activity, rather than face-to-face over a desk or coffee table.
- Ensure men have access to useful information, so they can find out key contacts on their own, or through talking to a key worker or work health and safety representative. For example, make copies of *The Blokes' Book* available in your staffroom (see below).



- Make a personal referral. If you know a trusted health professional relevant to the issue let your male employee know who it is and give him the contact details. Men are more likely to go to someone they know or someone who has been recommended to them.
- Let your employees know that it is OK to go and see a health professional during work hours, and that they can make up these hours at a later time, or take this time as leave.
- Acknowledge the positive role that male work colleagues play outside the workplace. If men know they are valued for their roles as fathers, brothers, uncles and mates, as well as for what they can do, they will be more inclined to look after themselves.
- Look for opportunities to bring specific health services to your workplace. This can help to break down barriers for men who need to see a health professional. It also demonstrates your commitment to their health and wellbeing.

## Where can I go for more information?

There are a number of organisations that may be of assistance to workplaces in discussing men's health and wellbeing issues.

<p><b>The Blokes' Book</b> www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/pophealth/mens_health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Order copies or download <i>The Blokes' Book</i> – a directory of services, contacts, support groups, current information and commentary from services and men in the Tasmanian community.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Tasmanian Men's Shed Association (TMSA)</b> www.tasmensshed.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A local Men's Shed is an extension of the traditional backyard shed found across Australian culture. It is a place for men to meet and gather, learn skills, swap stories and work on projects.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Men's Health Australia</b> www.menshealthaustralia.net</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This website contains information about the social and psychological wellbeing of men and boys, including information on education, mental and physical health, drugs and alcohol, sexual issues, crime and violence.</li> </ul>
<p><b>MensLine Australia</b> www.mensline.org.au 1300 78 99 78</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MensLine Australia is a professional telephone and online support, information and referral service, helping men to deal with relationship problems and other issues in a practical and effective way.</li> </ul>
<p><b>beyondblue</b> www.beyondblue.org.au</p>	<p>beyondblue have a number of free downloadable resources specifically for men, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hey Dad: Fatherhood – First 12 months</li> <li>Hey Dad: Helpful contacts for Dads</li> <li>Maintaining your wellbeing: Information on depression and anxiety for men with prostate cancer and their partners</li> <li>Anxiety disorders and depression in men with testicular cancer</li> <li>Men and separation</li> <li>Depression in men (fact sheet and information card)</li> </ul>

## References

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012, 4125.0, *Gender Indicators Australia*, Australian Government, Canberra.
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2012, *Male health 2011*, Australian Government, Canberra, available at [www.aihw.gov.au/male-health-2011](http://www.aihw.gov.au/male-health-2011)
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012, 4364.0.55.001, *Australian Health Survey: First Results 2011-12*, Australian Government, Canberra.
4. Bayram, C, Britt, H, Kelly, Z & Valenti, L 2003, *Male consultations in general practice in Australia 1999-00*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra.