

Making the right moves in mental health

Running a small business can be rewarding but it comes with many stressors, which if not addressed can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety or depression. While ensuring workplace health and safety practices are in place for their employees, business owners may neglect the risks surrounding their own mental health.

Workplaces can be where mental health issues often come to the fore. According to [Safe Work Australia](#), 7,200 Australians are compensated for work-related mental ill-health conditions each year, equating to around 6 percent of all workers' compensation claims.

Identifying if someone needs help with a mental health issue can be difficult. [Mental Health First Aid Australia](#) found that while one in five Australians will experience a mental illness, many people may not have the knowledge or confidence to offer them the assistance they need. This was backed up with a [study by Swiss researchers](#) who found that mental ill-health affects 20 per cent of the workforce but supervisors rarely have the training to detect problems or take action.



Jirsch Sutherland National Managing Partner Bradd Morelli

Jirsch Sutherland National Managing Partner, [Bradd Morelli](#) says if a business owner is experiencing mental ill-health, this can have a big impact on the day-to-day running of their business.

“Mental ill-health issues arise as a result of a number of factors but some common ones include long hours put in to meet the demands of the business, and stress related to cash-flow,” he says. “Because of the nature of our business, Jirsch Sutherland is often on the frontline with owners who are dealing with significant challenges including financial burden, and it also means we’re in a position where we can offer support.”

Patrice O’Brien, Beyond Blue’s General Manager Workplace, Partnerships and Engagement, says “many people at the helm of Australia’s 2.26 million small businesses share something in common”.

“Working long hours, cash flow issues, social isolation and balancing work and domestic

responsibilities are some of the unique challenges small business owners face,” she explains. “And not surprisingly, these factors can also affect a business owner’s mental health and wellbeing.”

Morelli says to ensure Jirsch Sutherland can better assist in dealing with people facing such issues, all of its Managers, Principals and Partners are undertaking a Mental Health First Aid Certificate course that will help them recognise and deal with mental health issues.

“The first person to notice changes in behaviour isn’t always a family member,” he says. “When we work with businesses that are in trouble we can see firsthand how the owners are coping with the associated stress. The course we’re undertaking will provide us with the confidence to help them in a practical way.”

Improved knowledge

The [Blended Mental Health First Aid \(MHFA\) for Insolvency Professionals course](#) is designed to assist those in financial distress who are experiencing a mental ill-health problem. It comprises an e-learning and face-to-face component.

The course teaches insolvency professionals how to help someone experiencing mental ill-health problems or are in crisis by using a practical evidence-based action plan, and also shows them where and how to get help.

MHFA training is associated with improved knowledge of mental illnesses, their treatments and appropriate first-aid strategies and provides the confidence to give first aid to individuals with mental illness. It is also associated with decreased stigma and an increase in help provided over time.

The course is based on guidelines developed through the expert consensus of people with lived experience of mental ill-health problems. Some of these problems, which are covered in the course include: depression, anxiety, psychosis and substance abuse while mental ill-health crises covered include suicidal thoughts and behaviours, non-suicidal self-injury, panic attacks and traumatic events.

Jirsch Sutherland has also announced Beyond Blue as its official charity and mental health partner. Funds from any fundraisers will be distributed to Beyond Blue and it will work closely with them on preparing content, initiatives and advice for financially distressed businesses and individuals. In turn, Beyond Blue will assist Jirsch Sutherland with guidance on mental health policies, content, training and seminars (see breakout box below for more information on the Jirsch Sutherland/Beyond Blue seminars).

Additional help for businesses



Beyond Blue recently launched its new guide, *Supporting small business owners to improve their mental health and wellbeing at work*, which provides business advisers such as accountants, bookkeepers, tax agents, industry associations and representative bodies, or family and friends, with practical tips about how to provide support without needing to be trained counsellors or clinicians. It is available for download at bb.org.au/supportingsmallbusiness

Governments are also running courses for small businesses to help them deal with mental ill-health issues. The Victorian Small Business Commission has guidelines for [Creating a Mentally Healthy Small Business](#) while online mental health resources such as [Heads Up](#) and [Ahead for Business](#) are specific to small-business owners.

Late last year, the Australian government announced a \$3.6 million package to support small business mental health. The package was launched by Michaelia Cash, Minister for Small and Family Business, who said at the time that she had met with hundreds of small businesses who said mental health was a key issue for them. The funding will primarily provide advice and support services for small business owners who are experiencing mental ill-health issues.

Cash added the funding would also pay dividends as research from PwC had found a link between small business mental health and productivity. In its report, [Creating a mentally healthy workplace](#), PwC found every dollar spent on workplace mental health among small businesses returned \$14.50 in productivity benefits.

If you are feeling overwhelmed it may be time to speak to a professional. Beyond Blue provides a [list of national help lines and websites](#) where you can find immediate assistance.

City	Date	Time
Sydney	Wednesday 9 October 2019	8am-10am
Brisbane	Wednesday 9 October 2019	8am-10am
Melbourne	Friday 11 October	8am-10am
Perth	Friday 11 October	8am-10am
Newcastle	Tuesday 15 October	7.15am-9am

For more information, please contact Isabella Sheman at isabella@jirschsutherland.com.au.