

## Now is the time to ask: 'Are you okay?'



Andrew Spring, Jirsch Sutherland Partner

Good mental health and wellbeing are essential to getting through the COVID-19 crisis so now, more than ever, is the time to ask your clients, colleagues and friends 'Are you okay?'

These three words can be the start of helping someone whose mental health and wellbeing is suffering from the impact of the coronavirus.

"This pandemic is having profound impacts on the mental health and wellbeing of many Australians ... People are looking for support to cope with the effects of widespread anxiety and uncertainty, self-isolation and loneliness, family stress, business collapse, job loss and financial hardship caused by COVID-19," says Beyond Blue Chair, The Hon Julia Gillard.

Jirsch Sutherland has already found the rapidly escalating economic impact of COVID-19 is having a major impact on many business owners' mental health and wellbeing. Indeed, a recent NAB business survey shows business confidence has been in free-fall, dropping to minus 66 points – the lowest on record. This serves as a warning of the need to be mindful of each other.

"Numerous people we've spoken to say they cannot sleep at night and are sick to the stomach worrying about their staff, their business's cash flow and future," says Partner Andrew Spring. "For example, a real estate agency owner recently shared the issues he has been dealing with as a result of the impact of COVID-19 on his business. He has staff breaking down in the office or not turning up for work, tenants unable to pay rent, landlords concerned about their rental income being affected, not to mention just managing the day-to-day office needs. As a small-business owner, he's having to manage the business and handle the role of an HR person."

For many, COVID-19 has wreaked a domino-like effect on their business, starting with cash-flow issues, closely followed by an inability to pay creditors, operating costs and staff – not to mention experiencing the stress and pressures that go hand in hand with this, which can have a serious effect on mental health and wellbeing.

“Because the pressures – and not just the financial ones – can be overwhelming, it’s crucial for trusted advisers to offer support. However, the shock of the rapidly evolving circumstances may cause people to forget to ask for help – or they may be too ashamed to. This is where we and other advisers can step up,” says Spring.

“We’re more than just business advisers – our role is to understand and take into consideration issues that can affect a business owner’s decision-making and impact their mental health and wellbeing. This is a macro event of nobody’s making and it’s important that as an industry we all band together to help de-stigmatise asking for help.”

Jirsch Sutherland extended Mental Health First Aid Certificate training to all of its Partners, Principals and Managers so they understand the impact a period of financial stress can have and can offer the right support to those experiencing mental ill-health.

## Dedicated resources



Georgie Harman, CEO – Beyond Blue

Trusted business advisers are all in a position where they can offer support as they are at the frontline of those dealing with stresses inflicted by COVID-19.

Support can start with asking ‘Are you okay?’ followed by directing anyone you are concerned about to Beyond Blue’s [Coronavirus mental wellbeing support service](#). The service provides free information, advice and strategies; digital self-help tools, and around-the-clock counselling by mental health professionals; and online forums. It also includes practical tips to help small-business owners: [Small business owners and mental health](#).

According to Beyond Blue, there have been more than 21,000 views of its coronavirus forum discussion, which provide a safe place for people to connect and support each other by sharing stories of hope, resilience and recovery.

“We expect there will be more demand for mental health support as the health, social and economic consequences of COVID-19 play out and we would encourage everyone to reach out early,” says Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman. “Remember, you’re not alone and support is

available. The Beyond Blue Support Service is available around the clock, by phone or online, and our online forums are moderated by people who understand and care.”

**If you need guidance or support, contact Beyond Blue on [1300 22 4636](tel:1300224636).**