

Program tools support our mental health initiatives

Last October's Mental Health Breakfast Seminars, proudly supporting Beyond Blue, and Jirsch Sutherland's Walk and Talk 'netwalking' tours that accompanied the launch of our new We Care Mental Health Program attracted strong turnouts and excellent feedback.

The breakfast seminars provided easy and effective ways we can both maintain our own mental health and support colleagues who are suffering mental ill health. The Walk and Talk tours provided an opportunity to de-stress and recharge by getting out of the office to enjoy city sights while chatting to colleagues and clients. We learnt that simply asking a colleague "How are you?" and listening attentively to their response can make a positive difference to their day and their mental health.

Feedback on these events was immediate and positive: many business owners and directors told us they would like to implement a similar program at their company and others asked for advice on how to help someone suffering mental ill health.

The positive outcomes of these initiatives have secured them a place in our 2020 mental health program, and we look forward to welcoming colleagues, clients and referrers.

Helping small business advisers

While our We Care Mental Health Program has been created to help us maintain good mental health and to support colleagues and clients suffering from mental ill health, we also have access to Beyond Blue's free online guide: *Supporting small business owners to improve their mental health and wellbeing at work.*

Patrice O'Brien, Beyond Blue's General Manager Workplace, Partnerships and Engagement, provides the following tips on how to recognise the signs of poor mental health and explains how their guide can help you support anyone suffering mental ill health.

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.

And not surprisingly, these factors can also affect a business owner's mental health and wellbeing.

While running a small business can be hugely rewarding, a 2018 University of Melbourne report commissioned by Beyond Blue found almost one third of small business owners report having high levels of psychological distress.

The good news is that with support, people who experience mental health conditions can recover or effectively manage symptoms enabling them to live contributing lives.

That's because mental health is not a fixed or static state.

It exists on what experts call a continuum, where positive mental health is at one end, through to severe symptoms of mental health conditions at the other.

Think of it as a set of traffic lights.

If you're in the green, you're feeling good and functioning well. You are physically and socially active and sleeping well.

Stress and other factors can lead us into the orange, where we might be irritable, forgetful, anxious and nervous.

If we end up in the red, we may have angry outbursts, constant fatigue, experience extreme anxiety and panic attacks, and possibly experience suicidal thoughts.

It goes without saying that it is important to stay in the green whenever possible, and if we feel ourselves sliding towards the orange or red, that we know how to recognise the signs and how to take appropriate action.

The signs of poor mental health and wellbeing

The signs of poor mental health can manifest in many ways which can often make it difficult to

identify if support is needed, either for ourselves or for others.

A person who runs a business may not be meeting deadlines, may be less engaged in meetings or their work standards may be lower than usual.

At the more serious end, a small business owner may find it difficult to control their behaviour at work, be absent from work, or have withdrawn from colleagues, customers and clients.

Sometimes the first person to notice these changes may not be someone in the business at all, but someone who supports or advises the small business owner – the accountant, the bookkeeper, the small business mentor, a family member or friend.

Now, more than ever, mental health support is an essential tool in the kit bag of those who advise and support small business owners.

And while you are not expected to become a counsellor or clinician, advisers have told us they want to play a support role that goes beyond business advice.

That's why Beyond Blue has developed a free resource to make it as easy as possible for small business advisers to easily find the information they need to feel confident in playing a support role.



A free guide for small business advisers

The role of small business advisers is about more than just providing guidance on debts, accounts and assets — it's about people.

As professionals, small business advisers equip small business owners with the right information so they can run their business successfully.

Now they can also play an important role in supporting the mental wellbeing of small business owners and empowering them to look after their own mental health.

And it's not only professionals who can provide support; sometimes it's those closest to them — their family and friends — who small business owners will turn to when times are tough.

The [Supporting small business owners to improve their mental health and wellbeing at work guide](#) equips small business advisers such as accountants, bookkeepers, business advisers, tax agents, industry associations and representative bodies, as well as family members and friends, with practical information they can share with small business owners.

The guide allows these advisers, who often see first-hand how stress can affect small business owners, to provide support without needing to be a trained counsellor or clinician.

It includes practical tips on:

- Providing immediate support to a small business owner
- Recognising signs of poor mental health
- Speaking with someone you're concerned about
- And how small business owners can improve their situation

It also provides links to resources such as personal and workplace wellbeing plans, actions that small business owners can take themselves, and information on how advisers can look after their own mental health.

The Supporting small business owners to improve their mental health and wellbeing at work guide is available at bb.org.au/SupportingSmallBusiness