MENTAL HEALTH IS YOUR BEST BUSINESS STRATEGY

Fix workplace stress before it's too late

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The Hidden Crisis in Every Office

Workplace mental health is still widely perceived as an individual concern, rather than a shared organisational responsibility. Too many organisations treat it as an afterthought, waiting too long before taking action, until burnout, absenteeism and disengagement cripple their workforce. In Australia alone, mental health-related absenteeism and presenteeism cost businesses over $10 billion annually.

The world of work has changed, and employee expectations have changed with it. Nearly a quarter or 22% of employees rank wellbeing, including mental health support, as the number one thing they look for in an employer.

Organisations that ignore this shift risk losing talent, productivity and, ultimately, their competitive edge.

The good news: there is a proven blueprint for building mentally resilient teams and workplaces that thrive.

I. The Mental Health Crisis in Workplaces: Where We Are Now

What Employees Really Want

For years, mental health has been sidelined as a secondary concern in workplaces. But today, employees are vocal about what they need: workplaces that genuinely prioritise their mental wellbeing. A lot of workers feel unable to express these concerns directly to their employers, fearing stigma or dismissal. If they could, here's what they would say:

"Recognise that mental health is just as important as physical health."

Employees want mental health to be woven into workplace culture and not treated as a token initiative. This means making support visible, accessible and proactive.

Research by Deloitte found that 35% of employees expect their employer to offer tangible mental health support, such as stress management training, flexible work options and leadership-led wellbeing initiatives. When organisations actively promote Employment Assistance Program (EAP) services and integrate mental health into daily conversations, employees are far more likely to seek help before reaching a crisis point.

"Appreciate our work and make us feel valued."

Recognition is one of the most powerful motivators. Employees don't just want financial incentives, they want to feel seen and valued through meaningful and memorable recognition. When hard work is ignored or dismissed, engagement plummets.

A Guardian report highlighted that employees who feel unappreciated are more likely to disengage, while regular acknowledgment and recognition significantly boosts morale. Moreover, employees who feel valued are more likely to stay engaged, contribute innovative ideas, and demonstrate higher levels of commitment to organisational goals.

"Give us real work-life balance."

Work-life balance isn't just about leaving early on a Friday. Employees want workplaces that genuinely respect boundaries. Sabbatical leave is one way businesses are helping employees reset and recharge. SEEK's Workplace Happiness Index 2024 found that 45% of Australian workers are unhappy in their jobs, with burnout being a key factor. Sabbaticals have been shown to support both mental and physical health, helping employees manage stress and return to work more engaged.

Some of Australia's biggest employers, including Adobe, Deloitte and Commonwealth Bank of Australia, already offer sabbaticals alongside government agencies that allow employees to purchase additional leave credits.

"Be honest and transparent with us."

Many employees feel disconnected from leadership. A 2022 insights report revealed that while 90% of executives believe they understand the challenges their employees face, only 47% of employees feel the same way.

Honesty is important, but in some business operations, it is often reactive—addressing the truth only after an issue has surfaced. While employees appreciate honesty, they need more than just reassurance after the fact. They want proactive transparency: open, ongoing dialogue where leaders share challenges, acknowledge uncertainties and involve employees in decision-making.

Transparency builds trust not just in leadership but in the workplace itself. Employees want to work in an environment where leadership is upfront about business realities, workplace changes and expectations. When organisations cultivate transparency, they reduce uncertainty, empower employees and create a culture where people feel genuinely included in shaping the future of their workplace.

90%
of executives

believe they understand the challenges their employees face

only
47%
of employees

feel that they are understood by their employers

Based on a 2022 insights report

"Support our career growth."

Employees don't just want a job, they want a career path. Workplaces that invest in continuous learning and development have lower turnover rates and higher employee satisfaction. Structured mentorship programmes, internal mobility options and upskilling opportunities make a tangible difference in retention.

Gen Z and young millennials are taking more sick days due to mental health issues

14.3
average sick days per year for Gen Z workers

70%
Gen Z employees experience burnout

"Create an inclusive culture where we belong."

A supportive workplace promotes belonging. This is particularly crucial for younger employees, who are experiencing rising rates of workplace burnout. Gen Z and young millennials are taking more sick days due to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. In Australia, Gen Z workers take an average of 14.3 sick days per year—almost double that of Baby Boomers. In New Zealand, nearly 70% of Gen Z employees have reported experiencing burnout in 2024, with almost half feeling stressed at work multiple times a week.

When employers address these concerns, they don't just create a better workplace, they build a culture where employees are engaged, loyal and performing at their best.

The Cost of Inaction

Many businesses still underestimate the impact of mental health neglect. The financial cost of ignoring workplace wellbeing is staggering:

$10.9 BILLION

The annual cost of absenteeism, presenteeism and compensation claims due to poor mental health in Australian businesses.

BeyondBlue/PwC Report

$12 BILLION

The estimated economic burden of mental health issues in New Zealand workplaces

Adecco NZ

US$1 TRILLION

The amount depression and anxiety cost the global economy each year, predominantly from reduced productivity.

World Health Organization

The cost isn't just financial. A stressed, disengaged workforce leads to lower morale, increased conflicts and diminished innovation. Businesses that neglect these challenges will find it increasingly difficult to attract and retain top talent, while those that prioritise workplace mental health will see stronger employee engagement, productivity and long-term organisational success.

> "EAPs are often underutilised because they are positioned as **crisis solutions** rather than **proactive tools**.

Why Traditional Workplace Policies Fall Short

Despite the statistics, many organisations still treat mental health reactively. EAPs, for example, are often underutilised because they are positioned as crisis solutions rather than proactive tools. According to EAP Research Australia, only 5% of employees typically use their company's Employee Assistance Programs or EAPs, for example, leaving the vast majority without meaningful support.

Additionally, workplace environments themselves often contribute to mental distress. Psychological hazards such as excessive workloads, poor leadership and lack of autonomy create are all major contributors to stress and burnout. Without structural change, no amount of wellness initiatives will solve the deeper issues.

II. Workplace Wellbeing: The Biggest Blind Spot Leaders Keep Missing

Mental Health as a Core Business Imperative

Workplace mental health is often treated as something employees must manage on their own. However, the reality is that the workplace itself plays a fundamental role in shaping mental wellbeing. Organisations that fail to recognise this often implement surface-level initiatives that do little to address the root causes of workplace mental health challenges.

A more effective approach requires businesses to take ownership of mental health by embedding mental wellbeing into leadership development, workplace policies and daily operations and more than just offering stopgap measures and last-minute interventions like crisis support or one-off EAP referrals.

Companies that take this systems-based approach create healthier, more engaged and more productive workforces which ultimately strengthens both their culture and their bottom line.

> " The workplace itself plays a **fundamental role** in shaping mental wellbeing.

The Industries Most at Risk

Some industries experience higher levels of mental health challenges than others. High-stress environments, extended working hours and pressure-driven roles often lead to burnout.

Healthcare

Long shifts, high emotional demands and workforce shortages lead to chronic burnout among healthcare professionals. Burnout is now recognised as a serious occupational hazard by WHO, with studies showing that rates frequently exceed 50% in high-pressure environments. This chronic stress impacts not only individual wellbeing but also patient care and workforce sustainability particularly in high-pressure environments such as emergency care and primary healthcare settings.

Construction & Mining

The construction and mining industries face significant mental health challenges, with workers experiencing high rates of suicide. Factors contributing to this include physically demanding work, isolation and a stigma surrounding mental health. In Australia, construction workers are eight times more likely to die from suicide than accident at work, with about 190 construction workers dying by suicide annually, equating to one loss every second day.

Agriculture & Transport

Farmers and transport workers face long hours, unpredictable workloads and a lack of access to mental health services, leading to higher stress levels and lower wellbeing.

The Biggest Workplace Stressors

Workplace stress doesn't arise from a single source. It's the result of multiple, compounding factors that employees face which impact their mental wellbeing and productivity. Among the most significant stressors are:

JOB DEMANDS

Excessive workloads, unrealistic deadlines and high-pressure environments increase stress and burnout risk.

LOW JOB CONTROL

Workers have little control or say over the work. This includes over how or when the job is done.

POOR SUPPORT

A lack or absence of managerial or peer support can leave employees feeling isolated and overwhelmed which can affect their performance and mental wellbeing.

LACK OF ROLE CLARITY

Unclear expectations and responsibilities, or conflicting job demands can lead to confusion, stress and decreased job satisfaction.

POOR ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Frequent restructures, inadequate communication about change and uncertainty about job security contribute to anxiety and detachment.

INADEQUATE REWARD AND RECOGNITION

Employees who feel undervalued or unappreciated are more likely to withdraw and seek opportunities elsewhere.

POOR ORGANISATIONAL JUSTICE

Perceived unfairness in workplace decisions, promotions or disciplinary actions can erode trust and morale.

EXPOSURE TO TRAUMATIC EVENTS OR MATERIAL

Workers in certain industries, such as emergency services, healthcare, social work and journalism, may experience secondary trauma from dealing with distressing content or incidents.

👤 REMOTE OR ISOLATED WORK

Work that is isolated from the assistance of others because of the location, time or nature of the work. It often involves long travel times, poor access to resources or limited communications.

⚠️ POOR PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Unsafe, uncomfortable or poorly maintained workspaces contribute to stress and reduced productivity.

💥 VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION

When a person is abused, threatened or assaulted at the workplace or while they're working.

👎 BULLYING

Persistent, targeted mistreatment in the workplace can severely impact an employee's confidence, wellbeing and job performance.

👋 HARASSMENT, INCLUDING SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED HARASSMENT

Unwelcome behaviour based on gender, identity or other protected characteristics can create a toxic and unsafe work environment.

🤝 CONFLICT OR POOR WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS & INTERACTIONS

Unresolved conflicts, toxic team dynamics or difficult interpersonal relationships can lead to stress, loss of interest and higher turnover.

Burnout, imposter syndrome and work conflicts are the top three workplace-related problems that employees speak about in therapy. **Leora Counsellor Jenna Cunneen** discuss these issues:

| Burnout | Imposter Syndrome | Work Conflicts |

III. The Blueprint for a Mentally Healthy Workplace

Creating a workplace that supports mental health requires more than just policies. It demands structural change and leadership commitment. The following steps form a strategic blueprint for organisations:

1 **Assess and identify risks.** Conduct psychosocial risk assessments to uncover workplace mental health challenges ([Safe Work Australia](#)).

2 **Build a leadership-driven culture.** Train leaders to recognise, respond to and support mental health issues.

3 **Create preventative systems.** Implement early intervention programs, proactive EAP engagement and workload management strategies.

4 **Normalise mental health conversations.** Reduce stigma, encourage peer support and promote psychological safety.

5 **Measure and adapt.** Establish key performance indicators and continuously evaluate the effectiveness of mental health initiatives.

IV. Why the Right Systems Matter: EAPs, Mental Health Platforms & Digital Support

Most businesses recognise that mental health support is important, but many still miss the mark on execution. Providing an EAP service is a start, but its impact depends on how well it's integrated, actively promoted and embedded into workplace culture.

For years, traditional EAPs have been underutilised because they rely on employees taking the first step: reaching out when they're already struggling. But the reality is that most employees hesitate to seek help, and would wait until stress, anxiety or burnout have already taken a toll. If mental health support is only accessed in crisis, businesses are reacting too late.

A well-designed EAP should be more than a helpline. It should be an everyday workplace resource. Organisations that successfully implement EAPs move beyond crisis support and instead incorporate mental health into:

Daily workplace interactions – normalising discussions about wellbeing so that employees feel comfortable seeking support.

Leadership and management training – equipping leaders with the tools to spot early warning signs and proactively support their teams.

Workplace policies and workflows – integrating EAPs into onboarding, performance management and team wellbeing initiatives so they aren't seen as separate or optional.

> " **If** mental health support is **only accessed in crisis**, businesses are reacting too late.

Digital mental health tools are changing the landscape. AI-driven burnout prediction, employee wellbeing apps and 24/7 support services make mental health resources more accessible. Companies that embed these tools into their HR policies see higher engagement rates and reduced absenteeism (McKinsey & Co.).

Making Mental Health Support Part of the Workplace DNA

For mental health programs to be effective, they must go beyond policy documents and become part of everyday workplace interactions.

Businesses can drive real impact by:

Making EAPs visible and easy to access

Support should be integrated into onboarding, team meetings and leadership discussions, not buried in policy manuals.

Training leaders to model healthy behaviours

When managers normalise conversations about stress and actively use wellbeing tools, employees follow suit.

Using workplace data to tailor support

Every workforce has unique needs. Tracking trends like absenteeism and common stressors helps businesses refine their mental health strategies.

V. The Future of Workplace Mental Health

The landscape of workplace mental health is rapidly evolving. Businesses must stay ahead by adapting to:

New workplace mental health laws.

Regulatory bodies are introducing stricter guidelines, requiring organisations to proactively manage psychosocial risks.

HR trends towards wellbeing-focused leadership.

Companies that integrate wellbeing into their leadership strategies outperform those that do not.

Remote work challenges.

While flexibility is valued, remote work can blur the boundaries between professional and personal life which can lead to overwork and burnout.

Moving beyond one-off initiatives.

A long-term, strategic investment in workplace mental health leads to sustained business benefits.

VI. Companies Leading the Way in Workplace Mental Health

Several companies worldwide have successfully implemented mental health initiatives that have improved employee wellbeing and productivity:

Google

Google prioritises mental health through on-site counselling, digital wellness tools and manager training programs to support employees struggling with stress.

Unilever (Global)

The company offers mindfulness workshops, mental health training for managers and an app providing urgent health assistance, making mental wellbeing a core part of its culture.

Kmart New Zealand & Z Energy

Partnered with WorkSafe New Zealand to reduce psychosocial risks in retail, tackling workplace violence and stressors, improving overall employee safety and wellbeing.

Bell Canada

Runs the "Let's Talk" initiative, an annual campaign raising awareness and funds for mental health causes through social media engagement.

Medibank (Australia)

Successfully implemented a four-day workweek, improving job satisfaction, work-life balance and mental wellbeing, while maintaining business productivity.

Conclusion: Workplaces That Ignore Mental Health Won't Survive

Workplace mental health is no longer just about offering support but about making it a natural, everyday part of how a company operates. Employees shouldn't have to wait until they're struggling to access help, and businesses shouldn't see mental health as just another policy on paper. The most forward-thinking organisations are making it proactive, personalised and seamlessly woven into workplace culture.

At Leora Healthcare, we've seen the shift firsthand. The companies that get it right don't just reduce absenteeism and burnout, they create high-performing teams that stay engaged, motivated and invested in their work. They understand that mental wellbeing isn't a separate initiative but a key driver of business success.

The connection is clear: when mental health is a priority, businesses thrive. Companies that embed wellbeing into their leadership, culture and policies retain top talent, improve productivity and build more resilient teams.

The future of work belongs to organisations that make mental health a part of the way they do business, every single day.
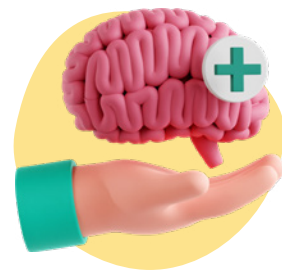
> **The connection is clear: when mental health is a priority, businesses thrive.**

Prepared by: Leora Healthcare

Learn more: Mental Health - Leora Healthcare

What Clients Say About Leora's Modern Employee Assistance Program

We are very excited to be partnering with Leora for our EAP. Having worked many years in health, **I have seen many models of EAP with Leora being far and beyond the best**. Being a male dominated industry we believe the 24/7 AI powered chat function will be the most invaluable tool for staff to seek help discreetly and at any time of day, and it is extremely easy to access through the app. In addition, we still get the usual access to counselling plus proactive tools for general staff wellbeing. It has it all and is extremely great value for money.

Polymaster

Choosing Leora as our EAP provider has been a great part for our employee wellbeing initiatives. **The platform's user-friendly interface and efficient services have made access to mental health resources very easy**. Leora's commitment to providing flexibility for employees to book their therapy sessions independently is a game-changer! Grateful to have Leora as our partner.

Hasbuilt Projects

We made the switch to Leora from a more traditional style EAP earlier this year. **Our tech-savvy team are loving having easy access to the app on the go.** It's great they can book time with a therapist of their choice at a time convenient to them.

Cheil

Leora offers a holistic approach to employee well-being by providing learning content, equipping our team with essential tools for navigating challenges. **Leora has made mental health support more accessible for our employees**, encouraging a healthier and more resilient work environment.

Anytime Fitness

Leora.

Healthcare for every body and every mind