

Better for Business Central Coast

What is the problem?

- The problem we have identified is that there is so much information on mental health in the public domain that SME business owners do not have the capacity nor the time to seek this information out. It is difficult for business owners to find the appropriate resources and then implement them. In turn, this results in SME business owners failing to meet Work Health and Safety Regulation requirements. This could lead to SME business owners seeing mental health as a problem and not an opportunity.
- SME businesses employ about 90,000 residents of the Central Coast and work settings provide opportunities for informal learning, establishing cultures that challenge stigma, and creating supportive environments for staff experiencing mental health issues or illness.
- The Australia Government Productivity Commission Inquiry Report on Mental Health 2020 estimated the costs of mental illness and suicide in Australia for the 2018-19 period were substantial, with loss of participation and productivity estimate at between \$12.2 and \$39.1 billion per year due to the combination of lower participation, absenteeism, and presenteeism.

Recommendations for workplace mental health in SMEs

Designing workplace mental health interventions for SMEs

- A place-based approach
- No one-size-fits-all
- Resource constraints and multi-faceted pressures and priorities
- Translatability and transferability of existing interventions to the SME context
- Single-access points
- Supporting SME owners and leaders for their own self-care

Communication of workplace mental health with SMEs

- Adapting the choice of language and terminology to optimise accessibility.
- Align communication channel and style to target audience(s).
- Integrate with existing forums and channels that SME owners already utilise to avoid creating additional complexity whilst also benefitting from the existing trust.

Mental health service and resource access

'Just-in-time' workplace mental health support services that SME's can access when dealing with specific incidents or needs as well as resources designed to be utilised in an ongoing manner.

Opportunities for economies of scale and resource sharing

Given the ad-hoc need for workplace mental health services combined with the resource constraints faced by SMEs, consideration should be given to exploring and developing industry focused co-operative or resource sharing models and frameworks that SMEs could participate in to collectively negotiate and access services.

Facilitating peer-to-peer collaboration

Creating safe environments and exploring opportunities to facilitate peer-to-peer collaboration, support, and learning.

Workplace Health and Safety for SMEs

Providing support for SME owners and leaders to ease the compliance burden of growing workplace health and safety requirements.

Force-multipliers

Leveraging trusted networks that SME's already engage with that can act as intermediaries and impact-multipliers through connecting service providers to SME owners and leaders.

Future Research

Future Research to build on this project

- Mapping of SME business owner and leader workplace mental health access points
- Measuring incidences and impact of workplace mental health on SMEs
- Development and expansion of workplace mental health resource listing

Implications for Future Research in this area

This project provides an example of a methodology that can be applied in other regions and industry sectors to engage with and understand workplace mental health that also acts as stakeholder sensitisation intervention that raises awareness and builds solidarity amongst business owners and leaders.