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GOOD PRACTICE IN WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES

REVIEW REPORT

An interim, evidence-informed report exploring what good practice in workplace mental health looks like in action.

Grounded in global research and real-world workplace insight, this report identifies what is needed to move beyond awareness toward sustainable, well-governed mental health support systems.

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Good Practice in Workplace Mental Health Initiatives 2026

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1 Introduction

There has been a growing international and regional institutional focus on improving mental health and wellbeing in the workplace in recent decades, particularly since Covid-19. As a result, there is ample literature available on the workplace factors that influence mental health as well as good practice for supporting mental health and wellbeing at the workplace. This literature ranges from meta-analyses, peer reviewed evidence reviews: including longitudinal studies, to handbooks, guides, and other tools and resources developed by organisations such as the World Health Organisation.

Evidence demonstrates that mental health is shaped not only by individual factors but also by organisational structures, working conditions, and workplace culture. Good practice generally fell into five key areas:

1. **Build systems to sustain long-term implementation** - Effective workplace mental health programmes require robust organisational systems that support planning, coordination, and long-term sustainability of programmes. Embedding mental health within policies, and as a priority for leadership structures, resource allocation, and communications ensures consistent implementation and organisational alignment
2. **Develop a long-term, comprehensive, and coherent plan** - Sustainable mental health strategies should be organisation-wide, coherent, and designed for continuous development rather than short-term impact. Interventions must be tailored to the organisation and structured so that different actions are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.
3. **Conduct comprehensive organisational assessment, monitoring, and evaluation** - Regular review is essential for identifying organisational needs and measuring the effectiveness of initiatives. Integrating monitoring systems into routine organisational processes enables data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement.
4. **Manage psychosocial risks in the workplace** - Addressing psychosocial risks requires a shift from individual-focused approaches to systematic changes in the work environment that reduce stressors and promote healthy working conditions.
5. **Address mental health on three fronts: prevent, promote, and support** - Comprehensive workplace mental health programmes operate across prevention, promotion, and support to address the full spectrum of employee needs. This integrated approach combines reducing risk factors, strengthening wellbeing, and provides timely, appropriate support for those experiencing mental health difficulties

This report outlines key principles and practical actions for organisations seeking to design, implement, and sustain effective mental health initiatives.

2 Build Systems to Sustain Long-Term Implementation

Workplace mental health initiatives require organisational systems that provide a foundation for planning, coordination, monitoring, and sustaining long-term action (1–3). Embedding mental health within wider organisational structures and strategies helps ensure that these efforts are consistent and aligned with overall goals (1-4). This includes the following:

- **Organisation-wide policy review:** Organisations should develop a Mental Health and Well-being strategy (4) and embed mental health considerations across all organisational policies and practices (1, 5, 6) including recruitment (1, 2, 4), guidelines preventing bullying, violence and harassment (2), and business and strategic plans (5), ensuring coherence with the promotion of positive mental health.
- **Leadership commitment and governance structures** (1-4, 6): Secure leadership buy-in (3) and establish clear programme leadership structures (1, 2), such as working groups (1, 6) or mental health champions (3, 6). Responsibilities, timelines, and accountability should be clearly defined for all stages of programme development, implementation, and monitoring (1, 2). In addition, leadership support of and participation in mental health initiatives needs to be visible across the organisation (4, 6).
- **Employee participation systems** (1-4, 6): Establish methods for meaningful involvement of employees at all levels in decision-making processes and action plans (1-4, 6). The involvement of employees with lived experience is also encouraged (2). Staff should be empowered to discuss and suggest changes to the way the organisation work, including addressing work-related stressors such as workplace culture, workload, and stigma (5).
- **Securing resources** (3, 4): Literature highlights that securing adequate resources - such as funding, staffing levels, time, and availability of physical space for interventions - often becomes a fundamental barrier to implementation. This can prevent organisations from advancing, even when strong leadership and well-designed strategies are in place. It underscores the importance of paying close attention to what may appear as operational or secondary aspects, since these foundational elements often determine whether a mental health programme can take root and sustain itself over time (3).

- **Effective communication** (4, 6): Develop and maintain structured, transparent, and consistent communication across all levels of the organisation, clearly conveying the aims, importance, and rationale of mental health programmes (4, 6). This should include promoting available activities, resources, and supports, as well as regularly sharing updates on strategies, policies, and organisational developments through multiple channels. Strong communication is a key success factor in encouraging employee awareness, participation, and engagement in workplace health promotion initiatives, helping employees understand both what is being implemented and why (6).

3 Create a Long-Term, Comprehensive & Coherent Plan

To be sustainable in the long term, a mental health strategy should be organisation-wide, comprehensive, and coherent across its components, ensuring that actions complement and build upon each other and are designed for continual improvement, rather than as isolated initiatives (1, 2, 5, 6). Some key aspects to ensure coherence and sustainability include:

- **Tailoring interventions to organisational context** (5): Mental health plans should reflect the organisation's characteristics and the needs of its workforce, taking into account factors such as size, industry, and sector.
- **Ensuring structural coherence across interventions** (5): Organisations can design their strategy so that actions are interconnected and mutually reinforcing - for example, by linking organisation-wide measures that promote healthy work environments with individual supports for employees experiencing particular difficulties. This layered structure helps maintain alignment and continuity across all levels of intervention (5).
- **Adopting a long-term approach** (6): Organisations should prioritise sustained efforts within their policies and practices, rather than relying on short-term initiatives or one-off events. Continuous development of activities and strategies helps build a lasting health culture that supports employee wellbeing and organisational productivity in a sustainable way (6).

4 Conduct Comprehensive Organisational Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation

Organisations should carry out regular assessments to identify their needs and priorities in relation to workplace mental health, as well as evaluate their initiatives (1, 5). This process should include the following:

- **Workplace assessment** (1, 5, 6): Review organisational policies, practices, and structures that affect mental health and wellbeing. Conduct stress risk assessments; identify employees' needs; and gather staff perspectives on mental health, including through satisfaction indicators (1, 6).
- **Monitoring and evaluation systems** (1, 5, 6): Establish tools to measure progress and outcomes. This includes setting measurable targets such as reductions in stress levels or absenteeism related to psychosocial factors (1, 6) and evaluating the effectiveness of supports provided through defined performance indicators (2).
- **Use of data for continuous improvement** (2, 4, 6): Data collected through monitoring and evaluation should be used to inform ongoing refinement of policies and practices.
- **Integration of monitoring within organisational processes** (1): Monitoring should not be limited to periodic evaluations but embedded in wider systems, such as annual performance reviews or inclusion of mental health metrics within organisational quality standards.

5 Manage Psychosocial Risks at the Workplace

Guidelines consistently highlight that responsibility for managing work-related stress should not rest solely with individual employees. While personal coping or resilience-building activities contribute to overall wellbeing, relying on them alone risks implying that workers are at fault for experiencing stress in challenging conditions (2). This framing is incomplete, as a substantial body of longitudinal and review evidence identifies characteristics of the work environment itself as risk factors or predictors of depression and related mental health outcomes (7-10).

Across this literature, adverse psychosocial working conditions including job strain (high demands with low control), imbalances between level of effort required and rewards, low social support or poor workplace relationships, bullying, and mismatch between role and

individual, are consistently associated with increased risk of depression and common mental disorders (7-10). Job strain and effort–reward imbalance had the strongest and most consistent associations (7-10).

Organisations should therefore avoid placing the burden of change on individual behaviour alone (1) or using individual-level approaches as substitutes for organisational strategies to reduce work stressors or solely to boost productivity (5). These interventions should be part of a more holistic approach and complement, not replace, systemic efforts to create healthier working environments (6).

Creating and maintaining a healthy psychosocial work environment involves systematically identifying and addressing workplace factors that contribute to stress and poor mental health (1, 2, 5). The following organisational measures are commonly identified as key areas of focus for improving mental health in the work place:

- **Optimal work processes** (1, 2, 4): Reorganising work to improve efficiency and reduce strain, for example, through job enlargement, job rotation, flexi-time, flexible schedules, or restructuring tasks to relieve skilled personnel from administrative duties.
- **Job autonomy and job quality** (1, 2, 5): Providing employees with sufficient control over their work (e.g., organising their day, exercising initiative), access to adequate resources, clear roles and expectations, reasonable workloads and deadlines, and achievable performance targets.
- **Employee involvement in decision-making** (1, 2, 4): Involving staff in decisions and problem-solving (through surveys, forums, or workshops) to enhance engagement and shared ownership of outcomes.
- **Rewards and recognition** (1, 4, 8): Promoting fairness by ensuring balanced effort–reward ratios, including fair pay, and fostering a culture of appreciation and positive work feedback.
- **Positive communication and supportive culture** (1, 2, 4, 5, 8): Encouraging open, respectful communication that builds trust; implementing transparent decision-making processes; and fostering collegial support through management example, opportunities for peer interaction, and social initiatives that promote inclusion and psychological safety.

- **A workplace free from bullying, discrimination, harassment and violence** (1, 2, 5, 8): Establishing and enforcing anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies; maintaining organisational frameworks for addressing unfair treatment or offensive behaviour; and supporting employee participation mechanisms or staff-led initiatives that take action against discrimination.
- **Supportive management** (1, 2, 4, 5): Training managers in supportive leadership styles—attending to staff needs, mentoring, motivating, and maintaining open communication. This includes developing skills to recognise early signs of distress, and initiate mental-health-related conversations and guide staff towards appropriate supports.
- **Opportunities for personal and professional development** (1, 4): Offering continuing education and career development opportunities as part of a broader personnel strategy that supports growth, confidence, and wellbeing.
- **Safe and confidential reporting mechanisms** (2): Providing accessible channels for all workers to identify and report psychosocial risks without fear of reprisal.
- **Role-specific risk assessment** (5): Conducting psychosocial risk assessments tailored to each role to ensure that prevention and support measures are appropriate to job demands and contexts.

The ILO and WHO (2022) recommend embedding the prevention of psychosocial risks within Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) management systems, applying the same structured approach used for physical safety (2). This means integrating psychosocial risk management into organisational policy, planning, and review processes, ensuring these risks are managed with equal rigour and accountability as physical ones (2).

6 Prevent, Promote and Support

Comprehensive workplace mental health programmes commonly operate across three interconnected fronts: 1. preventing poor mental health, 2. protecting and promoting mental wellbeing, and 3. supporting employees with mental health conditions (2, 5, 11). This structure enables organisations to address risks, strengthen wellbeing, and provide timely support when difficulties arise.

6.1 Prevent Poor Mental Health

Prevention involves reducing psychosocial risks and addressing workplace stressors that can lead to psychological strain (1, 5). These measures are discussed in detail under the *Managing Psychosocial Risks* section of this report.

6.2 Protect and Promote Mental Wellbeing

Measures to enhance mental wellbeing focus on developing knowledge, skills, and supportive environments that foster positive mental health across the workforce.

Recommended actions include:

- **Mental health training and psychosocial interventions** (1,2,4): Provide structured training on stress management and resilience using diverse learning formats such as workshops, videos, and role-playing (1). Psychosocial activities may include psychoeducation, mindfulness, relaxation techniques, or group-based exercise, yoga, and meditation delivered in person or online (1,2,4). An extensive review of evidence for workplace mental health interventions found that both mindfulness interventions and strategies for raising awareness of mental illness and how to manage it in workplace, have a large evidence base for reducing stress and burnout and improving overall mental well-being (12).
- **Mental health literacy initiatives** (2, 5): Increase understanding of mental health, reduce stigma, and encourage early help-seeking by strengthening employees' capacity to recognise and respond to signs of distress.
- **Open dialogue and stigma reduction** (1, 5): Encourage managers to hold regular, supportive conversations about wellbeing—both informally and through structured forums—where staff feel safe to raise concerns. Sharing experiences and normalising discussion of mental health have been shown to reduce stigma and strengthen engagement (5).
- **Peer support initiatives**: Facilitate mutual support through peer support roles (3) or mental health champions (5).
- **Provide support following traumatic events** (5): Establish procedures for responding to unexpected traumatic incidents affecting employees.

In relation to interventions, literature highlights the importance of clear communication about their purpose and expected benefits (3). Employees are more likely to take part when they understand how a programme can help them personally and why it has been introduced.

Guidelines also recommend that organisations use quality-assured, evidence-based interventions. Programmes should be well-established, accredited, or supported by research demonstrating positive outcomes (5, 11).

6.3 Support Employees with Experiencing Mental Health Challenges

Supporting staff with existing or emerging mental health difficulties involves early recognition, access to appropriate help, and inclusive employment practices.

- **Early identification and assistance** (1): Develop systems to notice early signs of distress and offer prompt support, for example through counselling or wellbeing check-ins. Early action can shorten episodes of ill-health and aid recovery.
- **Specialist support and treatment options** (1, 2, 5): Facilitate access to professional mental health care. Employees should have the option—but not the obligation—to engage with evidence-based therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy, problem-solving, behavioural activation, or interpersonal therapy (2). Multiple studies have demonstrated positive outcomes related to reducing stress, burnout, and mental illness and improving mental well-being for these types of interventions (12). Support should always respect the individual's preferences regarding when or whether to access treatment (5).
- **Workplace accommodations and return-to-work arrangements** (1, 2, 5): Provide reasonable adjustments for employees with persistent mental health needs—such as flexible hours, modified workloads, changes in work environment, or regular supportive meetings with supervisors. Return-to-work processes should include phased returns, continued clinical care, and clear communication protocols to prevent isolation and ease reintegration (1, 2).
- **Inclusive recruitment and supported employment** (1, 2): Ensure recruitment and employment policies are non-discriminatory. Job advertisements can signal openness to applicants with lived experience of mental health or disability (1), and supported employment initiatives can promote equitable access to work opportunities (2). Policies supporting existing staff with mental health conditions should also apply to new employees (1).

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