



**Victorian  
Public Sector  
Commission**



# Creating a mentally healthy work environment

**How to create and support a mentally healthy work environment to prevent harm or injury.**

Employers are responsible for implementing strategies and action plans that create a mentally healthy workplace and culture.

Workplace culture is the shared values and beliefs that guide how members of a workplace approach their work and interact with each other.

We all have a role to play in:

- promoting positive mental health at work
- preventing harm to mental health because of work.

In a mentally healthy workplace, employees:

- feel respected and supported
- feel safe to speak up, ask for help or raise concerns without fear of retribution
- have the right training, tools and resources to do their work
- have an appropriate and manageable workload
- are given opportunities to develop their skills and grow in their careers
- are given reasonable adjustments to support their mental health needs.

## Benefits of a mentally healthy workplace culture

The culture of your organisation is how you work, interact and behave with one another.

It's a shared set of values and ways of working you embrace each day.

The culture of every public sector organisation and team starts with the [Victorian public sector values](#) and [codes of conduct](#).

When your organisation has a good culture, it contributes to good mental health and wellbeing.

If you build a healthy workplace and team culture, you'll:

- attract and keep high-performing employees
- build morale and rapport with colleagues
- create an environment where people can learn from others
- increase trust within your teams
- give employees confidence to speak openly and honestly
- enable employees to reach out for help.

## Your role as an employee

Employers are primarily responsible for creating safe and healthy work environments.

But we all contribute to a mentally healthy workplace and culture.

To help create and maintain a healthy work environment, employees should:

- participate in mental health or stress management training
- follow the occupational health and safety policies and procedures at work
- be open and feel safe to discuss mental health, stress or workplace challenges with a trusted manager, colleague or HR
- be respectful and support colleagues who may be experiencing mental health challenges
- give feedback or participate in discussions or surveys to help improve the mental health strategies at work
- look for signs of distress in yourself and others.

## Health and safety representatives (HSRs)

Active and engaged HSRs can promote a positive safety culture by:

- advocating for the health, safety and wellbeing of their colleagues
- fostering communication and between employers and employees
- helping to develop workable solutions
- encouraging their workplace to create a mentally healthy culture
- sharing valuable experience and knowledge about how to identify hazards and assess risks.

## Your role as a manager

Managers play a key role in creating a mentally healthy or unhealthy workplace.

For example, [supportive leadership](#) can positively impact the performance of a team.

Being a supportive leader means your team:

- has a sense of your leadership style when you interact with them
- may feel encouraged to reach out to you when they need help.

As a manager, you should regularly bring your team together to talk openly and share information to build your team's culture.

Some simple things managers can do to build a positive workplace culture are:

- discuss the [public sector values](#) and [codes of conduct](#) with the team
- promote education and awareness about mental health needs
- look out for [signs of distress](#) and offer timely support when needed
- monitor and manage psychosocial hazards (including workload and time pressure) of each team member to prevent burnout or stress
- give each team member a chance to showcase their work and give constructive feedback
- hold different types of meetings so they're not always formal
- embed open and transparent communication as a norm
- give feedback as a group and not just on an individual level
- schedule regular one-on-one conversations with team members to discuss their

work and wellbeing.

## Tips and resources to use

- [Wellbeing toolkit](#) – tips, tools and activities to support team wellbeing, VPSC.
- [Leading in the public sector](#) – develop your skills as a manager or leader, VPSC.
- [WorkWell: Mental health resources for workplace leaders](#), WorkSafe Victoria.

## Your role as a senior leader

As a Senior leader, you set the tone, culture, direction and expectations from the top.

To build a mentally healthy workplace culture, you should:

- demonstrate commitment to mental health at the highest levels of the organisation and visibly support mental health initiatives
- model the [public sector values](#) and [codes of conduct](#)
- develop and implement clear policies that promote mental health, reduce stigma and prevent mental health injuries
- allocate resources to support mental health training, support services and programs
- build a safe to speak up culture that values open and transparent communication
- champion education and awareness programs like workshops or seminars
- regularly review the effectiveness of mental health strategies based on feedback and changing needs
- provide managers with mental health training and resources needed to support their teams
- advocate for mental health both within the organisation and the wider community
- address negative behaviours such as bullying, harassment, discrimination and violence
- support and implement policies that promote diversity and inclusion
- support and implement the flexible work policy.

## Guides, tools and resources for employers and senior leaders

## Mental health and safety assessment tools

To build a mentally healthy workplace, you need to understand what measures you already have and how effective they are.

You can use assessment tools to find out what's working and where you need to improve.

You should look at factors such as:

- senior management commitment
- safety culture
- occupational health and safety systems
- accountability mechanisms.

You can use these online assessment tools to get started:

- Leading the Way Self-Assessment Tool, VPSC
- [WorkWell Survey](#), WorkSafe Victoria
- [People at Work assessment tool](#), Comcare
- [Thrive at Work survey](#), Thrive at Work.

## Use your People matter survey results

Victorian public sector organisations can use their People matter survey results to:

- identify priority focus areas
- develop action plans
- improve how they work.

VPSC has more information about [taking action](#) in response to People Matter survey results.

As a senior leader, you can use these results to help you understand:

- the experiences of your employees
- engagement, wellbeing, diversity and inclusion
- psychosocial hazards (such as bullying or discrimination).

Organisations should focus on results to guide action and interventions to improve

employee wellbeing, mental health and safety.

Key [measures of wellbeing](#) from the survey are:

- meaningful work
- safety climate
- learning and development
- manager support
- workload.

## **Victorian Mentally Healthy Workplaces Framework and guides**

The [Victorian Mentally Healthy Workplaces Framework](#) was created to reflect leading practice and support workplaces to be mentally healthy.

Organisations can use their [online guides](#) to:

- [develop a mentally healthy workplace strategy and action plan](#)
- [support recovery at work and return to work](#)
- [support workers in short-term, casual, insecure or irregular roles](#).

## **Flexible work and working remotely policy**

Flexible work has positive impacts on health, safety and wellbeing.

Organisations can use the Victorian Public Service [flexible work policy and resources](#) to embed a culture of flexible and remote work.

## **Leading in the public sector**

To create and support a mentally healthy workplace we need leaders with the right capabilities and skills.

You can use our [Leading in the public sector](#) resources to help develop your skills as a manager or leader.

## **Victorian public sector integrity framework**

The [Victorian public sector integrity framework](#) shows how and why we should act with

integrity.

Strong organisational integrity improves employee engagement and wellbeing. It also helps build a strong safety climate and safe to speak up culture.