

## **Mental Health in Organisations and the Community**

Data shows that approximately 1 in 5 Australian adults experience a common mental illness each year. We also know from studies that many individuals do not access the appropriate support thereby allowing their situation or illness to get worse.

The impact for organisations is significant having been estimated to be as high \$13 billion annually by the business group the Shared Value Project.

Mental illness can be associated with absenteeism but also so-called presenteeism where employees come to work but are not productive because they are not getting the help needed to deal with their mental health issues. Organisations can play a larger role in people getting the help and support they need through programs such as Mental Health First Aid.

## **Mental Health First Aid**

Mental Health First Aid is based on the concept of physical first aid, except instead of teaching how to provide first aid for physical problems or injuries, participants learn how to provide first aid for mental health problems including depression, anxiety, psychosis and substance use problems.

Having mental health first aid skills means being able to assist someone who may be developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis, and this can make a real difference for the individual, the workplace and the community in general.

Mental Health First Aid is the help offered to a person experiencing a mental health problem before professional help is received.

Participants undertaking the course learn how to identify the signs of a mental health problem or crisis, how to talk to someone about their mental health, to understand what professional help is available, and how to encourage someone to access this help.

Mental Health First Aid can also be implemented into workplaces as part of a framework for creating mentally healthy workplaces.

## **About Mental Health Australia**

Mental Health First Aid Australia (<https://mhfa.com.au/>) Guidelines give an overview of the best practice in providing mental health first aid to support people with mental health problems.

The guidelines have been developed in partnership with researchers from the University of Melbourne and in consultation with consumers, carers, health professionals and researchers working together to agree on techniques and skills that are considered to be best practice.

## **Training and Accreditation**

Training and accreditation is achieved by participants completing a two-day training course followed by a short online assessment from Mental Health Australia. The accreditation is valid for 3 years and can be updated via a 4-hour face-to-face refresher session that extends the accreditation for a further 3 years.

At the start of the course each person receives a copy of the Standard Mental Health First Aid Manual that they can take away at the end of the course. This manual contains the material related to the training and additional material related to areas not covered in the course.

## **Mental Health First Aid Course Content**

### **Introduction to Mental Illness**

- Risk factors, prevalence and impact
- Interventions
- Recovery

### **Mental Health First Aid**

- Why Mental Health First Aid
- The Mental Health First Aid Action Plan

### **Signs, Symptoms and Interventions – Understanding Common Mental Illnesses**

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Psychosis
- Substance Use

### **First Aid for Crisis Situations – What to do in an Emergency**

## **Mental Health First Aid – The Evidence**

Since it began in 2000, evaluations by Mental Health First Aid Australia and by the Population Mental Health Group at the University of Melbourne consistently show that Mental Health First Aid training is associated with improved knowledge of mental illnesses and their treatments, knowledge of appropriate first aid strategies, and confidence in providing first aid to individuals with mental illness, the benefits of which are maintained over time.

Some studies have also shown improved mental health in those who attend the training, decreases in stigmatising attitudes, and increases in the amount and type of support provided to others.

## **Other General Organisational Awareness Options**

Organisations may desire to initially engage leaders in a 90-minute Introduction to Mental Health First Aid which provides information on mental health problems in the workplace and how employees experiencing mental health issues can best be supported. This program is generally run as a prelude to engaging with a Mental Health First Aid Training Course.

Tailored awareness talks are also available for business groups, teams, and organisational events to help to raise the profile of mental health and generally educate on related issues.

If you would like to discuss more about the program and the range of services on offer to raise awareness and build skills, please contact me direct on my email or mobile (see below).

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