

## MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS AT WORK

The World Health Organisation estimates that the cost of mental health issues such as stress, depression and anxiety to the Irish economy exceeds €3bn.

There is a strong proven business case for organisations to promote good physical and mental health for all staff. Actively promoting staff wellbeing leads to greater productivity, better morale, better retention of staff and reduced sickness absence

Most employees are afraid to admit they are not well, and 50 per cent of people surveyed in a study by the National Stigma Reduction Partnership, See Change, said that if they were experiencing a mental health problem they would not want anyone to know about it. Interestingly, an Aware Depression Support survey showed that despite a lack of wellness policies, 77 per cent of organisations that responded acknowledged that dealing with stress and mental health at work are priorities

Here are some tips on how organisations can start to create a culture that encourages people to be open and honest about their mental health, and to access the support they may need

## PROMOTE A CULTURE OF ACCEPTANCE

Get commitment from senior leaders, this sends a clear message that staff mental health and wellbeing matters - colleagues take cues from how leaders behave

Staff need to know that their mental health is important and that being open about it will lead to support, not discrimination

Develop clear policies about mental health and wellbeing, make sure these are implemented and communicated to everyone

# Look after others

## Tips for good mental health and wellbeing at work

### ENCOURAGE A BETTER WORK / LIFE BALANCE

Sustained pressure and a poor work/life balance can quickly lead to stress and burnout, reducing staff performance and morale

Monitor workloads to ensure staff are coping and not feeling under excessive pressure

Flexible working benefits both organisations and staff: organisations benefit from increased morale, commitment, productivity and reduced sickness absence - staff feel better able to balance the demands on them from different aspects of their lives

Flexible working can be an important intervention to prevent mental health problems from getting worse and leading to absence - it can also support

a phased return to work after a period of absence

Senior leaders and managers can be positive role models for healthier work habits and can encourage staff by leading by example, such as taking lunch breaks and working healthy hours

### RAISE AWARENESS

Embed mental health in inductions and training - staff will then understand how mental health is managed within the organisation and what support is available

Make sure the staff handbook/intranet site includes information about mental health policies and the support provided by the organisation

Invite a speaker to talk about mental health during a mental health or diversity event - the lived experience can help to break down stigma and stereotypes

Communication is key: use existing communication channels - staff meetings, blogs, factsheets, top tips, web links, FAQs, posters, noticeboards, staff newsletters, intranet and internet pages

Encourage mental health champions - people at all levels talking openly about mental health sends a clear message that staff will get support and that a mental health issue is no barrier to career development

### PROVIDE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Staff need to feel valued and supported and that their work is meaningful - foster a positive culture that values all staff by investing in their skills and development, this builds the trust and integrity essential to maintain commitment and productivity levels

Managers can also make themselves available for regular work-related conversations with employees

Consider training line managers in how to spot the early signs of mental ill health and how to respond, let staff know that there are people available who are trained to help

### SIGNPOST TO SUPPORT

Early intervention can stop problems from escalating. Mental Health Ireland ([www.mentalhealthireland.ie](http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie)), the See Change alliance ([www.seechange.ie](http://www.seechange.ie)) and Mental Health First Aid Ireland ([www.mhfaireland.ie](http://www.mhfaireland.ie)) all have helpful resources and offer training

If your organisation offers counselling services or Employee Assistance Programmes, ensure all staff know about them and how to access them

Ensure staff know about LawCare and the support available

Call our free, independent, confidential Helpline on **1800 991 801** or go to [www.lawcare.ie](http://www.lawcare.ie)