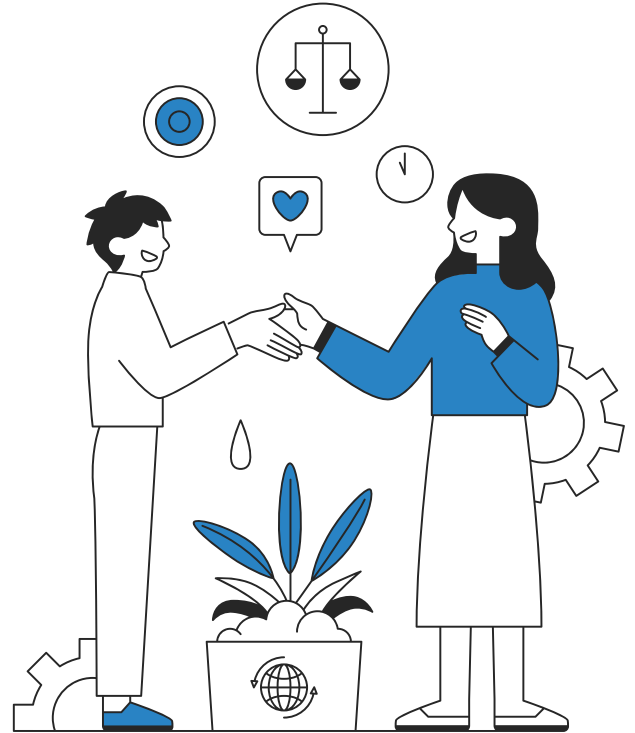




# A BUSINESS CASE FOR WELL-BEING



2026

## INTRODUCTION

Australia-only evidence for employers, leaders and decision-makers. This handout brings together the latest available official Australian data on workplace mental health, psychosocial risk and the commercial case for investing in mentally healthy work.

### Prepared for 2026

UrSpace is part of Watkins Therapy Group and supports workplaces with EAP, counselling, training and practical well-being strategies across Australia. A key benefit of being part of Watkins Therapy Group is UrSpace's ability to also offer Mental Health First Aid training, helping organisations build internal confidence, early response skills and a stronger culture of mental health awareness.

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Current Australian prevalence data
- Workplace injury and compensation trends
- National policy and WHS context
- Quote-ready provider references
- Australia-only handout, updated for 2026



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All figures in this handout are drawn from official Australian sources. The latest nationally available data spans 2020 to 2024 and was published between 2024 and 2026.

## AT A GLANCE

The latest Australian evidence shows that mental health, psychosocial risk and workplace design have direct consequences for productivity, retention, claims costs and leadership accountability.

42.9% of Australians aged 16 to 85 had experienced a mental disorder at some point in their life from 2020 to 2022.

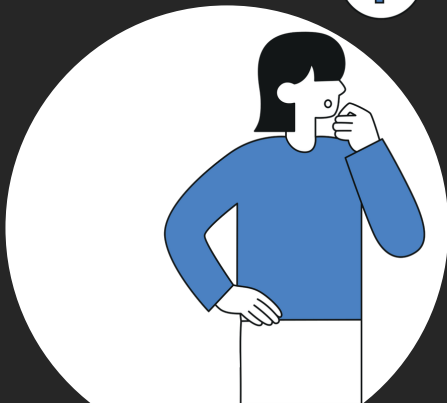
15% of Australia's total disease burden in 2024 was due to mental health conditions and substance use disorders.

\$11 billion is the estimated annual cost of poor mental health to Australian businesses.

21.5% had a 12-month mental disorder, with anxiety disorders the most common at 17.2%.

\$200 billion to \$220 billion is the estimated annual cost to Australia of mental ill-health and suicide.

\$2.30 is the average return for every \$1 invested in a mentally healthy workplace.



## WHY IT MATTERS

Mental ill-health is not only a clinical issue. It influences attendance, performance, safety, turnover, compensation exposure and the overall capacity of a workplace to function well.

## Useful context for employers

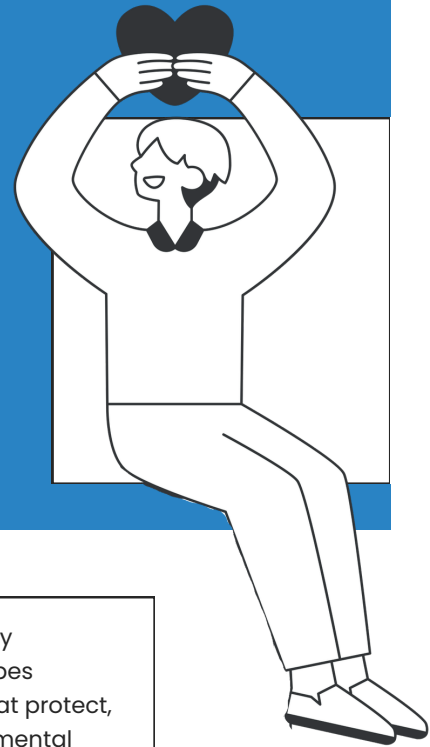
AIHW reports that anxiety disorders alone contributed 3.9% of Australia's total disease burden in 2024. That places anxiety among the leading specific causes of lost health nationally.

# 3.9%

Australia's total disease burden

# WHY EMPLOYERS CANNOT TREAT WELL-BEING AS OPTIONAL

A mentally healthy workplace is now a business, leadership, and workplace safety issue. National Australian guidance is increasingly consistent on this point: work can protect mental health, but work can also create or amplify harm when job demands, role clarity, leadership, workload, change processes and interpersonal behaviour are poorly managed.



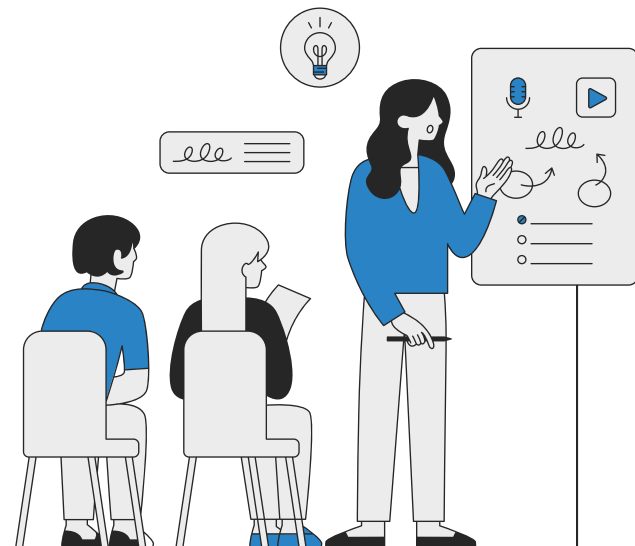
The National Mental Health Commission frames mentally healthy work around three linked pillars: protect, respond and promote. That means effective workplaces do more than offer support after someone is struggling. They actively identify and manage psychosocial risks, build the capability to respond early and strengthen the positive aspects of work that help people thrive.

“The term mentally healthy workplace broadly describes workplace experiences that protect, respond to and promote mental health.” National Mental Health Commission.

\*These do not meet your duty to eliminate or minimise psychosocial risks to workers.” Safe Work Australia, on EAP and counselling alone.

“Every \$1 invested in a mentally healthy workplace has a Return on Investment of \$2.30.” Comcare.

Safe Work Australia is also clear that counselling or EAP support is not a substitute for risk control. Support services matter, but they sit alongside the employer’s obligation to identify hazards, reduce risks, and design work more safely in the first place.



## BOTTOM LINE

A good well-being strategy is not a glossy add-on. It is part of how a workplace prevents harm, supports performance and meets its responsibilities under modern Australian expectations and WHS practice.

## The workplace impact is measurable.

Safe Work Australia's latest national statistics show that mental health conditions accounted for 17,600 serious workers' compensation claims in 2023 to 2024 provisional data, or 12.0% of all serious claims. That was an increase of 14.7% in one year and 161.1% over the decade.



**17,600**

Serious claims

**12%**

Share of claims

**35.7**

Median time lost working weeks

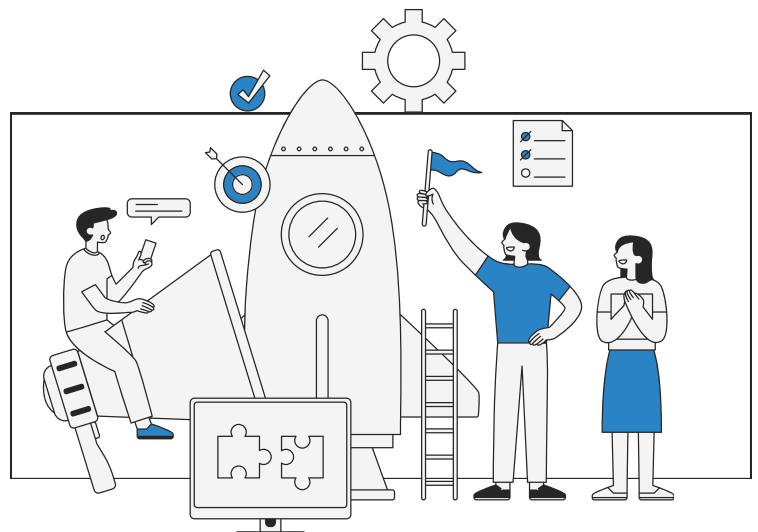
**\$67,400**

Median compensation

**28%**

of employees had moderate to severe mental ill-health in 2021. 28% of employees reported presenteeism in 2021.

For employers, these figures matter because mental health-related claims are not only more common than many leaders assume, but they also tend to involve more time away from work and substantially higher compensation costs than the average serious claim. The Baseline Report also suggests the performance drag is broader than claims alone, with presenteeism and moderate to severe mental ill-health both sitting at 28% nationally in the workplace data set used for 2021.



# What effective workplace well-being looks like in 2026

The most useful Australian frameworks now point to a systems approach. This means building well-being into how work is designed and led, not only into the support offered after harm has already occurred.



## PROTECT

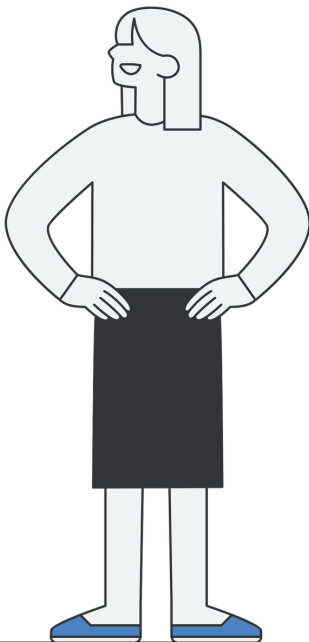
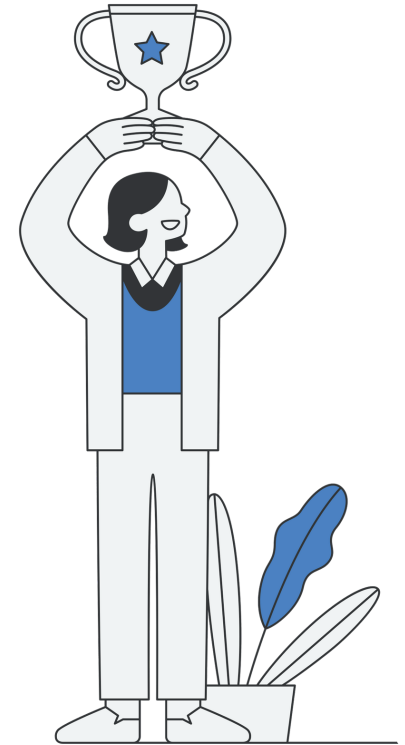
Identify psychosocial hazards, manage job demands, improve role clarity, reduce exposure to harmful behaviours and meet legal duties to eliminate or minimise risk so far as reasonably practicable.

## RESPOND

Train leaders, create pathways for early support, make it safer to speak up, respond appropriately to distress and connect people with timely help such as counselling, coaching or EAP support.

## PROMOTE

Strengthen the positive aspects of work, including purpose, belonging, recognition, supportive supervision, growth, flexibility and fair systems that help people function at their best.



## PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY

An EAP can be valuable, but it is most effective when paired with healthy job design, capable leaders, realistic workloads and clear psychosocial risk management. Or put another way, a helpline cannot tidy up a chaotic work system on its own.

For boards, executives and people leaders, the message is straightforward. Well-being should be treated as part of operational performance, risk management and culture, not as a side project run when time allows.

# Can you afford not to have an EAP?



“

“The cost to Australia of mental ill-health and suicide is around \$200 to \$220 billion per year.”  
**Productivity Commission.**

“

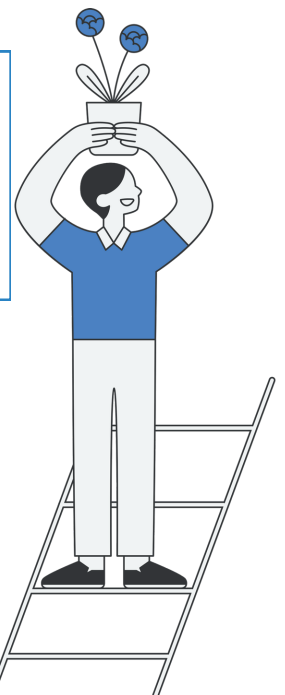
“Every \$1 invested in a mentally healthy workplace has a Return on Investment of \$2.30.” **Comcare.**

“

“These do not meet your duty to eliminate or minimise psychosocial risks to workers.”  
**Safe Work Australia.**

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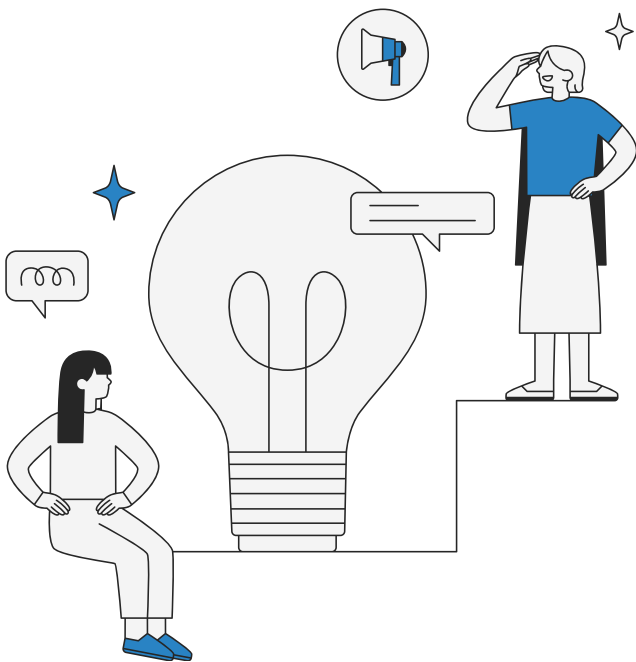
“The term mentally healthy workplace broadly describes workplace experiences that protect, respond to and promote mental health.”  
**National Mental Health Commission.**



## REFERENCES

- [1] Australian Bureau of Statistics. National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2020 to 2022. Key figures used: 42.9% lifetime mental disorder, 21.5% 12-month mental disorder, 17.2% anxiety disorders.
- [2] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Mental illness burden of disease. Key figures used: mental health conditions and substance use disorders are responsible for 15% of total disease burden in 2024; anxiety disorders 3.9%.
- [3] Comcare. Your mental health responsibilities at work. Key figures used: poor mental health costs Australian businesses \$11 billion per year; every \$1 invested has a return of \$2.30.
- [4] Productivity Commission. A brief overview of the mental health inquiry report. Key figure used: Mental ill-health and suicide costs Australia around \$200 to \$220 billion per year.
- [5] Safe Work Australia. Key Work Health and Safety Statistics Australia 2025 and related psychosocial hazards guidance. Key figures used: 17,600 serious claims, 12.0% of serious claims, 35.7 working weeks median time lost, \$67,400 median compensation, 161.1% ten-year increase; EAP support alone does not meet the duty to eliminate or minimise psychosocial risks.
- [6] National Mental Health Commission. National Monitoring Framework for Mentally Healthy Workplaces. Key wording used: mentally healthy workplaces protect, respond and promote mental health.
- [7] National Mental Health Commission. National Baseline Report for Mentally Healthy Workplaces. Key figures used: 28% moderate to severe mental ill-health, 28% presenteeism.

## WHATS NEXT



Want to talk about your workplace or EAP needs?

UrSpace can also support your organisation with Mental Health First Aid training through Watkins Therapy Group, giving teams access to practical training as part of a broader workplace well-being and support offering.

UrSpace is part of Watkins Therapy Group.

For EAP discussions, book a meeting with UrSpace & Watkins Therapy Group Director, Benjamin Watkins, email [info@urspaceeap.com](mailto:info@urspaceeap.com)



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