



Media Release

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Tradies say skills shortages are impacting their mental wellbeing

The latest Steel Blue survey has revealed the nation's skills shortage crisis is taking its toll on worker's mental health and wellbeing.

Each year, boots manufacturer Steel Blue, together with Beyond Blue and the Australian Physiotherapy Association, surveys 1200 tradespeople to better understand the mental health supports needed.

The *2024 Boot the Blues* campaign survey found more than half (54%) of respondents say the current skills shortage was having a negative impact on their mental health.

Steel Blue's Chief Executive Peter Bell said the findings are concerning given Australia's labour shortage.

"Recent reports state Australia faces the impossible task of finding an extra 90,000 tradespeople in the next three months. The labour shortage puts undue pressure on the existing workforce," Mr Bell said.

A fifth of respondents also reported they wouldn't tell anyone if they had depression and 45% said poor mental health has had a negative impact on their relationships.

"The survey revealed sixty percent of people who saw a decline in their mental health also experienced a knock-on effect to their physical health," said Mr Bell.

"For those working in trades, resources, and agriculture who rely on being strong and physically fit, this negative cycle between mental and physical wellbeing can have lasting impacts on their relationships and financial stability."

Beyond Blue's CEO Georgie Harman said while more needs to be done to combat stigma surrounding depression and anxiety in the trades sector, the good news is tradies are increasingly turning to family, friends and their GPs for support.

"More people are seeking support for mental health since the survey started in 2022. And over 60% of respondents said they knew how to protect their mental health in times of stress," Ms Harman said.

"We must change the narrative around depression and other mental health conditions. Taking action, getting support, talking with friends or family is such an important step to take to get better.

"Partnerships, like the one we have with Steel Blue, are vital in changing attitudes."

The Australian Physiotherapy Association Tradies National Health Month also found more than nine in ten tradies reported experiencing injuries and pain in the past year, with 90% of these injuries caused or worsened by work.

“The majority of tradies surveyed reported that pain affects their quality of life, with 42% describing their pain as severe. One in four tradies fear they will need to retire early due to the repetitive stress on their bodies”, says Zac Lowth, Chair of the Occupational Health National Group.

This Tradies National Health Month (August), Steel Blue and Beyond Blue are celebrating their 10-year milestone; the longest corporate partnership to date for Beyond Blue.

“Our Blue Boots initiative has been running since 2014 and has helped raised over \$450,000 for Beyond Blue, providing support for more than eight thousand people who have reached out to the Beyond Blue Support Service,” said Mr Bell.

“The partnership is more than a donation, it is part of Steel Blue’s DNA. The iconic blue boots help start a conversation on site and over the 10 years, we estimate more than a million conversations and check-ins on a mate have started at workplaces across Australia, to proactively address mental health issues.”

Steel Blue Boot the Blues Survey Key Findings

1. A fifth of respondents said they would not tell anyone if they had depression.
 2. Approx. 35% agreed or strongly agreed that most people would not employ someone they knew had been depressed, however only around 5% of respondents said that they would not hire someone they knew had been depressed.
 3. 1 in 2 respondents said that skills shortages had impacted their mental wellbeing.
 4. A majority of respondents did not know or said ‘none’ for programs their workplace has implemented for physical wellbeing.
 5. The most common source of support for respondents is a family member or friend and their GP is the most accessed professional source of support.
 6. Workplace injury incidence is high, with a significant impact on time taken off work.
 - a. Almost 30% being injured at work
 - b. More than 35% of those who had been injured had more than 3 months off.
- This shows the strong links between poor mental health, poor physical health and loss of income.

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