



## Media Release

### Accessible and tailored mental health support needed for small business

Small business owners are facing concerning rates of mental ill-health, prompting calls for greater investment in tailored mental health supports.

The Wellbeing and Prevention Coalition in Mental Health together with the Council of Small Business Organisations Australia (COSBOA), has released its latest policy brief '*Promoting Small Business Owner Mental Health.*'

The latest data shows that small business owners (SBOs) continue to experience significantly higher rates of stress, depression, and anxiety compared to the general population.

**Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman** said people are struggling and there are significant knock-on effects to the economy.

"Poor mental health impacts productivity and costs the Australian economy up to \$220 billion annually," Ms Harman said.

"Small business owners are the backbone of our economy, and they should be looked after. We owe it to them, their families, their employees, and their communities.

"Solutions must focus on prevention and early support to decrease the prevalence and impact of mental illness within the small business sector, so that people don't reach crisis point with their business or their mental health."

**COSBOA CEO Luke Achterstraat** said small businesses make up 97% of all businesses in Australia.

"Small businesses employ almost half the private sector workforce, yet they operate in a unique and often challenging context, facing financial pressures, isolation, and long working hours.

"These factors, combined with limited access to resources and mental health support, create a perfect storm for mental ill-health.

"Many SBOs find mental health support difficult to find and afford and are generally unaware of the programs and services available, so more work is needed to ensure these programs are visible, accessible, and useful to small business – including through their trusted and familiar channels.

"We need to meet them where they are," he said.

**Everymind Director Dr Jaelea Skehan OAM** said the policy brief aims to put the spotlight on what is currently missing.

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“Policy, legislation and support strategies are often targeted towards large businesses, leaving small businesses behind in taking effective action on mental health in the workplace,” she said.

“We need to continue to actively involve small business owners to ensure they have fit-for-purpose advice and support to prevent and respond to the psychosocial risks involved in owning and running a small business. Decisions need to be made with SBOs, not for them.”

The Wellbeing and Prevention Coalition in Mental Health is urging governments at all levels to prioritise the mental health of SBOs by:

- Embedding the voices of SBOs: ensure programs and policies are tailored with input from small business owners.
- Protecting and promoting mental health: increase funding for evidence-based programs that support SBO wellbeing.
- Addressing distress drivers: ensure programs understand and address the unique risk factors faced by SBOs.
- Increasing awareness, access, and uptake: utilising trusted channels to promote available support.
- Ensuring national consistency: co-ordinating and sustainably funding a national approach consistent with the National Workplace Initiative.
- Supporting risk management: help SBOs identify and mitigate psychological health risks through the workplace health and safety framework.
- Building the knowledge base: investing in research to better understand and address SBO mental health.

**New South Wales business owner Jeremy Suggett** said the mental health challenges facing the sector are being ignored.

“Small businesses need more accessible, flexible support systems – ones that recognise our distinct pressures and can help us create healthier work environments for ourselves and our staff,” he said.

“We have different needs – even if we aren’t feeling mentally well, we still need to turn up, answer the phone/emails, send out stock, pay the staff and keep the business going – the buck stops with us.”

Last year, Mr Suggett was stressed about the future of his business.

“I felt very exposed, I lost clarity, I lost interest in sleeping and eating, and everything became stressful. I didn't have the option of taking time off, but needed help suitable to my situation.

“We need more policies that recognise the struggles we face, that reflect our voice and support that fits the reality of small businesses,” he said.

The report highlighted the success of existing programs like Beyond Blue’s *NewAccess for Small Business Owners (NASBO)*, and Everymind’s *Ahead for Business*.

NASBO is a free and confidential program that’s proven to stop mental health issues from snowballing and provides people with practical support to manage their mental health.

Everymind’s Ahead for Business, a tailored mental health program, specifically designed for SBOs, has also had users report increased ability and confidence to manage their mental health and wellbeing.

**Read the Policy Brief: Promoting Small Business Owner Mental Health [here](#).**

**ENDS**

**Beyond Blue Support Service** available 24/7 on 1300 22 4636 or [beyondblue.org.au/getsupport](http://beyondblue.org.au/getsupport)  
**National Debt Helpline** 1800 007 007 or [ndh.org.au/financial-counselling/find-a-financial-counsellor/](http://ndh.org.au/financial-counselling/find-a-financial-counsellor/)  
**Small Business Debt Helpline** 1800 413 828 or [sbdh.org.au](http://sbdh.org.au)  
**Workplace Wellbeing** [business.vic.gov.au/business-information/workplace-wellbeing](http://business.vic.gov.au/business-information/workplace-wellbeing)

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#### **Background**

##### ***About the Wellbeing and Prevention Coalition in Mental Health***

The Wellbeing and Prevention Coalition is an informal group of 20 leading mental health organisations that work together to advocate to Commonwealth and State/Territory governments for greater action and investment in the promotion of mental wellbeing and the primary prevention of mental health and substance use conditions.

The group encourages governments around Australia to:

- Develop Wellbeing and Prevention Plans to guide their action and investments in the promotion of mental wellbeing and the primary prevention of mental health conditions .
- Increase their funding and investment in evidence-based programs and public policies that contribute to the promotion of mental wellbeing and the prevention of mental health conditions.
- Strengthen their mental health promotion systems infrastructure including governance arrangements, workforce development, implementation support, quality assurance systems, and data and information systems.
- Provide funding for mental wellbeing and primary prevention-focused research.
- This Policy Brief series aims to summarise the evidence around wellbeing and prevention initiatives that governments and other funders can potentially include in their investment strategy.
- For more information about this policy brief please contact us at [advocacy@preventionunited.org.au](mailto:advocacy@preventionunited.org.au)

##### ***NewAccess for Small Business Owners (NASBO)***

- The majority of NASBO participants are sole traders.
- NASBO is based on Beyond Blue’s highly effective NewAccess program and is funded by the Commonwealth Government.
- NASBO utilises low-intensity Cognitive Behavioural Therapy that offers up to six sessions.
- Participation is free, confidential and no GP referral is required.
- Visit [www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/newaccess-mental-health-coaching/small-business-owners](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/newaccess-mental-health-coaching/small-business-owners) or call 1300 945 301.

##### ***Ahead for Business***

- An Everymind program that supports those working in small businesses to take action on their mental health and wellbeing through a digital portal providing tailored resources, check-ups, and personalised action plans.
- To access the digital portal, visit: [aheadforbusiness.org.au](http://aheadforbusiness.org.au)