Employees call for proactive action to mental health

As Australia marks National Safe Work Month this October, new data from Beyond Blue highlights demand among employees for meaningful change in workplace mental health practices.

Australian employees are calling for more than just awareness when it comes to workplace mental health, with Beyond Blue data revealing a strong demand for real, proactive change that improves people's day-to-day experiences at work.

A community poll* commissioned by Beyond Blue, which asked Australians about their experiences of stress and burnout in the workplace, found that 88% of respondents believed burnout was an important issue for workplaces today, while two in three people rejected the idea that burnout was a personal failing.

Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman AO said workers experiencing chronic stress and burnout are at greater risk of mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety.

"Employees are voicing a clear need for greater consideration to be given to wellbeing in their working conditions. That means integrating wellbeing into how work is designed and experienced, from manageable workloads and adequate resourcing to leadership that genuinely supports them," Ms Harman said.

"Most businesses want to do the right thing, but need clearer pathways to get started, so there's more work to be done.

"Mental health at work must be built into systems that help people to stay well. That's why it's so important to build wellbeing into the systems and culture of work, not treat it as an add-on or something reactive.

"We want more organisations to normalise help-seeking and encourage conversations about mental health, it's important they make it clear that seeking support is a strength, not a weakness."

Workers pointed to systemic factors such as inappropriate workload (49%), lack of management support (32%), and inflexible working conditions (21%) as the top causes of burnout. The data also highlighted a range of further challenges workers faced, including emotional exhaustion and disengagement.

Many workers reported feeling disconnected at work. The poll found that 44% of workers felt lonely and, 39% felt excluded at work *at least sometimes*, and 18% said no one at work "had their back".

Ms Harman said that by fostering connection, inclusion, and psychological safety, workplaces can create environments where people feel safe to speak up and express concerns without fear of negative consequences.

"Embedding flexibility and compassion into workplace culture, along with visible support from leaders who model psychologically safe behaviours, is key to supporting mental health," she said.

"We also need to equip leaders and managers to recognise early signs of distress and have regular check-ins with workers."

Beyond Blue lived experience speaker Craig knows all-too-well the impact of chronic stress and a lack of workplace support.

In a previous role, Craig supervised 60 people at a multinational company and loved his job, having worked there for the majority of his working career – but when the pressure piled on and support disappeared, everything started to unravel.

"For two years, I was doing the work of three people with little support from my manager, clocking 60-hour weeks with limited breaks and then colleagues who I'd trusted and confided in began backstabbing me and setting me up to fail – it was surreal, and the whole experience completely changed me," Craig said.

"The unrelenting stress took its toll, and while speaking up shouldn't have cost me my career, it did in my case."

Craig was admitted to hospital to address his declining mental health.

"Since leaving my management role, I've since gone back to study, built a routine that helps me manage my mental health and stay well, and am linked in with a psychologist – but the damage has been done – and it all started at work," the 48-year-old said.

"No one should have to go through what I did. Mental health support needs to be built into the system – not just a tick-the-box initiative or employing reactive measures after someone's already in crisis."

Of the respondents who had experienced *burnout* at work, half didn't seek support for it.

"People who did reach out for mental health support turned to GPs (43%) and psychologists (36%), while fewer people reached out to wellbeing staff within their own workplace (9%) or online mental health supports (7%)," Ms Harman said.

Ms Harman said given Australians spend a third of their lives at work, it needs to be a setting that helps rather than harms people's mental health.

"Whether you work in a hospital, a school, a construction site or an office, good work should help you to come home feeling fulfilled and connected, bringing real benefits to your mental health and the people you care about," she said.

"Mental health at work is much more than just having an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). It's about creating a culture where wellbeing is a shared priority and is woven into how we lead, support and show up for one another every day."

The Productivity Commission estimates that the economic loss due to the effects of mental ill-health on participation, absenteeism and presenteeism is up to $39 billion.

With 14.6 million Australians in the workforce, mentally healthy workplaces benefit everyone.

"Our message this Safe Work Month is that workplaces can be proactive about how they look after their people by improving their daily experiences of work. It's good for your people, and good for your business," Ms Harman said.

"Beyond Blue's work and mental health page has practical tips to help Australians stay well at work, assess their mental health and access resources and information about supporting themselves and a colleague at work."

The community poll was commissioned by Beyond Blue and surveyed a sample of 1,000 people nationally representative for age, gender and state/territory in June, 2025.

For employers: *Beyond Blue has been a leader in workplace mental health for more than 20 years, and will continue to advocate for mentally healthy workplaces through initiatives like its latest unique early intervention service, Before Blue, which provides proven mental health support for workers.*

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Beyond Blue's 24/7 Support Service can be reached on 1300 22 4636 or beyondblue.org.au/getsupport or visit Beyond Blue's Forums
Beyond Blue's work and mental health page
Beyond Blue's Burnout Check-In Tool

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- Beyond Blue lived experience speaker Craig (VIC-based)

Background
Before Blue
- Launched in 2024, Before Blue is a tailored mental health support service adapted from Beyond Blue's NewAccess Program to support workplace mental health, with personalised coaching, as well as content accessed via a specially designed and secure digital platform.
- Latest data from Before Blue participants shows that:
  - 97% learnt skills to help them maintain their mental health
  - 89% felt more able to cope with any challenges that may arise at work
  - 89% felt their overall mental health had improved
  - 82% felt more productive at work
- Employers can learn more about purchasing Before Blue for their employees here: www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/before-blue
Think Again, with Beyond Blue podcast
- The first series of this podcast will focus on workplace mental health, offering practical advice, information and strategies for senior leaders and managers.
- Episodes are available on **Apple Podcasts, Spotify** and **YouTube**.