# **Burnout Guidelines**

# What is burnout?

Burnout among the support and care services workforce refers to a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion resulting from prolonged and excessive work-related stress. It generally manifests as a decline in performance, compassion fatigue, reduced professional efficacy, and a decline of positivity in the workplace. People experiencing burnout may struggle to meet the demands of their roles, impacting their overall wellbeing and effectiveness in providing support and assistance. Recognising and addressing burnout is crucial for sustaining a healthy work environment and ensuring quality service delivery.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) refers to burn-out as defined in the International Classification of Diseases 11th Revision (ICD-11) as: “Burnout is a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterised by three dimensions: feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; increased mental distance from one’s job, feeling negative or cynical about one's job; and reduced professional efficacy.”

**What contributes to burnout?**

There are various factors that impact on people at work, and circumstances that elevate a person’s feelings of stress. To consider what can help reduce stress levels, it is important to be aware of the triggers and psychosocial hazards in the workplace.

Safe Work Australia advises that a psychosocial hazard is anything that could cause psychological harm (e.g. harm someone’s mental health). Common psychosocial hazards in the workplace include (but are not limited to):

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| Job Demands | Low Job Control | Poor Support |
| Lack of Role Clarity | Poor Organisational Change Management and Culture | Inadequate Reward and Recognition |
| Poor Organisational Justice | Traumatic Events or Material | Remote or Isolated work |
| Poor Physical Environment | Violence and Aggression | Bullying, Harassment, including Sexual Harassment |
| Conflict or Poor Workplace Relationships and Interactions, Exclusions in the Workplace | | |

**What is vicarious trauma in the workplace?**

Vicarious trauma in the workplace refers to the emotional and psychological impact experienced by individuals who, while not directly exposed to a traumatic event, absorb the trauma of others through empathetic engagement. This secondary exposure, often encountered in support and care service professions, can lead to symptoms mirroring those of direct trauma, such as heightened stress, intrusive thoughts, and emotional exhaustion. It underscores the importance of support structures, self-care, and organisational awareness to mitigate the risk of cumulative stress and maintain the wellbeing of those indirectly affected by others' trauma.

**What are the signs of burnout?**

Recognising signs of burnout is important for early detection and the ability to implement strategies to address concerns. Early detection and management is crucial for individual wellbeing and in maintaining a healthy work environment. Some signs to look out for include (but are not limited to):

1. **Reduced Work Performance:** A decline in work performance, efficiency, and productivity.
2. **Persistent Fatigue:** Feeling consistently tired, both physically and emotionally, despite adequate rest.
3. **Cynicism and Detachment:** Developing a negative and cynical attitude towards work, colleagues, or clients, accompanied by a sense of detachment from the workplace.
4. **Mood Instability:** Heightened irritability, impatience, or a short temper in professional interactions.
5. **Neglect of Personal Needs:** Ignoring one's own physical and emotional needs, such as proper nutrition, exercise, and relaxation.
6. **Health Issues:** Frequent headaches, stomach aches, or other physical symptoms without an apparent cause.
7. **Concentration and attention difficulties:** Trouble focusing, making decisions, or maintaining attention to detail.
8. **Increased Absenteeism:** Taking more sick days or unplanned time off.

**Burnout assessment tool**

It is helpful to check on your warning signs and get an idea of how your mental health is going, so here is a link to check for yourself: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/mental-health/check-your-mental-health>

**\*PLEASE NOTE:** this is NOT a formalised assessment or diagnostic tool, it is a resource for wellbeing check-ins. If you have concerns or are worried about your results, please consult with your GP or Mental Health Practitioner as soon as possible.

**what to do if you are worried**

**For an employer/supervisor:** If you are worried about a person you are supervising, it is important to approach the person with care, empathy and compassion and understand that some people do not want to discuss their difficulties or how they are feeling. Ensuring you are respecting a person’s right to privacy and dignity is important in being able to support them. Please see the following links and helpful resources for supporting someone in the workplace who be experiencing burnout

[Maslach Burnout Toolkit (AWS + MBI) - Assessments, Tests | Mind Garden - Mind Garden](https://www.mindgarden.com/184-maslach-burnout-toolkit)

**For a peer:** If you are worried about someone you are working with and they have disclosed concerns about their own wellbeing to you, it is important to remember there are many options for support for them and yourself. You are encouraged to speak openly with them about the things you are worried about and give them hope that things can help them, then you can link them to the services below.

**For an individual:** If you are experiencing the above symptoms and feel you are at risk of burnout, please take these signs seriously and seek support via your GP or mental health practitioner. Please see some helpful links below:

* [Beyond Blue - Find a mental health professional](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/find-a-mental-health-professional)
* [1300 MH CALL: Mental health access line | Health and wellbeing | Queensland Government (www.qld.gov.au)](https://www.qld.gov.au/health/mental-health/help-lines/1300-mh-call)
* [Find a GP (General Practice) near you | healthdirect](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services/guided-search/general-practice)

**\*PLEASE NOTE:** It is important to note that individuals and employers are not trained clinicians and are not required to be offering clinical support to people experiencing mental health concerns or high levels of burnout. Please refer to the organisation’s wellbeing policy for expectations of support roles within the organisation and how to best assist someone in the workplace.

**workplace obligations and requirements**

As of 2022, it is a requirement that all entities undertaking any business functions within Australia must ensure (so far as is reasonably practicable) that workers and other persons are not exposed to risks to their psychological or physical health and safety, and must eliminate psychosocial risks in the workplace, or if that is not reasonably practicable, minimise these risks so far as is reasonably practicable (Safe Work Australia, 2022). As a result, Codes of Practice have been introduced for all businesses as practical guides to achieving the standards of health and safety, required under the model Work Health and Safety (WHS) Act and Regulations.

This Code of Practice on managing psychosocial hazards at work is an approved code of practice under section 274 of the WHS Act ([Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (legislation.gov.au)](about:blank). Under the model WHS laws, a person conducting a business or employer, must manage psychosocial risks (e.g. risks to mental health) at work.

**mental health effects on the workplace**

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| **Negative implications for declining mental wellness** | **Positives of mentally well workplaces** |
| In Australia, there have been significant improvements in becoming more mentally healthy at work, but there is more work to do. | Research shows investment in mental health has a positive return, ranging from an average of $2.30 upwards for each dollar invested. |
| Nearly 1 in 5 people experience poor mental health each year. Nearly half of us will experience poor mental health during our lives. | Employees feel more engaged with the workplace and positive sense of wellbeing while at work. |
| Many people spend a third of their lives at work. | Mentally well workplaces are proven to improve productivity and outcomes. |
| Poor mental health costs the Australian economy $12.2bn - $22.5bn each year (according to the Australian Government Productivity Commission). | Mentally well workplaces are more likely to attract and retain staff.  (Beyond Blue, 2022) |

# Aligned practice principles

**Workforce Optimisation:**

* Establish a wellbeing check-in system with staff to monitor their wellbeing and identify any early signs of stress or burnout.
* Offer training sessions and resources on stress management techniques, resilience-building strategies, and self-care practices.
* Foster and cultivate a culture where colleagues support each other and feel empowered to seek help when needed, by encouraging team bonding activities, peer support networks, and mentorship programs.
* Offer flexible work arrangements and recognise the diverse needs of staff members, allowing opportunities such as remote work, flexible hours, or compressed work weeks.
* Provide holistic wellbeing programs that address various aspects of staff wellness, including physical, mental, and emotional health, such as; workshops, wellness challenges, and access to resources such as counselling services.

**Safety and Wellbeing First:**

* Develop and communicate clear processes for reporting safety concerns or incidents to appropriate authorities and management and having safe options for people to report their own safety and wellbeing concerns.
* Foster a culture of safety awareness among staff members by regularly discussing safety topics, sharing best practices, discussing wellbeing and burnout, and recognising proactive safety behaviours.

**Development focused:**

* Place significant emphasis on the importance of self-care and work-life balance as integral components of professional development, whereby resources and support for staff are included in support planning and workforce development actions.

**Trauma-Informed Approaches:**

* Provide comprehensive training on trauma-informed practice and ensure staff members understand the prevalence of trauma, its effects on individuals, and how to recognise signs of trauma in themselves and others.
* Foster a work environment that prioritises safety, trust, and support for all of the workforce, and implement policies and practices that promote psychological safety such as regular check-ins, peer support networks, and supervision.
* Provide access to trauma-informed support services, such as counselling, therapy, or peer support groups, for staff members who may need assistance in processing their own experiences of trauma or secondary trauma exposure.
* Empower and provide staff with self-care strategies and coping mechanisms to mitigate the impact of trauma on their wellbeing by offering resources and training on stress management, mindfulness, and boundary-setting.
* Promote reflective practice and continuous learning by providing opportunities for staff to participate in workshops, case consultations, or supervision sessions focused on trauma awareness and self-care strategies.

**Values-Driven Leadership:**

* Invest in the professional development and wellbeing of the workforce by providing opportunities for growth, training, and support, which can consist of paid opportunities, peer learning, collaborative practice models, case consultations and attending industry-led opportunities.

# Additional Resources and Links

*[Organisation to add]*