

# WORKING AND THRIVING BEYOND COVID-19

Optimising Health & Wellbeing



## Transitioning back to work checklist



The focus for workplaces has now shifted to returning to a ‘new normal’ of operations. South Australians should be proud of the swift and effective adoption of COVID-19 prevention measures, however, it would be unrealistic to think that workers will transition seamlessly into new or adjusted working conditions or return to “business as usual”. People will need to adjust and adapt to the next rounds of change. They may have ongoing worries about job and financial security, as well as concerns about the mental or physical health of self and loved ones. Now is the time for workplaces to reflect on their ‘new normal’ where workplace health and wellbeing is prioritised.

People who have been working remotely from home may have different feelings and views about returning to their pre-COVID work environment. Some may be excited about seeing colleagues face to face, whilst others may be stressed or anxious about losing the flexibility and perceived safety of working from home and view it as another change or disruption to life. Those who have remained in the workplace may be apprehensive or excited about colleagues returning.

# LEADERSHIP

It is important for leaders (senior and frontline managers) to be visible and clearly communicating to the workforce that health, safety and wellbeing are key priorities at this time. Leaders being accessible, listening to their teams about issues or concerns about work in the current context, and having supportive conversations are ways to maintain positive employee experiences and build a culture of care. Leaders should take time to acknowledge the efforts of employees and encourage the creation of connection and support in the workplace.

## CHECK OFF THESE QUESTIONS:

- Have leaders communicated the importance of health and wellbeing to employees? e.g. [wellbeing policy/strategy](#); discussions at team meetings?
- Do leaders understand the broad range of emotions that employees may have about returning into the workplace, or continuing work for home, and acknowledge these individual differences?
- Are leaders demonstrating vulnerability with their employees; sharing their own feelings and emotions and challenges they are facing during this time?
- Do leaders have the knowledge and skills to have a [supportive conversation with an employee who may be stressed or struggling](#) and know [what supports are available](#) for employees?
- Do leaders act as role models and [take steps to look after their own mental and physical health & wellbeing](#)?

# CONSULTATION & COMMUNICATION

In times of change, it is critical that employees feel connected to their workplace and are well informed. Employees can all react and feel differently, and these feelings need to be acknowledged. Genuine communication and consultation with employees about workplace changes as well as how health, safety and wellbeing is being managed is of the utmost importance. Workplace connections need to be kept strong whether employees are working remotely from home, are transitioning back to the workplace or have remained at their normal workplace throughout the pandemic.

## CHECK OFF THESE QUESTIONS:

- Are managers [consulting](#) early and often with employees about workplace changes and any impacts on health, safety, and wellbeing?\*
- If in place, do you ensure [Health and Safety Representatives/Committees](#) are included in the consultation?
- Is the business considering changes to flexible working arrangements policies and therefore are managers consulting on what aspects of alternative work arrangements employees enjoyed, were challenged by or would like to sustain?
- Are leaders communicating more regularly with employees, using active listening and empathy, and providing clear direction?
- Are you using all available communication methods to ensure good communication in your workplace? e.g. face to face; email, telephone, virtual platforms.

*\*Use the conversational tips on page eight and nine to help guide these conversations*

# HEALTHY HABITS IN THE WORKPLACE

Take this opportunity when moving to the 'new normal' to prioritise worker health. There has never been a better time to invest in the wellbeing of your employees. Findings from the SA Population Health Survey have shown that levels of physical activity and healthy eating habits have significantly worsened since the pandemic began. It may seem like the time to tighten the belt on the budget, but even a small investment in wellbeing programs can improve productivity, reduce absenteeism and improve workplace morale. For ideas, tools and resources to please visit [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/healthyworkers](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/healthyworkers) and [openyourworld.sa.gov.au](http://openyourworld.sa.gov.au).

## CHECK OFF THESE QUESTIONS:

- Have you checked in with your employees to ask if they've started any new healthy habits since the COVID-19 pandemic? e.g. new walking routes, virtual exercise workouts.
- Have you asked employees if there have been any challenges faced in trying to maintain wellbeing during COVID-19? e.g. increased alcohol consumption, unhealthy snacks
- Have you asked your employees how the workplace might be able to support healthier habits?
- Have you considered offering health and wellbeing initiatives on healthy eating, sleep, fatigue, drug and alcohol usage, getting active in the workplace?
- Have you considered how you could encourage/support active commuting to and from work? e.g. lockers, bike storage, showers, more flexible working arrangements.

# MANAGING HAZARDS TO STAFF MENTAL HEALTH

It is important to think about what changes have occurred to the way work is done during COVID-19 and if this has introduced new hazards and risks that can impact on the health and wellbeing of employees. For example, working from home may have challenged work-life balance with the blurring of boundaries; remote workers may feel more isolated; workplace changes may have impacted on job roles, workloads and relationships within the workplace.

## CHECK OFF THESE QUESTIONS:

- In consultation with staff, have you identified and addressed [any new hazards and risks due to COVID-19](#) that impact on mental health? e.g. workplace violence, lack of social contact
- Have you considered how jobs may have changed, and if workers are clear about new/changed roles and if additional training is required?
- Do you have a [change management plan](#) which includes communication and consultation with workers about changes to work arrangements?
- Do you provide [practical information to workers about 'switching off' and how to separate work and home lives](#), particularly if working from home arrangements are continuing?

# SUPPORTING GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

There is strong evidence from previous pandemics that there are risks of increasing mental ill health to the community. The level of anxiety and stress is still likely to be high among the workforce during the recovery phase, and the importance of focusing on mental health, self-care and building of resilience should be promoted and prioritised within your business as part of your culture of care approach.

## CHECK OFF THESE QUESTIONS:

- Have you considered offering [education, training or information on mental health, the importance of self-care and resilience techniques](#)?
- Do you talk with employees about mental health and wellbeing to help break down stigma?
- Do you promote available mental health support services such as an [Employee Assistance Program](#), or [other mental health support services](#)?
- Do you promote [COVID-19 mental health support lines](#)?
- Have leaders or peers been trained in how to have supportive conversations with someone that is stressed or struggling? e.g. [mental health first aid training](#).

# SUPPORTS AVAILABLE TO OPTIMISE WORKPLACE HEALTH AND WELLBEING

**South Australian business advisory services** – The following services, websites and information are available to support everyone (leaders and employees) with health and wellbeing.

- ReturnToWorkSA has information about [mentally healthy workplaces](#) and accessing free support and assistance, call 13 18 55 or email [mentallyhealthy@rtwsa.com](mailto:mentallyhealthy@rtwsa.com).
- SafeWork SA Advisory Service provides workplace advice and support, call 1300 365 255 or visit [SafeWork SA's website](#) for COVID 19 business resources.
- Business SA has a free Industrial Relations Advice Line and a team of Consultants to support businesses with IR/WHS issues when transitioning back to the workplace. To speak with an expert contact Business SA on (08) 8300 0000 (select option 2). The Healthy Worker Adviser funded through Wellbeing SA is available to help businesses and peak bodies in promoting workplace health and wellbeing contact (08) 8300 0000 or visit [Business SA's website](#).

**Website resources for business** – The following websites contain information and advice to support business with COVID-19 health and wellbeing.

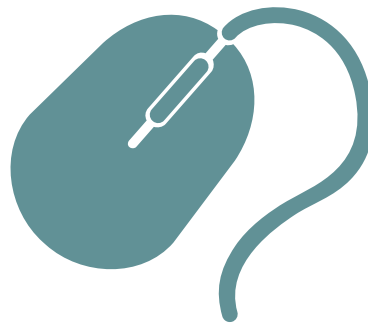
- Business SA has [COVID-19 Resources Centre](#), which contains valuable information and resources to help businesses respond to COVID-19 and plan for the future.
- Wellbeing SA's [tools and resources](#) to help you create a healthier workforce.
- [Heads Up](#) is all about giving individuals and businesses the tools to create more mentally healthy workplaces.
- SafeWork Australia has resources for businesses for COVID-19 including [psychosocial hazards](#).
- Public sector leaders find great resources for creating mentally healthy workplaces [here](#).



# SUPPORTS AVAILABLE TO OPTIMISE WORKPLACE HEALTH AND WELLBEING

**Resources for everyone** – The following services, websites and information is available to support employees with health and wellbeing

- SA Health [COVID-19 Mental Health Support web portal](#) lists virtual supports services and other resources to support the mental health of South Australians.
- Beyond Blue [Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support service and website](#) contains information, advice and strategies to help you manage your wellbeing and mental health during this time.
- [Open Your World Website](#) has information on tools and resources you need to improve your wellbeing and stay healthy, active and connected.
- [Head to Health](#) helps you to find digital mental health resources such as apps, online programs, online forums, and phone services, as well as a range of digital information resources.



# CONSULTATION CONVERSATION ABOUT TRANSITIONING BACK TO THE WORKPLACE

Before your employees return to the workplace, consider using the following questions to assess your employees' views about returning to their place of work:

## CHECK OFF THESE QUESTIONS:

- How do you feel about coming back to the workplace?
- Do you have any concerns about coming back to the workplace?
- Is there anything that I as a leader can do to help with your transition back into the workplace?
- If needed, how effectively could you maintain your work from home situation for the next X months or a combination of work and home arrangements?
- What are your biggest challenges working from home?
- What are your largest gains from working from home?
- Have you started any healthy habits since working from home and is there anything our workplace can do to help continue these healthy habits?

# EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLBEING CHECK-IN CONVERSATION

For employees working from home and transitioning back into the workplace:

- How are you going? (or how has your day/week been; how are things going)?
- Tell me about the work you are doing at the moment?
- What has been going well or according to plan?
- What (if anything) has been a challenge or a bother for you?
- What has been (or is) your way of handling that?
- How is your physical health at the moment?
- How is your emotional health at the moment?
- [Do you feel safe to continue working from home](#) or returning to work from home in future if restrictions change?
- Is there anything that I, as a leader or colleague, can do to help you? (what sort of information, action or resources might you need from others, to help you achieve what you want?)
- Be prepared to outline sources of support, such as the Employee Assistance Program (or other free mental health supports) and offer to create an individual support plan with/for them.
- Ensure to document your conversations and always follow up on agreed actions.



Wellbeing SA



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