

# Mental Health First Aid Officers in the Workplace

Take the next step with your training

**Every day millions of Australians go to work while experiencing a mental health problem. The impact of this, for both the individual and employer can be enormous, affecting productivity, performance, well-being and safety.**

More and more workplaces are recognising the benefits of creating mentally healthy workplaces and fostering a culture of care, where employees feel supported and encouraged to talk openly about mental health. This is also a responsibility in terms of Workplace Health and Safety.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Australia training has been identified as a practical tool for creating a mentally healthy workplace. Many businesses now use MHFA Australia training as part of their broader health and well-being strategy.

In addition to actively supporting staff to complete an MHFA Australia course and become an accredited Mental Health First Aider, many workplaces are also appointing Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Officers and establishing a network and resources to support the role.

## **What is an MHFA Officer?**

An MHFA Officer has completed their MHFA Australia training and accreditation. They have the confidence and skills to recognise and respond to a co-worker who may be experiencing a mental health problem and are the designated person within their organisation, to offer initial, mental health support to other employees.

The MHFA Officer role complements formal support services like Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), but sits outside of Human Resources and Health and Safety functions.

The role of an MHFA Officer is voluntary and employees fulfil the position at the same time as their paid duties.

**Being an MHFA Officer is the ideal role for people who are passionate about mental health, the well-being of others and developing their skills in the workplace.**

Mental health first aid is the initial help offered to someone who is experiencing a mental health problem or a mental health crisis. The first aid is given until appropriate professional help is received or the crisis resolves.





## What are the benefits of appointing an MHFA Officer?

### Improves Knowledge, Attitudes and Skills

MHFA Officers report that they feel more competent and confident to have a mental health first aid conversation with a co-worker and encourage professional help. They demonstrate a workplace's commitment to improving mental health literacy, reducing stigma and promoting help seeking.

### Increases Support

Workplaces report that MHFA Officers provide valuable support to staff, by facilitating early intervention and encouraging employees to speak openly about mental health.

### Improves Workplace Culture

Appointing MHFA Officers is a positive way to demonstrate that your organisation cares about individual and workplace well-being. It can strengthen a supportive workplace culture by improving cohesion, morale, communication and employee engagement.

### Complements Existing Services

MHFA Officers work with existing workplace networks, encouraging use of EAP programs and other workplace and external services.

### Contributes to Workplace Outcomes

Studies suggest a correlation between employee mental ill health and issues such as reduced productivity, absenteeism, presenteeism and health and safety risks. Workplaces who invest in well-being resources can contribute to positive outcomes for both their staff and organisation.



## How to select an MHFA Officer?

**We encourage workplaces to offer MHFA Australia training to all staff. Once you have trained MHFAiders, you can then appoint people to the MHFA Officer role.**

When looking for an MHFA Officer it is important to consider:

- Inviting Expressions of Interest from Accredited MHFAiders in your workplace.
- Identifying Accredited MHFAiders who you think have the right skills and disposition, and invite them to take the role.
- Engaging staff and seeking their input on how to select MHFA Officers.
- Diversity – consider culture, gender, age, level of seniority and roles.
- Access – have a spread of accessible MHFA Officers across different sections and locations depending on your organisation's size, geography and office layout.

These considerations improve the likelihood that a person experiencing a mental health problem will identify someone capable, accessible and approachable that they can talk to.



### MHFA Officers ARE:

Formally appointed by their workplace.

A volunteer who is committed to accepting these additional duties.

A trusted peer support for initial contact, assistance and referrals.

An informal way of accessing support, outside of Human Resources or a Manager.

Able to escalate matters if required in a prompt and appropriate fashion according to their relevant organisational policies and procedures.

A valuable complement to other support services such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAP).



### MHFA Officers ARE NOT:

Counsellors, mediators or a dispute resolution mechanism.

A substitute for professional support services such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) or other external clinical supports.

A replacement for Human Resources.

Expected to fix problems or have all the answers – instead they empower and assist employees to seek further support.



## How to promote access to MHFA Officers?

Once you have appointed your MHFA Officer, it is important to ensure that staff know who that person is, the scope of the role and their availability.

Some of the ways you can promote MHFA Officers:

- Include information about MHFA Officers during your induction process.
- Providing email signatures, a lanyard or pin that identifies your MHFA Officer.
- Have MHFA Officers identifiable at any workplace health and wellbeing events.
- Use the MHFA Australia templates to develop posters with the photos and contact details of your workplace MHFA Officers.
- Display posters throughout the workplace in high traffic areas, including noticeboards, meeting rooms, bathrooms and post on virtual channels such as the intranet.



## How can you support your MHFA Officers?

The role of an MHFA Officer can often be time consuming and emotionally demanding, so providing support is essential. It is also important that MHFA Officers have the support of their manager, including an understanding that at times their MHFA Officer role may take them away from their duties.

Some of the ways to support and connect your MHFA Officers include:

- Having a central point of contact – a dedicated person to reach out to for coordination, debriefing and support.
- Ensuring they feel connected to and supported by their peers and that their contribution to a mentally healthy workplace is valued.
- Bringing your MHFA Officers together for regular meetings and connection.
- Ensuring they have someone they can escalate matters to and connect with when needed.
- Keeping their skills and accreditation up to date via MHFA Australia refresher training.
- Considering extending their skills through training in MHFA Australia specialised courses or with guest speakers to enhance their knowledge and skills.
- Keeping them connected with other, internal MHFAiders, MHFA Officers and the MHFAiders external to your workplace, through MHFAider network updates and events.



## What is the right number of MHFA Officers for your workplace?

A good rule of thumb is to have the same number of MHFA Officers as physical first aid officers. However, it is often more beneficial to aim for diversity, consider culture, gender, age, level of seniority and roles. Achieving diversity helps increase the likelihood that everyone will find someone in the organisation they feel comfortable talking with.



## What's next?

### Once you have appointed MHFA Officers in your workplace, why not be recognised for your efforts?

The MHFA Skilled Workplace Program recognises and celebrates workplaces for their commitment to Mental Health First Aid Australia training and creating a mentally healthy workplace.

For more details about the skilled workplace program visit: [mhfa.com.au/skilledworkplace](https://mhfa.com.au/skilledworkplace)



## Reach out to us today!

For more information and to access the full suite of resources, including the full MHFA Officer Position Description visit [mhfa.com.au](https://mhfa.com.au) OR contact [workplaces@mhfa.com.au](mailto:workplaces@mhfa.com.au) for more information.