MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING: AN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE FOR YOUR WORKPLACE
No doubt, you’re already thinking about how you can create a mentally healthy workplace.

You are not alone; more and more workplaces are realising the impact that mental health problems at work have on their people and productivity.

Encouraging early help-seeking is one way to promote a mentally healthy workplace. Given that most working adults spend the majority of their day at work, the workplace is where the early signs and symptoms of a developing mental health problem can often be first noticed.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is an evidence-based training course which gives your employees the skills and confidence to have supportive conversations with their co-workers and help guide them to professional help if needed. Research shows that MHFA courses increase knowledge, confidence and helping behaviours, and reduce stigma.

Whether you have already started delivering MHFA at work, or are still considering it, this guide will step you through how to deliver MHFA with impact.

We are here to help you along your journey. If you need any support or have any questions, please contact us at:

mhfa@mhfa.com.au
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In the framework to promote mentally healthy workplaces, there are five strategies that workplaces should address.

MHFA training fits under the fourth strategy ‘Promoting and facilitating early help-seeking.’

MHFA courses are designed to promote and facilitate early help-seeking, by building competencies in individuals who may come into close contact with those showing early signs of a mental health problem or crisis, such as co-workers, managers or clients.

As such, it is a key component of any workplace mental health strategy.

Framework to promote mentally healthy workplaces
1. Designing work to minimise harm
2. Building organisational resilience
3. Enhancing individual resilience
4. Promoting and facilitating early help-seeking
5. Supporting recovery and return to work

MHFA courses are based on evidence of what is best practice mental health first aid to support someone who has a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. This evidence has been developed in partnership with the University of Melbourne, through developing expert consensus guidelines for providing mental health first aid for a number of different mental health problems, crises and in different contexts.

"MHFA training is not only valuable for the people living with disabilities that we support at work, but moreover this training has equipped our employees with skills so they can take better care of themselves and their immediate families. Caring for each other is core to who we are and our company values. MHFA training underpins that better than any other form of training.”

Mobo Group, SA

Once developed, our courses are evaluated to assess the outcomes. These evaluations have shown that MHFA training is associated with:

- Improved knowledge of mental illnesses, their treatments and appropriate first aid strategies.
- Confidence in providing first aid to a person experiencing a mental health problem.
- Decreases in stigmatising attitudes.
- Increases in the amount and type of support

"MHFA is an important life skill. It has provided our staff with the tools and knowledge to breakdown stigma and support mental health conditions in the workplace.”

Department of Industry, Innovation & Science

Completing an MHFA course helps staff to develop the skills to support a co-worker, friend or family member. This can contribute to building a more supportive and open workplace culture. The skills are transferable to all sorts of situations, so can have a positive impact both within the workplace and in the broader community.

“John Holland’s experience with MHFA has been really positive. It has been a great tool in promoting mental health in our workplace and encouraging our people to look out for one another, both in the workplace and out in the community.”

John Holland
SKILLS BASED

MHFA courses teach people mental health first aid skills. Like physical first aid, the MHFA course teaches a practical Action Plan, ALGEE, to guide the support provided. MHFA is complementary to other workplace mental health training programs that are aimed at building awareness of mental health problems in the workplace. It differs from most of these programs with its focus on equipping employees with the knowledge, skills and confidence to provide appropriate support to a co-worker who may be experiencing mental health problems.

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID ACTION PLAN

A pproach the person, assess and assist with any crisis
L isten and communicate non-judgementally
G ive support and information
E ncourage the person to get appropriate professional help
E ncourage other supports

"I think the biggest benefit is the conversation framework, we’ve been calling the ALGEE framework that internally, because it’s really helped people understand how they take that first step, how they say those first words”

FLEXIBLE DELIVERY

MHFA Australia has a ‘train the instructor’ model where we train and accredit suitably experienced individuals as Accredited Instructors to deliver our programs. This means that you can train instructors internally or contract an external instructor to deliver MHFA in your workplace.

We also recognise that different workplaces have different requirements, so our courses can be delivered flexibly, either in two full days or a series of shorter modules, as well as through a blended model of eLearning and face-to-face training.

To make it more relevant and engaging for your workplace, there are a range of course materials such as films, case studies, and support resources for different settings which you can choose from.
"Incredibly valuable, relevant and worthwhile course to do. It has raised awareness and confidence in the staff to be able to have the right conversations at the right time.”

Western Australian Symphony Orchestra

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AIDER ACCREDITATION

Participants who complete a MHFA course can take an online assessment to become an Accredited Mental Health First Aider (MHFAider). Accreditation is valid for three years and is recognised via a personalised digital Certificate of Accreditation.

Accredited MHFAiders will:

- Have successfully passed a standardised Accreditation Assessment testing their mental health first aid knowledge and skills.
- Become part of the MHFAider community, access the MHFAider eNewsletters and join the online Facebook community; with resources designed to reinforce mental health first aid knowledge and skills.
- Be eligible to be appointed as a MHFA Officer (MHFAO) in their workplace.
- Be eligible to complete a shorter MHFA Refresher Course to renew their accreditation in three years’ time.
DELIVERING MHFA IN YOUR WORKPLACE

“We cannot keep up with the demand of people wanting these programs to be delivered, not just with our corporate employees but with families and with our supply chain and our stakeholders – it is so important to us.”

GUIDE TO MHFA COURSES

Standard Mental Health First Aid Course

The Standard MHFA course teaches people how to provide initial support to other adults who may be experiencing a mental health problem or mental health crisis until appropriate professional help is received or the crisis resolves, using a practical, evidence-based Action Plan.

This course is based on guidelines developed through the expert consensus of people with lived experience of mental health problems and professionals.

**Delivery:** A 12-hour course that is usually delivered as either a 2-day training package, or as 4 separate 1/2 day modules. There is also a blended option, with an online component.

Participants who complete this course can take an online assessment to become an Accredited MHFAider.

MHFA: Engaging Leaders*

This brief introductory session, intended for leaders and managers, will provide a ‘taster’ of what is taught in the MHFA course, as well as a space to discuss the challenges and opportunities of managing mental health problems in the workplace.

It is recommended for management thinking about introducing MHFA to their workplace or as a complement where MHFA training is being rolled out within an organisation.

**Delivery:** A 90-minute face-to-face workshop

*This course does not lead to MHFAider accreditation.

For more information about our courses, visit mhfa.com.au/courses
There are three ways to deliver MHFA training across your workplace.

**OPTIONS FOR DELIVERING MHFA**

1. **ACCREDIT AN EMPLOYEE TO DELIVER THE PROGRAM INTERNALLY**

Many workplaces train one or more employees as Accredited MHFA Instructors to deliver MHFA courses for their workplace; which can be a cost effective and sustainable option.

Details on how to accredit an employee as an MHFA Instructor are here: [mhfa.com.au/be-an-instructor](http://mhfa.com.au/be-an-instructor)

2. **FIND AN INSTRUCTOR TO DELIVER MHFA FOR YOUR WORKPLACE**

MHFA Australia trains and accredits instructors to deliver our courses nationally, who are independent and not employed by MHFA Australia. Instructors receive ongoing support and undertake continuing professional development to promote quality and consistency in course delivery.

You can view Accredited Instructor profiles on our website to find someone who is right for your organisation.


3. **BOOK EMPLOYEES ONTO A PUBLIC TRAINING COURSE**

Instructors also deliver MHFA courses for members of the public.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL DELIVERY
OF MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

Here are some suggestions to enhance the impact of Mental Health First Aid training in the workplace.

1 STRONG LEADERSHIP SUPPORT
Consider engaging a leadership champion early who can promote the benefits of training and explain what the workplace is trying to achieve. The ‘MHFA: An overview for Senior Leaders’ session is a good way to engage leaders and encourage them to attend the 2-day MHFA course. Having a leader introduce the course at the start of Day 1, thank participants for attending, and explain why the training is important to the workplace can help to engage participants.

2 COMMUNICATE THE BIGGER PICTURE
If participants understand why the organisation is delivering MHFA and what strategy or plan it sits within, it is easier for them to see how the training will be useful for them. This will help staff to be enthusiastic about attending the training, and also about using the skills and knowledge after the course.

3 VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Participants should be given the opportunity to choose to attend, or opt out of training. Having early champions for the program is important to its success, so having people volunteer for the course who are interested can create champions early on that will promote the training to others. Before attending the training, participants should be told the purpose of the course, and what content will be covered.

4 ACTIVE COORDINATION OF THE MHFAider NETWORK
Make the most of the two-day investment in building attendees’ skills by continuing to engage with your workplace MHFAider network and give them opportunities to consolidate their skills. Encourage participants to become accredited MHFAiders. You could also consider assigning a coordinator to create and manage a formal MHFA Officer network (see Tips on page 13).
“It’s been really hard to find really good providers that will work with corporates to the level of expectations we have, so having something like MHFA... was a real game-changer for us. So we know that categorically across all of our locations... we’re going to be able to offer a program to employees that is going to help them, their families, the community, and it’s consistent...”

INFORMATION FOR MULTINATIONALS

FACE-TO-FACE COURSES
MHFA has been licensed to organisations in over 25 countries. Each licensee has tailored the MHFA program to be culturally suitable for the local context, including translation, inclusion of relevant statistics, pathways to help-seeking and resources.
To access MHFA training in one of these countries, please contact the licensee in the relevant country:
mhfainternational.org

eLEARNING COURSES
MHFA has an eLearning course that is available for staff of Australian multinationals who are based in countries where there are no face-to-face courses available.
For more information, visit:
mhfa.com.au/courses/elearning/26733

TRAINING EMPLOYEES TO BE ACCREDITED MHFA INSTRUCTORS
Employees training to become an Accredited MHFA Instructor for their workplace must complete their Instructor training in the country in which they work. Once accredited, they can only deliver MHFA courses within that country. Courses are tailored for specific contexts so that they are appropriate for the context and their participants.
mhfainternational.org
It is common for workplaces to appoint physical first aid officers. Now, many workplaces are also seeing the value of appointing skilled individuals to provide mental health first aid within their workplace.

Appointing Mental Health First Aid Officers (MHFAOs) in your workplace is a positive way to demonstrate that your organisation cares about individual well-being. MHFAOs are trained to provide initial informal support to other employees in the workplace, outside of Human Resources and Workplace Health & Safety departments. They can complement formal support services, like Employee Assistance Programs (EAP).

MHFAOs are accredited MHFAiders who are appointed to provide mental health first aid within their worksite as required.

As part of building a mentally healthy workplace, many industries and organisations are making MHFAOs a workplace requirement. For example, the Downer Group, Lendlease and law firm Norton Rose Fullbright all have nominated MHFAOs. The South Australian Public Service Enterprise Agreement requires workplaces to train the same number of staff in MHFA as there are Health and Safety Representatives (HSR) and First Aid Officers at the workplace.
INCREASES SUPPORT
Workplaces report that MHFAOs provide valuable support to staff, by encouraging employees to speak openly about mental health and being able to facilitate early intervention.

“The conversations on mental health that happen at work have increased ten-fold since we started Mental Health First Aid, and our entire push for mental health. It’s a regular conversation now as opposed to it being isolated, you regularly hear people talking about it.”

“Having MHFAOs... it’s showing that the organisation cares about your well-being not just your billable hours and having you in the office from you know nine to six or whatever, they care about you as an individual.”

IMPROVES KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND SKILLS
MHFAOs report that they feel competent and confident to have an MHFA conversation and encourage professional help in their workplace.

COMPLEMENTS EXISTING SERVICES
MHFAOs work with existing workplace supports, encouraging staff to make use of EAP and other services.

IMPROVES WORKPLACE CULTURE
Appointing MHFAOs is a positive way to demonstrate that your organisation cares about individual well-being. It can strengthen a supportive workplace culture and improve cohesion, staff retention and engagement.

“From the couple of people that I’ve spoken to they’ve said that it’s so nice to have someone to talk to that isn’t HR, and isn’t quite as formal as feeling like you’re raising an issue, so that’s really good.”
We encourage workplaces to offer all staff MHFA training, with additional selection processes established to appoint some staff who are Accredited MHFAiders as Mental Health First Aid Officers (MHFAOs).

When appointing MHFAOs, consider initially training influencers who can act as champions for the program, before establishing a broader network of officers across the organisation.

There are a number of different approaches to selecting who should be an MHFAO, for example you could:

- invite EOIs from Accredited MHFAiders in your workplace (with or without a formal selection process),
- identify MHFAiders who you think have the skills and invite them to take the role,
- or open it up for your team to decide how to select MHFAOs in each area of the organisation.

You’ll need to find what’s right for your organisation and be prepared to be flexible, as your needs may change over time.

It is a good idea to document the requirements of the MHFAO role in your organisation before you start.

HOW MANY MHFAOs SHOULD WE HAVE?

Rather than aiming for a particular ratio, like is done with physical first aid officers in the workplace, we encourage workplaces to instead aim for diversity, with MHFAOs differing in seniority, position, gender, sexual orientation and cultural background and accessible within every team. In this way, it increases the likelihood that someone developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis will find someone in the organisation they feel comfortable talking with.
It is important that Mental Health First Aid Officers (MHFAOs) have support from their direct supervisors to undertake the role, including understanding that at times the role may take them away from their usual duties.

The role of an MHFAO can be more time-consuming and emotionally demanding than that of a physical first aid officer, so providing support to MHFAOs is essential. As a start, we suggest having a central point of contact for MHFAOs, so that they have someone to reach out to for debriefing and support. This person should also be an MHFA Instructor or Accredited MHFAider.

It is also important that MHFAOs feel connected and supported by their peers. Consider the following strategies to maintain engagement and retention:

- Regular face-to-face gatherings for MHFAOs
- Refresher training every three years to maintain Mental Health First Aider Accreditation
- Additional training and guest speakers to complement and enhance their knowledge and skills
- Further training via MHFA specialised courses
- An online space for MHFAOs to safely share their experiences, whilst protecting the confidentiality of colleagues they may have assisted
- Encourage them to engage with the wider MHFAider community via the MHFAider Facebook group or signing up to the newsletter.

MHFAOs should be promoted regularly and through a variety of means to continue to remind staff of their availability, role and the organisations support of mental health problems at work. Here is a list of ideas:

- Include information about MHFAOs wherever other first aid officers are listed e.g. noticeboards and intranet
- Mention MHFAOs during staff induction
- Think of ways MHFAOs can signal their role to others e.g. door sticker, desk sign, lapel pin, lanyard or caps
- Display posters around the office
- Have MHFAOs identifiable at other health and well-being events
- If staff are exposed to a traumatic event in the workplace, remind staff that MHFAOs are available.
DOCUMENATION

Workplaces should be clear with MHFAOs and all staff about what documentation they require and what the purpose of the documentation is, so that concern about confidentiality does not become a barrier to people having conversations with MHFAOs and seeking help.

Based on our research, we suggest that MHFAOs document their conversations only if a MHFA conversation is ongoing (i.e. over a period of weeks or months) and not resolving. This may be documented in the form of a diary entry rather than something formal on the person’s HR record or file.

If a risk to safety is identified, the MHFAO should document the conversation and escalate immediately.

POLICY

Mental Health First Aid Australia have created a MHFA Officer Policy Template which you can tailor and use for your organisation.

Visit bit.ly/mhfao-policy to download the template.
**TIPS FOR EVALUATING YOUR MHFA PROGRAM**

- Plan your evaluation, ideally before you begin your program – think about what you need to know about the program and how you will gather that information.
- Evaluate the implementation of the program:
  - was it rolled out as intended, e.g. training participation rates; the appointment and retention of MHFAOs; development and use of policies, etc.
  - were there aspects that didn’t work or did not get implemented
  - were there any barriers that impacted on the program’s implementation?
- Evaluate the impact of the program in your workplace:
  - changes in staff knowledge, attitudes and behaviours (MHFA Australia has resources for formally evaluating the courses impact on knowledge, attitudes and behaviours)
  - staff satisfaction
  - knowledge about and usage of MHFAOs
- Consider who you will collect information from and how you will do this:
  - seek feedback from course participants, MHFAOs, senior leadership, all staff, etc.
  - use appropriate methods to gather information, such as staff satisfaction surveys, interviews, records of courses run and staff trained.

Remember to share the insights you gain and provide feedback to management, employees and stakeholders. Learn from the evaluation and use the results to improve your program over time, and most importantly celebrate your successes!

**TIP**
You can use the Actions in the MHFA Skilled Workplace Program Planning Tool for suggestions on how to successfully embed and expand your MHFA program.
Now that you have thought through your delivery of MHFA, why not also plan to be recognised for your efforts! The MHFA Skilled Workplace Program recognises and celebrates workplaces for their commitment to Mental Health First Aid training.

Participating in the program is a clear demonstration of your commitment to building a mentally healthy workplace, both to your staff and your external stakeholders.

“Nexus Primary Health chose to become a MHFA Skilled Workplace due to the program being so highly regarded in the community.”

Suzanne Miller, Chief Executive
Nexus Primary Health

There are three levels of recognition available; gold, silver and bronze. Recognised MHFA Skilled Workplaces receive:

- An electronic Certificate of Recognition
- A digital badge, that can be used on their email signature or website
- Their company logo featured on the MHFA Australia website
- Their company being publically recognised in the MHFA Australia Annual Report and possibly appearing across a range of our public communication channels.

HOW TO APPLY

It is free to apply anytime during the year via an online application form, that is available on our website.

To be recognised, workplaces must achieve both criteria:

1. The minimum percentage of staff trained within the last three years; and
2. The minimum number of actions completed, which demonstrates the commitment to MHFA in their workplace.

Download the full criteria, application form and planning tool at:

mhfa.com.au/skilledworkplace

“The department is committed to providing a mentally healthy workplace for its workers, and to providing excellent service to the Australian public. Being a MHFA Skilled Workplace provides confidence to our workers and the public that the department is utilising an Australian developed, internationally recognised and evidence based model to meet these aims.”

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
CASE STUDY: BUILDING HEALTHY MINDS
DOWNER PRIORITISES MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

Downer Group, Australia’s leading integrated services provider with more than 56,000 employees, is educating their workforce in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA). Natasha Palethorpe, Downer’s Group Health Manager and MHFA Instructor, said: “When we were considering which type of training would be of the greatest benefit to employees, we decided that MHFA was crucial.”

“In the four years we have been delivering the course, we have trained more than 500 employees, and that number is growing every month.” A number of sites and offices also have nominated MHFAiders, who have completed the MHFA program. “Alongside the First Aid Officers and Health & Safety Representatives, you will also see MHFAiders listed.”

Several of Downer’s leaders have expressed their interest to roll out the program more broadly.

“Our role is to change the culture surrounding mental health from the ground up, by promoting workable health and wellbeing strategies in every state, territory, offices, project and site.”

The value of the MHFA course is its highly practical approach, says Natasha.

“Attendees learn to notice signs and symptoms of poor mental health in themselves and in others. The MHFA ALGEE Action Plan, for example, can be used in any scenario and the course is designed in a way that is easy to understand for those with limited mental health experience.”

MHFA training is also responsive and flexible to each of Downer’s different work environments. Case studies within the course are tailored to specific work groups and the flexible delivery options can accommodate production times, including night shifts.

“We have to be creative in how we deliver the course. We can deliver it across several weeks or in two-day blocks. Our training venues can be anything from offices, work sites or in local community venues.”

The course has not only proven to be valuable to Downer employees, but also to the local communities in which Downer operates.

“MHFA training is very much needed in rural and remote areas, many of which experience high suicide rates and mental health problems. We have run workshops for entire communities, upskilling everyone in attendance. The stigma around mental illness is extensive and we are working hard to break down this barrier.”

Natasha affirms Downer’s determination to tackle this important and significant health issue. “Downer has made an incredible effort to care for employees by prioritising mental health awareness and providing MHFA courses. As well as drawing awareness to mental health, Downer has made a large financial and organisational commitment to do something about reducing stigma and increasing understanding of mental health and wellbeing.”

Natasha and her team have ambitions to expand the program even further across the organisation.

“We would love to see this program grow and are steadily building our profile across all the organisation. It is exciting to see such a positive and enthusiastic response to the course from our leaders and employees.”
HeadsUp has a range of resources for workplaces - [headsup.org.au/healthy-workplaces](http://headsup.org.au/healthy-workplaces)

Creating a mentally healthy workplace: A guide for business leaders and managers
Learn about what steps leaders can take to create a mentally healthy workplace.

Developing a workplace mental health strategy: a how-to guide for organisations

Workplace prevention of mental health problems – Guidelines for organisations
These guidelines consist of actions organisations can take to prevent common mental health problems in the workplace.
[prevention.workplace-mentalhealth.net.au](http://prevention.workplace-mentalhealth.net.au)

Legal rights and responsibilities
Improving workplace mental health is in everyone’s interests, and we all have a role to play. Both employers and employees have formal rights and responsibilities under discrimination, privacy, and work health and safety legislation.

Workers with mental illness: a practical guide for managers
Provides information on how to support workers with mental illness and how to develop and promote a safe and healthy work environment for all workers.

Helping Australian employees successfully return to work following depression, anxiety or a related mental health problem: Guidelines for organisations
Designed to help anyone involved in the process of returning to work after absence due to depression, an anxiety disorder or a related mental health problem.
[returntowork.workplace-mentalhealth.net.au](http://returntowork.workplace-mentalhealth.net.au)

Superfriend has a range of resources with practical information to help improve the mental health of the workplace: [superfriend.com.au/resources](http://superfriend.com.au/resources)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the individuals who participated in this research for sharing their experiences of MHFAOs in their workplaces.