

Why Mental Health First Aid is Suitable Workplace Training

Mental Health Problems in the Workplace

Most people now know that mental health problems are common and disabling. Employees struggling with mental health problems may find it difficult to maintain their usual levels of productivity, leading to presenteeism¹ and absenteeism.

Unfortunately, there may not be many people in a workplace who would know how to offer help to a co-worker who is developing depression, troublesome anxiety or a substance use disorder. In other cases, a co-worker may be unsure if it is appropriate to offer help and perhaps only intervene once someone reaches a crisis, such as suicidal thinking. Fortunately, mental illnesses often develop slowly. Given that the majority of adults spend more time at work than elsewhere, the workplace is where the early signs and symptoms of a developing mental health problem can first be noticed.

About Mental Health First Aid and Workplace Training

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is an evidence-based first aid course focused on acquiring knowledge and strategies to improve the confidence and skill to offer help to someone showing the signs and symptoms of a developing mental health problem or a mental health crisis. Like traditional first aid, MHFA teaches an easy to remember 'Action Plan' called *ALGEE* in order to be able to know how to offer support to a person developing a mental illness or experiencing a mental health crisis. The skills learned in MHFA training are beneficial inside and outside the workplace.

The MHFA Program is the only *internationally recognised evidence-based anti-stigma mental health training program for workplaces*.² MHFA training leads to improved knowledge of mental illness, confidence to help someone with a mental illness, and reduces unhelpful stigmatising attitudes that can prevent people from seeking help early.³ For more information on the evidence-base see mhfa.com.au/research/mhfa-course-evaluations

MHFA is *complementary* to other workplace mental health training programs that are aimed at building awareness of mental health problems in the workplace. MHFA training differs from most of these programs in that it is focused on skills-based training, not only awareness-raising. In order to support a skilled mental health first aid workplace culture, it would be ideal if every employee had appropriate knowledge and skills in how to help each other. However, identifying and training appropriate key staff in mental health first aid strategies can be a cost-effective starting point. Just like regular First Aid Officers, it makes sense to have dedicated staff across a workplace who are trained in how support co-workers experiencing a mental health problem or crisis. After receiving such training, some of these staff may even be appointed as formal 'Mental Health First Aid Officers,' alongside regular First Aid Officers. The [Blended MHFA in the Workplace Course](#) provides some tips and tools on how to implement such a policy.

¹ Defined as "employees attending work when they are unwell."

² Szeto AC, Dobson KS. Reducing the stigma of mental disorders at work: A review of current workplace anti-stigma intervention programs. *Applied and Preventive Psychology*. 2010; 14(1):41-56.

³ Hadlaczy G, Hokby S, Mkrтчian A, Carli V, Wasserman D. Mental Health First Aid is an effective public health intervention for improving knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour: A meta-analysis. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 2014; 4; 467-475; doi: 10.3109/09540261.2014.924910.



Are there flexible training options?

Yes. Flexible workplace training in mental health first aid strategies is available from MHFA Australia (a national non-profit charity) in the following formats:

- a Blended course (self-paced eLearning plus a half-day face-to-face follow-up session) or
- a Standard 12-hour face-to-face course (delivered over two days or four separate 3-hour sessions see mhfa.com.au/courses/public/types/standard).

The 2020 social distancing requirements related to the **Coronavirus pandemic** have prompted the rapid development of a third option:

- a Blended Online course (self-paced eLearning plus 2 x 2.5 hour 'face-to-face' follow-up sessions via fully interactive videoconferencing).

What does it cost and how to enrol?

The cost of the eLearning component of a Blended MHFA Course is \$150 p/person, which includes a MHFA Manual. Enrol directly at mhfa.com.au/courses/elearning. Discounts for bulk enrolments will be available from the shop.

The price of face-to-face MHFA training varies according to Instructor, as they are not employed by MHFA Australia and can set their individual fees. Your local Instructor can inform you of their individual fees. To find an Instructor see mhfa.com.au/instructors.

At no further charge, MHFA Course participants can also choose to complete a standardised online Accreditation Exam after training. Participants who successfully attempt the exam are recognised as an Accredited Mental Health First Aider for 3 years via a personalised digital Certificate of Accreditation. See mhfa.com.au/firstaider

2020 COVID-19 pricing: The cost of the eLearning component of a Blended Online MHFA Course is \$55 p/person, which includes an optional hard copy MHFA Manual. Enrol directly at mhfa.com.au/courses/elearning. Discounts for bulk enrolments will be by negotiation with MHFA, as these are already heavily subsidised. The cost of the associated videoconferencing sessions, charged separately by instructors, is \$150 or \$165 for those who must charge GST.

The Mental Health First Aid Skilled Workplaces Initiative

Workplaces who have trained a minimum percentage of their workforce in MHFA are eligible to apply to be publicly recognised as a *Mental Health First Aid Skilled Workplace*. Eligible workplaces receive recognition by receiving a custom electronic badge valid for 12 months which can be displayed on their website and publications. MHFA Australia also publicly acknowledge skilled workplaces on the [MHFA Australia](https://mhfa.com.au) website, social media, Annual Report, and newsletters. For more info see mhfa.com.au/cms/mental-health-first-aid-skilled-workplace-initiative



Public support and testimonials for workplace mental health first aid training

Policy makers

"In the next two to five years, I'd like to see that it is normal at any workplace that there is on the notice board the name of the first aid officer and then next to that the number of the mental health first aid officer..."

Tim Marney, WA Mental Health Commissioner, Oct 2014.⁴

"All workplaces should ensure an employee is trained in "first aid" mental health for any members of staff who need help, according to the [sic: British] government."

British Medical Journal, 2012 ⁵

Blended MHFA in the Workplace Course participants

"Training was well worth the wait. The Instructor was an excellent facilitator and there was plenty of value-add as well as revision (which I really needed) of the online course materials."

Merryn Lancaster, Victorian Public Sector Commission.

Blended MHFA in the Workplace Accredited Instructors

"I'll also add that the workplace course is perfect. My clients have been asking for this for such a long time. It also compliments other workplace training such as risk management and resilience building. My training repertoire is now just how I want it."

Doula Theodosi, Return to Work Consultant, Principal Master Mental Health First Aid Instructor, nb&a group.

Last updated 23/04/2020

⁴ www.watoday.com.au/wa-news/wa-businesses-encouraged-to-appoint-mental-health-officers-20141010-114aap.html

⁵ O'Dowd, A. Every workplace should have a mental health first aider, says government. BMJ 2012; 345 doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.e5087>