Learn the skills to make a difference.

MHFA OFFICER
GUIDE TO THE ROLE
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1. MHFA OFFICER
GUIDE TO THE ROLE

Mental health first aid (MHFA) is the help provided to a person who is developing a mental health problem, experiencing a worsening of an existing mental health problem or in a mental health crisis. The first aid is given until appropriate professional help is received or the crisis resolves. In the same way as learning physical first aid, MHFA teaches people how to recognise those crucial warning signs of a mental health problem and feel confident to provide appropriate support, including assisting them to get professional help.

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; that is, a Mental Health First Aid Officer. Mental Health First Aid Officers 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.

Many industries and organisations are making Mental Health First Aid Officers a workplace requirement and are establishing a network to support the role.

Appointing Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Officers in your workplace is a positive way to demonstrate that your organisation cares about individual well-being and embedding MHFA training within your workplace also encourages people to talk more freely about mental health, reducing stigma and creating a more positive culture.
2. WHAT IS A MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID OFFICER?

Mental Health First Aid Officers are accredited Mental Health First Aiders who are appointed to provide mental health first aid within their workplace, as required.

The role of the Mental Health First Aid Officer is to offer mental health first aid to individuals who are experiencing a mental health problem, a worsening of an existing mental health problem or in a mental health crisis. The first aid is given until appropriate professional help is received or the crisis resolves.

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID OFFICERS ARE:

- Formally appointed by their workplace
- A confidential peer support for initial contact, assistance and referrals
- An informal way of accessing support, outside of Human Resources or a Manager
- A valuable complement to other support services such as Employee Assistance Programs.

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID OFFICERS ARE NOT:

- Counsellors, mediation or dispute resolution mechanism
- A substitute for professional support services, such as Employee Assistance Programs
- A replacement for Human Resources
- A 'fixer' - they do not fix problems, instead, they empower and assist the employee to seek further support.
3. BENEFITS OF APPOINTING MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID OFFICERS IN THE WORKPLACE

Mental health problems often develop gradually and the symptoms can affect work performance and productivity. The workplace is often where the early signs and symptoms can first be noticed. Providing Mental Health First Aid early can assist workers in returning to their usual performance quickly and can avoid the problem worsening or a crisis emerging.

Mental Health First Aid is also a recommended strategy to creating a mentally healthy workplace(1).

There are many benefits to appointing Mental Health First Aid Officers in the workplace. Importantly, it sends a clear message to all employees that senior management takes mental health within an organisation seriously, and are committed to improving the mental health of their employees, as well as supporting those employees with a mental illness.

Providing Mental Health First Aid is a in defined key action for Creating a Mentally Healthy Workplace(1).

For every $1 spent on creating a mentally healthy workplace, there is a positive return on investment of $2.30(2)
Benefits of Appointing Mental Health First Aid Officers in the workplace:

**IMPROVES WORKPLACE CULTURE**
Appointing MHFA Officers is a positive way to demonstrate that your organisation cares about individual well-being. It can strengthen a supportive workplace culture and improve cohesion, retention and engagement(3).

**INCREASES SUPPORT**
Workplaces report that MHFA Officers provide valuable support to staff, by encouraging employees to speak openly about mental health and being able to facilitate early intervention.

**IMPROVES KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES & SKILLS**
MHFA Officers report that they feel competent and confident to have an MHFA conversation and encourage professional help in their workplace(3).

**COMPLEMENTS EXISTING SERVICES**
MHFA Officers work with existing workplace support, encouraging staff they support to make use of EAP programs and other services.
4. BECOMING A MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID OFFICER

A Mental Health First Aid Officer is an Accredited Mental Health First Aider appointed in their workplace to:

- Provide mental health first aid within their worksite as needed, at their level of competence and training.

- Escalate any matters if required in a prompt and appropriate fashion according to their relevant organisational policies and procedures.

Mental Health First Aiders attend either the Standard, Youth or Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander Mental Health First Aid course.

These courses are offered as fully face to face or in a blended format.

Participants who complete this course can take an online assessment to become an Accredited Mental Health First Aider.
5. HOW DO YOU SELECT MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID OFFICERS IN YOUR WORKPLACE?

We encourage workplaces to offer Mental Health First Aid training to all of their staff, initially training influencers who can act as champions for the program. Then from the Mental Health First Aiders you have trained, you can appoint Mental Health First Aid Officers.

When appointing Mental Health First Aid Officers, consider:

- Inviting Expressions of Interests from Accredited MHFAiders in your workplace (with or without a formal selection process)
- Identifying MHFAiders who you think have the skills and invite them to take the role
- Opening it up for your team to decide how to select MHFAOs in each area of the organization
- Establishing a broader network of officers across 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. The Mental Health First Aid Workplace Engagement team would be happy to discuss your needs with you further.
6. HOW MANY MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID OFFICERS SHOULD YOUR WORKPLACE HAVE?

One simple way is to have the same number of Mental Health First Aid Officers as physical first aid officers. However, it may be more beneficial for a workplace to aim for diversity, with MHFAOs differing in seniority, position, gender, cultural background and accessible within every team. By doing this, you increase 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.
7. RESPONSIBILITIES OF A MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID OFFICER

The responsibilities of a Mental Health First Aid Officer may vary slightly between workplaces. However, as a general guide, The Mental Health First Aid Officer(s) will:

a) Provide mental health first aid within their worksite as needed, at their level of competence and training

b) Escalate any matters, if required, in a prompt and appropriate fashion

c) Hold a current Mental Health First Aid accreditation endorsed by Mental Health First Aid Australia and be available for any additional training as required

d) Maintain their Mental Health First Aider accreditation and complete MHFA refresher training, as required

e) Be reasonably accessible to all employees and be able to be called away from their normal duties at short notice

f) Familiarise themselves with Workplace and local resources, e.g. EAP, emergency medical assistance

g) Demonstrate an ability to relate well to others

h) Be able to maintain confidentiality (as appropriate) and treat all matters sensitively and privately

i) Immediately escalate any identified risks to the safety of employees and the workplace to Human Resources, Occupational Health and Safety or other designated organisational Management representative.

j) Identify any urgent risk and contact appropriate services immediately

k) Take measures of self-care to ensure they maintain their own wellbeing and they are in a good state to provide support for others.
8. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EMPLOYER

The responsibilities of the employer may vary between workplaces, however, as a general guide, it is the responsibility of the employer to:

a) Allow the Mental Health First Aid Officers to undertake appropriate training as required

b) Advise the Mental Health First Aid Officer if there are any psychological hazards in the workplace

c) Clearly communicate to workers how they can access the help of a Mental Health First Aid Officer in suitable public areas

d) Provide an appropriate space within the workplace that is accessible and suitable for private conversations

e) Ensure employees have access to accredited Mental Health First Aid Officers at all times, where possible

f) Instruct Mental Health First Aid Officers not to provide help that is outside the scope of mental health first aid

g) Ensure workers know what to do in a mental health crisis situation

h) Provide the funding and time for the Mental Health First Aid Officer to maintain their Mental Health First Aid accreditation

i) Manage the implementation and review of this protocol

j) Communicate this protocol and any changes to all employees.

Many workplaces who have an established Mental Health First Aid Officer program develop position descriptions and policy documents. It is a good idea to document the requirements of the MHFAO role in your organisation before you start. Check out our Resources section for some free digital resources!
9. HOW TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID OFFICERS IN YOUR WORKPLACE?

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. It is also important that MHFAOs feel connected and supported by their peers.

Here are some tips to help keep them connected:

- Conduct regular face-to-face gatherings for MHFAOs
- Conduct Refresher training every three years to maintain Mental Health First Aider Accreditation
- Provide additional training and guest speakers to complement and enhance their knowledge and skills
- Consider training in the other MHFA specialised courses
- Provide an avenue for MHFAOs to safely share their experiences, whilst protecting the confidentiality of those they may have assisted
- Encourage your MHFAOs to engage with the wider MHFA community via the MHFAider Facebook group

It is important that Mental Health First Aid Officers (MHFAOs) have support from their direct manager to undertake the role, including understanding that at times the role may take them away from their usual duties.
10. USEFUL RESOURCES

Mental Health First Aid Australia has lots of free digital resources just for workplaces!

Go to https://mhfa.com.au
or contact workplaces@mhfa.com.au

These resources include:

- Building the business case for Mental Health First Aid in the workplace
- Why Implement Mental Health First Aid in the workplace?
- The success of Mental Health First Aid in the workplace
- Mental Health First Aid Policy documents
- MHFA Implementation Guide
- Guide to Mental Health First Aid Officer
- Position Description for a Mental Health First Aid Officer
- Posters to promote your Mental Health First Aid Officers in the workplace

...and much more!
11. PROMOTE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID OFFICERS ACROSS THE ORGANISATION

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 at work.

Here are some ways to promote MHFA Officers:

- Use the MHFA poster templates available at mhfa.com.au to develop posters with photos and contact details of your MHFAOs.
- Display these posters throughout the workplace, in high traffic areas and in the virtual and communication mediums within your workplace.
- Include information about MHFAOs wherever other first aid officers are listed, e.g. noticeboards, meeting rooms, staff rooms and intranet.
- Provide information about MHFAOs during staff induction.
- Think of ways MHFAOs can signal their role to others, e.g. door sticker, desk sign, lapel pin, lanyard or email signatures.
- Have MHFAOs identifiable at other health and wellbeing events at your workplace.
- If staff are exposed to a traumatic event in the workplace, remind staff that MHFAOs are available.

Use MHFA merchandise to better promote Mental Health First Aider Officers in your workplace!

12. BECOME RECOGNISED AS A MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID SKILLED WORKPLACE

The Mental Health First Aid 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.

It is our way of celebrating organisations across Australia who not only invest in developing mental health first aid skills in their people, but also show a strong commitment to embedding the program into their organisation’s culture, through actions like senior leadership support, relevant policies, supporting Mental Health First Aid Officers and continuous improvement.

HOW YOU ARE RECOGNISED

Recognised Mental Health First Aid Skilled Workplaces receive:

- CERTIFICATE
- DIGITAL BADGE
- FEATURED LOGO
- PUBLIC RECOGNITION

Further details on how to apply: mhfa.com.au/skilledworkplace
13. HOW MHFA AUSTRALIA CAN SUPPORT YOU

1. Useful Resources
Mental Health First Aid Australia has free digital resources just for workplaces!

Go to [www.mhfa.com.au](http://www.mhfa.com.au) or contact workplaces@mhfa.com.au

2. Keep up to date with our latest news and updates.

3. Join our Friends of MHFA Newsletter!

4. Check out MHFA merchandise that can help you in your role as a Mental Health First Aider!

www.mhfa.com.au/shop

5. Keep in touch with MHFA Australia
Keep up to date with the latest mental health news and campaigns.

REFERENCES


2. PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2014, Creating a mentally healthy workplace: return on investment analysis, beyondblue and the National Mental Health Commission

3. Bovopoulos, N, 2019, Development of mental health first aid for workplaces, The University of Melbourne, Centre for Mental Health

Social Media

@MHFA_Australia to share with us your stories and for news from the MHFA community

@mentalhealthfirstaid Join our Facebook group Accredited MHFAiders to connect with other MHFAiders, support each other, share experiences, challenges and to ask questions that will enable you to continue your own personal MHFAider journey.

Website

Explore our website [mhfa.com.au](http://mhfa.com.au) for:

- Free downloadable posters for Mental Health First Aiders in the workplace
- Information about our Skilled Workplace Program which recognises workplaces for their commitment to Mental Health First Aid.

Apply free of charge online at: [mhfa.com.au/skilledworkplace](http://mhfa.com.au/skilledworkplace)