

Work Well Guide

creating mentally healthy
workplaces in the
performing arts

WHAT IS THE WORK WELL GUIDE?

The Work Well Guide is a resource that provides performing arts organisations/collaborators with practical strategies and evidence-based tools and techniques for creating mentally healthy workplaces.

Your workplace might be backstage, onstage, offstage, a tour bus, a shed or anything in between – but it's still a workplace! All workplaces can benefit from taking meaningful actions to be physically, culturally, and psychologically safe.

Whether you're working with one collaborator on a profit share in a black box space, or leading a major arts institution, creating a mentally healthy workplace is vital to the success of your work and to the health and wellbeing of the people around you.

Increasingly, workplaces across all industries, including the performing arts industry, are seeing the benefits of taking a strategic approach to promoting positive mental health and wellbeing. A 'strategic approach' simply means that you're taking actions in line with a clear sense of direction and purpose towards what you wish to achieve within your unique context.

This approach guides decision making and helps ensure your actions are meaningful, and purposeful. A strategic approach also helps move mental health and wellbeing away from just focusing on individual responsibility, and ensures positive systemic and cultural change.

However, a lot of information on how to take a strategic approach to mental health and wellbeing in the workplace tends to skew towards 'traditional' workplaces, and may not address the unique contexts of the performing arts industry. To help meet this need, the Arts Wellbeing Collective has developed the Work Well Guide.

By using our unique strengths, skills and creativity, we can design creative work and workplaces where everyone is enabled and supported to thrive.

Whether you are in a leadership position, and looking to influence change, or whether you want to use the Work Well Guide to advocate for positive change in your workplace, we hope you find this resource useful.

A note on language

Throughout the Guide, we will say 'workplace' to refer to anywhere that people work, and 'company' to refer to teams and groups of any size and scale.

Arts Centre Melbourne acknowledges the traditional owners of the land on which we stand, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people, and pays respect to their Elders, past and present.

WHO DEVELOPED THE GUIDE?

The Work Well Guide is a resource from the Arts Wellbeing Collective, an Arts Centre Melbourne initiative. The content was created, reviewed and informed by a range of performing arts workplaces, leaders, managers, supervisors, and performing arts workers who shared their experiences, challenges, and ideas.

PLEASE NOTE

The Work Well Guide is not a comprehensive guide to every issue you might encounter. Reader discretion is advised.

The Work Well Guide does not take the place of support and information from Company Management, peak bodies, occupational health and safety practices, legal or medical advice, or your workplace policies and procedures.

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INTRODUCTION

Take the time to consider the following questions. You may wish to discuss this with your team, cast, crew, company, or tour party. It's ok if you don't have all the answers right now - simply considering them is a great first step to creating a mentally healthy workplace.

- 1 Why create a mentally healthy workplace? What benefits do you hope to see?
- 2 What does a mentally healthy workplace look like in your context?
- 3 If your workplace/company exists already, what is already being done well?
- 4 What additional actions can you take?

APPROACH



CREATING A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

We all want to be able to work together effectively and to benefit from our work and working relationships, rather than to experience harm from them. The ethical imperative to create mentally healthy workplaces is well known. Supporting ourselves and each other, centring equity, access, and inclusion, and ensuring safer spaces that enable creativity and productivity are widely regarded as meaningful and essential to working well.

As an industry hallmarked by constant change, we have a unique opportunity in the performing arts to set a culture that promotes mental health and wellbeing right from the start.

Whether it's the start of a new show, season, tour, project, welcoming new company members, or just the start of a new day, we are constantly offered opportunities to reflect and learn from our experiences, successes and mistakes, and to use what we learn to craft a thriving future.

In everything we do together, we have the chance to rethink problematic practices that may not have served us in the past, and actively contribute to a more resilient, vibrant and inclusive sector.

Creating a mentally healthy workplace is good for the business outcomes of the performing arts industry too. It helps us to:

- Steadfastly uphold legislative requirements for creating and maintaining a safe workplace for all performing arts workers and artists.

Understanding the broader landscape in which we're working is important to upholding our responsibilities under the law and is key to avoiding significant risk.

- Demonstrate leadership hallmarked by physical safety, psychological safety, cultural safety, equity, accessibility and inclusion.

This leadership can be a characteristic feature not only of individual leaders, but of the performing arts industry as a whole.

- Centre First Nations people and perspectives. Work in culturally intelligent and responsive ways that prioritise equity, access and inclusion for all people.

Understanding intersectional approaches to workplace mental health and wellbeing in our industry is important, not only to meet people where they are, but to disrupt and change the systems that can cause harm.

- Realise value and return on investment.

If all other reasons are unpersuasive, at least creating mentally healthy workplaces will help you save money!

PwC's return on investment study found that organisations who proactively implemented action to create a mentally healthy workplace saw that for every dollar spent, there was - on average - a return on investment of \$2.30.*

Beyondblue & PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia. (2014).
Creating a mentally healthy workplace: return on investment analysis.

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

Regardless of what role you play or what title you have, never underestimate your power to effect positive change, or the impact of your words, actions and decisions on others.

Because people don't do what you say, people do what you do.

It is especially important to regularly reflect on these things if you are a people-leader, company manager, creative leader (for example, a director or choreographer), manager or supervisor, head of department or member of an executive team. Leaders who are committed to promoting positive mental health and wellbeing at work and can articulate a clear and aligned vision on what this looks like have a crucial role to play in the success of any initiative.

Whatever leadership looks like in your context, take the time to explore ways to engage and unite leaders on the importance of positive, preventative actions to support mental health and wellbeing. This might involve speaking with board members, producers, creative leaders, and even investors and funders. If you are finding resistance to taking a preventative approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing, try to get curious about what might be causing these barriers.

Common examples include:



Different understandings of mental health and wellbeing

Some people may not know very much about mental health and wellbeing so they may be resistant to making changes they do not fully understand the value of – this is totally understandable as we are all at different stages of our individual learning journeys and have all experienced different things in our lives. This barrier might stem from a 'literacy gap', which can arise when a person's knowledge about mental health in the workplace is missing some information, or based in ideas that may have become outdated or less useful over time.

Literacy gaps happen to everyone at some point and do not mean a person's views or perspectives are 'bad'. Instead these gaps can be seen as an opportunity for growth through ongoing learning, self-education, willingness to listen to other people's perspectives, and in some cases, specific workplace training. For most people, our appetite for making positive changes increases as our understanding of the issues improves.



Perception that it will be too costly

Some people may hold the view that taking actions to better support mental health and wellbeing in the workplace is too resource-intensive, arduous, or expensive. This is a common assumption and a reasonable thing to be concerned about – after all, we are all juggling a range of priorities and managing different financial and resourcing pressures all the time. While research shows that supporting psychosocial safety in your workplace will save you money over the long term, it's true that promoting positive mental health and wellbeing will rarely make you money in the immediate term. Despite the fast-paced nature of the performing arts industry, there's very little we do that does guarantee immediate return on investment. Immediate return is not the only mark of success.

For example, your marketing strategy will likely start some weeks, months, or even years before opening night. You wouldn't simply post the time and date of the show on social media in the morning and expect a show to be sold out that night. It's likely you're not using just one channel to market your show either! Promoting positive mental health and wellbeing is similar – strategic, considered actions over time yield the best results.

The good news is that there are many positive, preventative actions that require no money, and very little time that can result in improved mental health and wellbeing outcomes. This resource is designed on the assumption that you are not in a position to invest infinite amounts time and money into creating and maintaining a mentally healthy workplace. Instead it focuses on working with what you do have – the strengths, capabilities and creativity of your company. We are all in a position to start where we are and to build on what we already do well.



If all the strategies and ideas provided in this resource have been investigated and interrogated and there is still a reticence to take action, consider whether resourcing is really the barrier, or if perhaps something else is at play.



Preference for individual resilience

There is no doubt that resilience is a much-needed skill. The ability to adapt, learn, and grow, particularly from adverse events is something we can all cultivate. Sometimes we can place too much importance on resilience though, and see 'more resilience' as the solution for creating a mentally healthy workplace.

A person can be incredibly resilient, have excellent coping strategies, actively engage in stress reduction techniques, and be well connected and supported. But, no matter how resilient someone is, if they are in a workplace that negatively impacts their mental health, they're going to struggle. Whether its over-ambitious scheduling and excessive overtime, or leadership that enables bullying and harassment, the problem is not individual resilience, but organisational culture.

Instead of asking why people can't be 'more resilient', ask what they're facing that requires so much resilience. Can it be changed? The answer is usually yes, and the answer – more often than not – is in changing systems, cultures and ways of working – not individual resilience.



Preference for reaction

Another common barrier to creating mentally healthy workplaces can stem from a desire to focus on reacting to poor mental health and wellbeing over and above preventing mental injury or harm from occurring. Supporting ourselves and our peers when we experience mental health problems is a vital piece of the puzzle. However if managing mental health problems and crisis situations is all that we focus on, we'll struggle to change, remove or mitigate the things that are causing or contributing to mental health problems in the first place.

You might have heard the phrase, 'prevention is better than a cure'. Essentially, it is better to stop something negative from happening than to address it once it's happened. What do we mean by better? Better for the organisation, who do not need to expend resources, time and energy supporting staff and covering gaps – and better for the person who does not have to live through negative event(s) and the consequences on their life.

We'd all rather stretch than pull a muscle during bump in, rotate drivers on tour rather than risk road accidents due to fatigue, test and tag leads instead of risking electrocution, and countless other examples. As with physical risks, working to mitigate and manage psychosocial hazards does not mean that nothing bad will ever happen, rather that we will put the work in early to try and reduce their likelihood and prevalence.



Creating a mentally healthy workplace is the same in many ways as creating a physically safe workplace. Ask, what's happening in our companies, work and workplaces that might have a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing? What might be a risk to mental health and wellbeing? How will we react when something does happen? And, how can we stop that from happening, or at least reduce the likelihood of it happening again in the future? This approach takes a little more time and thought, but saves significant time, money and energy in the long run.

Prevention is strange because when we are doing it well, it can seem like we aren't doing anything at all. It's fundamentally harder to quantify and track the incidents that didn't happen, the injuries that didn't occur, or the days that weren't missed. When you are exploring supporting mental health and wellbeing in your workplace, try not to get pulled into the 'treatment-only' trap when measuring the success of your actions.

It is easier to track immediate, quantifiable numbers such as how many people attended a yoga session; how many called the employee assistance program; how many attended an online learning unit and so on, but these metrics can give a false sense of true progress because they are focussed on reactionary interventions rather than preventative ones.



While reactionary initiatives can be helpful and valuable, if they don't address the causes of mental health and wellbeing problems, you'll be left in a position where you have to continue treating, responding, and reacting to the same issues that arise again and again.

Preventative actions, on the other hand, can remove or reduce the need to be constantly reactive because they address and mitigate issues at their root.

DEFINING MENTAL HEALTH

What comes to mind when you think of 'mental health'?

Interestingly, the phrase 'mental health' is sometimes misunderstood. It is often used as a substitute for mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety.

However, according to the World Health Organization, mental health is "a state of mental wellbeing that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community."

'Mental health' then, refers to what's going well, with an expectation of normal stress. Consider what comes to mind when you hear the term 'physical health' – you're likely to think of things that keep us well (eating healthy foods, exercising, getting enough sleep and so on). In the same way, mental health is not merely the absence of a mental health condition, but about being mentally healthy in the way we think, feel, and develop relationships.

Like physical health, everyone's experience with mental health will be unique to them. It can be helpful to think of mental health as being on a continuum:



How much time you spend 'in the green' and your position on the continuum can be impacted by a range of factors that are both inside and outside of your control. Factors that are somewhat inside your control might be things like your self-care, the support network and relationships you've set up around you and so on, and things that are outside your control might include your biology, or unexpected life events.

A person's mental health is not fixed. It is normal to move up and down the continuum throughout the course of your life, a year, a month, or even across a day.

For example, it is common to be stressed when moving house or starting a new job - This is a one-off response to a situation that most people would find stressful. You can identify the 'trigger' and, importantly, the stress will resolve when the situation resolves.

Something becomes a mental health problem or illness when feelings arise that are of such long duration, and/or such high intensity, that they impact on a person's ability to function in everyday life.

DEFINING A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE

With this understanding of mental health in mind, what constitutes a mentally healthy workplace? Guarding Minds at Work in Canada shares this definition:

"...a place where people can work smart, contribute their best effort, be recognised for their work, and go home with energy leftover."

In the context of the performing arts, most of this definition is reasonable and highly applicable. We typically work smart, attuned to efficiency and using our resources, skills and knowledge wisely. We contribute our best effort – our dedication to our work, passion for storytelling and openness to discretionary effort is unmatched. We recognise good work when we see it, either through formal mechanisms, or even just sharing our thanks with each other.

The last phrase, though, "...go home with energy leftover" is often where we struggle. There is perhaps a perception that if we have energy leftover, we haven't 'given it our all'. We haven't pushed ourselves to the very limits, and 'thrown ourselves over' to the art. While this is a reasonable thing to do on occasion – perhaps during a particularly intense scene exploration, or sometimes an opening night or season launch – it's not sustainable over time, and won't serve your art or workplace culture, and it certainly won't help to create a mentally healthy environment.

Further to this, sometimes we judge the success of a show, season, or even a bump in based on how exhausted we are at the end of it. If everyone's wrecked, that must mean we're doing a good job and working hard! However, who does their best work when they're tired, stressed, frustrated, and on the verge of burnout? Conversely, who does their best work when they're awake, energised, excited, and enthused?

A great way to ensure the 'busy badge' or the 'stress wars' doesn't become the norm is to consider making positive mental health and wellbeing (or something similar) a measure of success. We'll often mark success by measures of box office return, critical acclaim, full houses, audience feedback – what if we added in 'company wellbeing' as one of those measures?

Let's take a look at what this might look like in your context.

Find out more at headsap.org.au/your-mental-health/what-is-good-mental-health

Step 1: Create a vision for a mentally healthy workplace

We have all experienced times in our professional lives – with a range of companies, collaborators, and organisations – where the culture is one to be celebrated. It shows up in all sorts of ways – what values are shared, what is prioritised, what is rewarded, what is frowned upon, and what is considered 'normal'. Sometimes these things help to create a mentally healthy workplace, and sometimes they hinder us.

The kind of culture we operate in can feel like magic. In one company, shared values are truly lived, and everyone's on the same page, and in another, the opposite is true, and tension, blame, and fractious interactions make for an unpleasant experience for all involved. This might feel like an X factor that can't be replicated, or like luck – you just get a 'good group', or you don't, and everyone struggles.

But is it magic and luck?

Think of one of those times when you were at your best - when you were able to do your best work. What was in place? What enabled you to feel energised? Now consider an example of when the company or team was at its best. What were those hallmarks? What enabled the company to be thriving at that time compared to another? How and why were those factors put in place?

Considering these factors can help reduce the sense that it's luck when individuals, companies and organisations thrive, and instead help us begin to spot those repeatable factors that contribute to positive cultures.

Culture will exist whether we create it or not. So, are you and your team or company committed to creating a safe environment where our work, people and productions can flourish? If so, what does that look like in practice? What does the cast, crew, creative team and company need in order to do their best work? Defining this in real terms will help direct actions to the areas that will have the most impact.

Of course, while it may not be perfect all the time – remember, the definition of mental health comes with an expectation of normal stress – knowing your vision for a mentally healthy workplace can help orientate meaningful action and reorientate action in moments of stress.

Consider the following to help articulate your vision for a mentally healthy workplace:



Imagine the show/season/festival has finished, and you bump into a colleague who asks you about it. How would you love to be able to describe it to them?



What is the very best version of the show/season/festival that you can imagine? How does it look, sound, feel? What would need to be in place for this to come true?



What might stop this version from happening? What could get in the way?



Which elements are in your control that you can positively influence? What skills and strengths can be used?

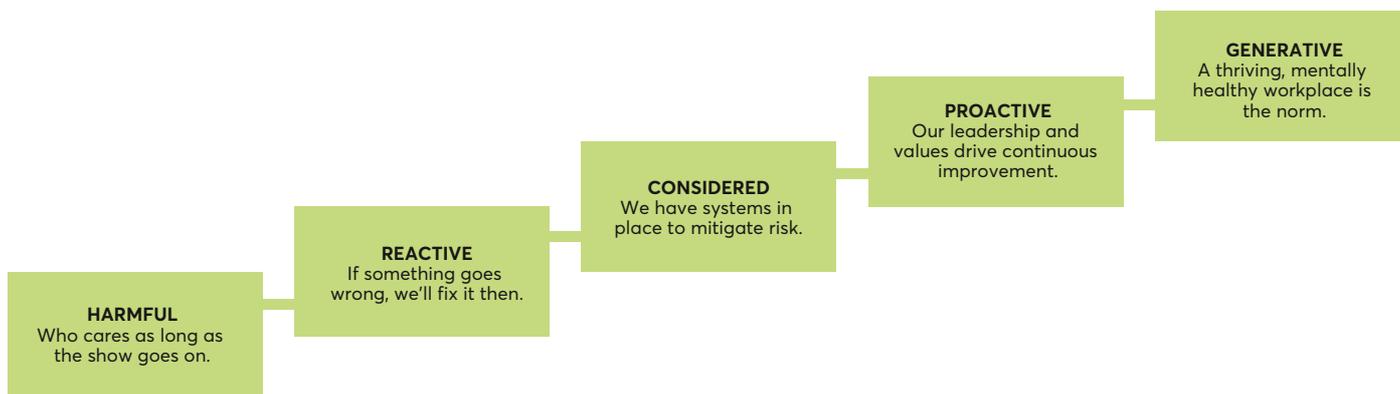
This vision does not replace the vision for your production or organisation. Think of it as the vision for the people of the company, and as a 'compass' that can guide actions, choices and decisions as they affect everyone who works with and for your company.

Try to create and write down your shared vision for mental health and wellbeing. The vision should be simple, short, and easy to understand – if you get stuck consider using the sample vision from Guarding Minds Canada that was provided in the previous section.

Step 2: Assess the current state of your workplace

Now that you have a clear vision of what a mentally healthy workplace looks like for you, how possible does this vision feel right now? Is it reflective of the workplace as it stands today or is it where you hope to be able to get to in the future? If your workplace or company is a new one – perhaps you're about to go on tour, or start rehearsals for a new production – how possible does the vision feel given what you know of the experience on which you're about to embark?

As a starting point, where would you estimate your company is on this scale?



This step is called 'assessing the current state' and it's important not to skip because it will help you understand what good things you are already doing, and where the specific gaps are. It's a planning step that saves both time and energy in the long run.

In assessing your current state:



Ask yourself: what's in place already that could be utilised for positive mental health messaging? This might include existing toolbox talks, induction packs, call sheets, check in, welcomes, etc. These can also prove to be great ways for company members to share feedback and ideas for creating and maintaining a mentally healthy workplace.



Talk with and engage company members. Every company member has expert knowledge of themselves and will know their needs, challenges, energy levels and what helps them to do their best work. This is excellent news – the expertise for how to create and maintain a mentally healthy workplace for the company is right there to draw on! Talk to your peers, colleagues and collaborators and find out what they need, rather than assuming that you already know.



Consider what language is being commonly used (spoken, written, and shared). If your vision is positive, future focussed, clear and kind, but day-to-day language is negative (e.g. 'tight schedules', 'pushing through',



'high pressure environments', 'challenging discussions') this may not be helpful in realising your vision, and can sometimes even create an assumption that an experience is going to be bad through your choice of words, body language and tone.

Look at existing actions, policies, procedures, schedules and strategies. Are they serving your vision? When we begin something new, we'll often know why. When we do something that we've always done before, we might not question whether it's helpful or not. If things are being done 'because we've always done them this way', check if they're serving your vision.



Work to ensure togetherness. For such a small industry, the performing arts can be very good at creating unhelpful (and typically arbitrary) divides, silos or factions. Consider some that you might have come across - cast vs crew, front of house vs back of house, principal roles vs ensemble, admin vs creative. This can lead to "us and them" mentality and "they always / they never" attitudes. Is there a culture or norm of saying, 'they', rather than 'we'? Everyone needs to play a role in realising the vision of a mentally healthy workplace – call out any 'they should' language – there is no 'they', we are all they.

The following factors might help give you a sense of where you're already going well, compared to where there might be opportunities for strategic action.

SUPPORT and being supported

When SUPPORT is working well:

- Company members recognise if and when they need support; know where and how to access it; and are enabled and supported by leadership (e.g. manager, supervisor, producer, head tech) to do so.
- There is a strong commitment to positive mental health, and a united approach to physical and mental health.
- Our leaders, creative teams, and company managers demonstrate knowledge of mental health and wellbeing, and role model help-seeking and behaviours that promote positive mental health.

When SUPPORT may need work:

- No supports are in place or offered.
- Use of support is discouraged.
- Support is only offered when crisis hits.
- Systems and structures focus on physical health and safety only.
- Leaders have low literacy of mental health, and role model behaviours that have a negative impact on mental health.

CONNECTION and feeling connected

When CONNECTION is working well:

- We have a positive culture hallmarked by trust, honesty and fairness.
- Our people know what we're trying to achieve and what's important, understand and demonstrate a commitment to our values, purpose and mission.
- Our efforts are acknowledged and appreciated in a fair and timely manner, and the behaviours rewarded are those that reflect and align to our vision of a mentally healthy workplace.

When CONNECTION may need work:

- Company members 'hunker down' and focus on the job without engaging with each other.
- Company members take a competitive approach to resources, time, and space.
- Poor behaviour is ignored or excused.
- Low morale, anger and frustration.
- Poor workplace relationships.
- Low recognition and reward, or behaviours are rewarded that are out of step with company values, or that have a negative impact on mental health (e.g. rewarding over-work, skipping breaks, yelling at others to get work done etc.).

LEADERSHIP and leading well

When LEADERSHIP is working well:

- There is a clear vision on what we are trying to achieve, and this is reflected in our priorities and ways of working.
- Our leadership is transformational, embraces vulnerability and authenticity.
- Our leadership effectively manages change, and uncertainty.

When LEADERSHIP may need work:

- Poor organisational justice
- Unclear or changeable priorities and expectations.
- Responsive and reactive programs and projects, no proactive planning.
- Command and control or transactional leadership encouraged.
- Poor organisational change management: Changes to work or workplaces are imposed.
- Vulnerability is seen as weakness.
- Company members experience symptoms of burn out.
- Sense of pessimism, or belief that nothing will improve.

ENABLEMENT and being enabled

When ENABLEMENT is working well:

- Company members are set up for success - our workloads are reasonable for the existing roles and resources.
- Company members have a say over their work and workload and are involved in decisions that affect their work. We consult and understand the impact of our decisions on others.
- We value emotional and social capacity as well as technical skills and expertise.

When ENABLEMENT may need work:

- Low self-esteem, particularly in new leaders.
- Disengagement from company members.
- Feelings of indifference or helplessness
- Working long hours, not taking leave or breaks.
- Low role clarity.
- Culture of blame, or finger-pointing.
- Allowing poor behaviour if it 'gets results'.
- Insufficient resourcing for high job demands.
- Low control over how someone can do their job.

ENGAGEMENT and feeling engaged

When ENGAGEMENT is working well:

- We are connected to and thrive on our meaning and purpose.
- We are passionate about our work, and can happily be absorbed in our job, but we keep perspective – a balance of work and personal life is encouraged and enabled. Our people have a life outside of their role.
- Our relationships with each other are positive and productive. We see the person, not just the role, and care about the 'whole person'.

When ENGAGEMENT may need work:

- Apathy or constant tiredness from company members, or an inability to progress or prioritise work or effective scheduling.
- High job stress as the norm.
- Short tempered responses, use of self-centred language (e.g. "I couldn't possibly take a break" / "I don't know why they always do that, it's not my fault.")
- Culture of 'leave it at the door', where mental health and wellbeing is seen as a personal issue and responsibility, not to be brought to the workplace.

COURAGE and being courageous

When COURAGE is working well:

- Our team members can put themselves on the line, ask questions, seek feedback, report mistakes and problems, or propose a new idea without fearing negative consequences to themselves, their company members, their job or their career.
- We understand the value of psychological safety and celebrate and model curiosity.
- We acknowledge and admit fallibility and actively work to redress harm.

When COURAGE may need work:

- Fear of failure or fear of making mistakes.
- Low accountability, or covering up or blaming when errors are made.
- No questions are asked by leadership – solutions or plans are handed down.
- Obvious or insidious consequences for those who speak up or ask questions.
- Ideas, suggestions and concerns are discouraged or dismissed.

PROTECTION and being protected

When PROTECTION is working well:

- Physical safety is a priority, and effective strategies are utilised to promote physical safety and care.
- Our workplace is respectful, and interpersonal conflict and grievances are addressed fairly and promptly.
- We actively prevent bullying, and harassment and discrimination, and have effective policies, procedures and codes in place to appropriately manage bullying, harassment and discrimination should it occur at any level.
- We prioritise psychosocial safety and have effective policies and procedures in place that value cultural safety, access and inclusion.

When PROTECTION may need work:

- High rate of preventable incidents.
- Bully, harassment and discrimination is tolerated, or addressed inconsistently.
- Disrespectful, rude, abrupt communications.
- Interpersonal relationships are fractious and challenges and/or grievances go unresolved and unexamined.
- Poor environmental conditions (working in poorly ventilated spaces, working in the dark, lack of sunlight / fresh air, noisy environments).
- Remote or isolated work, for example, working long periods away from home or working from home without appropriate supports in place.
- Experiencing workplace violence or trauma, including working with difficult subject matter without appropriate supports in place.

SAFETY and being safe

When SAFETY is working well:

- We value and ensure First Nations perspectives.
- We ensure a workplace where all are welcome.
- We support people with a lived experience of mental distress and illness
- We provide a workplace that is accessible and inclusive.

When SAFETY may need work:

- A workplace culture that does not allow for clear open communication
- Work that doesn't make space for voices from a variety of backgrounds
- High turnover of staff



How did your workplace perform?

Did you check mostly boxes on the left, or on the right?
Remember - this isn't an exercise in judgement or blame, simply an assessment to help guide your actions to the areas of greatest need.

Step 3: Take strategic, integrated actions

Once you've identified what's being done already, and where the gaps might be in realising the vision for a mentally healthy workplace, it's time to take meaningful action.

A great starting point is what's known as an 'integrated approach'. This takes into consideration three interconnected actions – which are called: prevent, promote and manage.



An integrated approach simultaneously:

- Prevents mental health problems and harm by minimising and designing out risks
- Promotes protective factors and the positive aspects of work
- Manages mental health problems should they arise, regardless of cause.

An integrated approach helps ensure your efforts are more effective, connected, and focussed on meaningful and sustainable positive change.

This might sound like a lot to consider, but the good news is, you've likely done this before. Think about the way in which we approach physical health and safety in

the performing arts industry. It's second nature to tape down leads, ensure there's no trip hazards backstage, help each other lift a heavy road-case, and thousands of other actions we do to ensure our physical health and safety at work. This is no different.

Think about taping down a lead. There was probably a time when we didn't realise this was a hazard. Then, someone tripped over it. Our response was not to hire a doctor to sit in the wings and treat everyone's broken ankles.

Instead, we prevent injury by taping down the lead, or even better, removing the lead from the pathway altogether. We promote good physical health by simple actions like stretching, and ensuring we're job ready before heading onsite. And, despite our best efforts, if someone does happen to trip and injure themselves, we manage this by ensuring we have first aid kits, first aid officers, and access to appropriate professional help.

Like physical OHS risks, there's nothing inherently 'bad' that we need to identify when considering things that might impact mental health and wellbeing. For example, there's nothing bad about working at heights to focus a light or plugging in a power board. But in both cases, we'd identify risks and mitigate these.

Similarly, look at the psychological factors of work and implementing action to mitigate risk. Examine the work environment, and identify those things that may have a negative impact on our mental health and wellbeing if not effectively mitigated.

Explore the benefits of an integrated approach at utas.edu.au/work-health-wellbeing

You can even draw on your skills with physical health and safety, and undertake a risk assessment. Simply:

- 1 Identify and examine work-related activities that might have a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing. For example, workload during bump in, early morning media calls, scenes with difficult subject matter etc.
- 2 Utilise risk management principles and aim to first eliminate hazards through primary interventions (those that target the cause of the stress, rather than treating stress related symptoms).
- 3 Communicate regularly with the company regarding psychosocial safety, health and wellbeing, and encourage feedback.
- 4 Consult with company members regularly and meaningfully regarding any risks to their psychological health and safety, and ideas for how these can be prevented and responded to.

ACTIONS FOR AN INTEGRATED APPROACH: A STARTING POINT

PREVENT

Aim to prevent mental health problems/harm by minimising or designing out risks or practices that might be harmful, and encouraging choices and actions that enhance wellbeing.

- Use your existing skills, knowledge, and processes in risk and OHS. Identify, mitigate, and monitor risks to psychological health as well as physical health.
- Embed shared values and ways of working. Clear is kind – explain appropriate workplace behaviours and live the values you wish to see.
- Make wellbeing normal. Expect self-care, looking out for others, taking breaks, eating lunch, finishing on time and with energy, and other markers of mentally healthy workplaces to be prioritised and be seen as normal, not exceptional.

PROMOTE

Promote the protective factors and positive aspects of work - look for ways to positively engage the company, build a sense of community and collegiality. Essentially - find ways to do more of the good, more!

- Celebrate good work. Simple, effective, and often underestimated – thanking people by name, calling out effort made, progress generated and ideas put forward, contribute greatly to mentally healthy workplaces.
- Connect with each other and remember to not always 'talk shop'. Games, lunches together, activities – harnessing those joyful moments that help us see the person, not the role.
- Remember the why. Our shared passion for the performing arts means that sometimes we take it for granted. Remembering the meaning and purpose of our work can be a protective factor – something that protects us from experiencing mental distress.

MANAGE

Manage mental health problems in an effective, compassionate and meaningful way, regardless of cause. This includes providing access to professional support, and clear policies and procedures on what to do if someone becomes/is unwell.

- Offer and promote access to support. Make information about help-seeking as well as returning to work after an illness easy to access and free of judgement. Share information often (not just in times of difficulty – mental health support is there for prevention too, not only crisis).
- Role model help-seeking. If you are a leader, seek help and speak openly about your experiences in ways that feel comfortable for you.
- Role model self-care. This has 'double impact' – you look after yourself better, while also demonstrating to others that looking after yourself is ok! Remember that what you do is more important than what you say – so if you encourage people to take regular breaks but then work through your own lunchtime every day, the example set by your actions will be the one that people follow.

One step at a time...

It can feel overwhelming to begin and maintain this journey. That's okay. Never underestimate the power of small, cumulative changes. Promoting positive mental health and wellbeing in the performing arts is not one big thing, it's the result of many small, purposeful actions which move us closer to the culture we wish to see and change our industry for the better over time.

If you're nervous about addressing mental health in the workplace, remember that genuine care and concern is your protection from anything you may fear. The reason we're working to create a mentally healthy performing arts industry is to create a thriving sector where everyone can do their best work. Our motivation comes from a place of care, compassion and aspiration for our community and our sector to flourish.

Culture is what we do. We make it together every day though our choices, actions, words, and ways of doing things. Make sure yours reflects the values you want to see in our broader industry and never underestimate the power you personally hold to move things forward to better.

For more information or support to create and maintain mentally healthy workplaces, get in touch with the Arts Wellbeing Collective team.

artswellbeingcollective@artscentremelbourne.com.au

artswellbeingcollective.com.au

Or visit the Worksafe Victoria Website to access the Work Well Toolkit.

workwell.vic.gov.au

HELPFUL SUPPORT SERVICES

Support Act Wellbeing Helpline	1800 959 500 (24/7)
First Nations Support	1800 959 500 (Option 3)
Manager Support Hotline	1800 818 728
BeyondBlue	1300 224 636 (24/7)
Lifeline	13 11 14 (24/7)
Suicide Call Back Service	1300 659 467 (24/7)
SANE Australia	1800 187 263 (9am to 5pm, Mon to Fri)
QLife (LGBTQI)	1800 184 527 (3pm to midnight)
Mensline	1300 789 978 (24/7)
Griefline	1300 845 745 (12pm to 3am)
DirectLine (alcohol and drug counselling)	1800 888 236
Gambling Help	1800 858 858 (24/7)
Kids Helpline	1800 55 1800 (24/7)
WorkSafe Victoria Advisory Service	1800 136 089

National Relay Service is available for people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment. Chat options are also available. Visit www.infrastructure.gov.au/national-relay-service for more information.

People who do not use English as their first language can get free translation support from the Translating and Interpreting Service tisnational.gov.au

artswellbeingcollective.com.au



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