



Mental Health Inquiry
Productivity Commission
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Dear Sir/Madam

Victorian Small Business Commission Submission - Productivity Commission Mental Health Inquiry

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to this Inquiry.

I respond to this inquiry in my capacity as the Victorian Small Business Commissioner. The Victorian Small Business Commission (VSBC) works to create a fair and competitive environment for Victorian small businesses through our key functions: dispute resolution, monitoring, advocacy and engagement with the business community. I would like to outline the role of my office in supporting small businesses to make their workplaces mentally healthy in line with the question posed in the issues paper.

Supporting small businesses to make their workplaces mentally healthy

The VSBC actively participates in a Small Business Stakeholder Reference Group convened by Beyond Blue. The purpose of the group is to provide input, expertise and advice to assist Beyond Blue to develop resources that will support the capacity building of those who work with or are close to someone in small business around mental health.

Industry associations and professional groups, and indeed individual intermediaries such as business mentors and advisors are often trusted persons who, when equipped with the right resources, can assist and support small businesses. It is important to communicate with small business owners through their existing networks and channels.

Challenges commonly associated with small businesses include:

- isolation that can accompany running a small business. Both in terms of being a sole trader and the result of not being able to share business stressors (e.g. financial pressures) with employees
- the stigma relating to mental health, particularly that disclosing a mental health condition may negatively impact on their business
- the pressure which results from both the responsibility of running a small business and expectations that may be placed on small business owners by themselves, family, friends and employees to be successful
- the financial strain that can accompany running a small business

- the inability of small businesses to access services in the public and larger private systems such as employee assistance programs that connect employees with counsellors at no charge
- the inability of small businesses to take other actions to improve their mental health when the business still requires attention.

Beyond Blue's research identified that various stakeholders play a key role in supporting small business owners with mental health issues, but that they don't always feel equipped with the right knowledge and resources to properly assist.

A step in the right direction was the development of the VSBC's mental health plan, which was developed with input from Beyond Blue. However, there is scope for a broader range of materials such as online learning developed in consultation with key stakeholders who understand the unique needs of small business owners.

If you have any enquiries about this submission, please contact Daniel Shepherdson, Senior Manager, Advocacy and Monitoring Services

Yours sincerely

JUDY O'CONNELL
Victorian Small Business Commissioner