

ALLIANZ AUSTRALIA

The social and economic benefits of improving mental health

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BACKGROUND

Allianz Australia (Allianz) has a long history in the personal injury sector, including workers compensation and compulsory third party insurance. As specialists in personal injury claims management including the increasing management of mental injury and illness we appreciate the opportunity to submit to the Productivity Commission our view regarding the economic impacts of mental ill health.

Our commentary is made in the increasingly pressing context of the significant rise of mental health conditions as a proportion of overall injuries in the workplace and our experiences with people maintaining or re-entering employment following injury or illness.

Allianz's recently published white paper, 'Awareness into action: A holistic approach to cultivating mentally healthy workplaces in Australia' (Appendix 1), highlights the enduring stigma associated with mental ill-health in the workplace and the need for a perception shift to see mental ill-health treated like other physical illnesses. The paper comes in response to research commissioned by Allianz that highlights the attitudes of working Australians to mental health, particularly in the context of the workplace. This survey revealed the vast majority of full-time working Australians (93%) are uncomfortable discussing or disclosing a mental health condition to a manager, and instead would prefer to lie when taking a sick day.

We are looking to shift the conversation away from just focusing on the commercial implications for businesses to understanding and acting on what we can do in collaboration with employers to proactively address well-being in the workplace.

Allianz is a signatory to the Health Benefits of Good Work (HBGW). As a signatory, we recognise the benefits that gainful employment can provide to people and society. The HBGW is an initiative from the Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine of The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (<https://www.racp.edu.au/advocacy/division-faculty-and-chapter-priorities/faculty-of-occupational-environmental-medicine/health-benefits-of-good-work>). Allianz adopts the HBGW principals in our workers compensation practices to encourage and support workers to return to work following a workplace injury or illness.

ASSESSMENT APPROACH

The Productivity Commission has been asked to undertake an inquiry into the role of mental health in supporting social and economic participation, and enhancing productivity and economic growth. Allianz believe increased social and economic participation has many benefits for the individual and the community. In this response we share our insights and experience in assisting people who have become job detached return to meaningful employment as we believe this is relevant to this inquiry.

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION

Governments at all levels have a responsibility for the wellbeing of citizens, which encompasses a duty to create an environment that allows for and encourages social participation and inclusion. The growing recognition of governments' duty to tackle social isolation is highlighted in the UK with the newly appointed 'minister of loneliness'. There is now an increasing push for an Australian equivalent, with a growing body of research indicating high rates of social isolation among Australians (2018 Australian Loneliness Report).

Population sub-groups who are more at risk of developing mental ill health are those who are both systematically and geographically isolated:

- Rural populations
- The elderly and retirees - becoming increasingly problematic in aging population
- Refugees
- Individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Understanding the specific needs of these subgroups is key to promoting and providing valuable services. Without this, uptake and sustained participation is unlikely. Research into the means by which to promote interventions among each of these at risk groups and the identification of the most appropriate interventions is paramount. Promotion of initiatives to tackle isolation should also be focused on key contacts such as General Practitioners, who are in the position to identify, provide support to, and promote social inclusions initiatives to the socially isolated. Such initiatives have been trialled in the UK, where the Royal College of General Practitioners has developed resources for GPs to support socially isolated patients.

As a workers' compensation claims manager, Allianz sees the consequences of decreased social participation caused by prolonged work absence. If an individual ceases work as a result of a work related injury, they often lose their connection with their workplace and the social ties that accompany this. The connection to the workplace is often underestimated in this context of return to work and this often results in exacerbation of primary psychological injuries or the development of secondary psychological injuries following a physical injury.

Allianz recognises the importance of good work and is actively involved in promoting the HBGW as a signatory to the consensus statement. At the heart of this consensus statement, is a shared commitment to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.

"Good work is engaging, fair, respectful and balances job demands, autonomy and job security. Good work accepts the importance of culture and traditional beliefs. It is characterised by safe and healthy work practices and it strikes a balance between the interests of individuals, employers and society. It requires effective change management, clear and realistic performance indicators, matches the work to the individual and uses transparent productivity metrics."

Realising the health benefits of good work for all those working in Australia and New Zealand requires a transformation in both thought and in practice. It necessitates cooperation between a broad range of participants including workers, governments, employers, unions, insurers, legal practitioners, advocacy groups and healthcare professionals.

Workers compensation schemes nationally have been moving towards an increasingly holistic approach to claims management. This approach seeks to address the importance of social engagement in recovery and recognises that reduced social engagement can lead to the onset of mental ill health. As opposed to relying on an exclusive medical model of recovery, Allianz make use of various programs and now adopt case management practices derived from a biopsychosocial model.

One initiative Allianz utilises to overcome this social isolation is the Kyzengage Program. This program is a 10 week intervention for workers who have become socially isolated as a result of their injury; this includes those with a psychological or physical injury. The Kyzengage Program aims to motivate participants through 10 weekly sessions by engaging them in a routine and community based activity program.

The holistic approach is also embedded within case management practices themselves. Case Managers work collaboratively with people to guide them through the identification of 'commitments', which are personal goals developed and updated throughout their recovery. Case Managers encourage the development of commitments that serve to increase a person's social participation, which ultimately assists in the achievement of their return to work goals.

In terms of assessment methods for monitoring the progress of individuals in a particular population, tools to measure social engagement such as the Australian Community Participation Questionnaire can be employed. This screening tool measures a person's engagement within their household, extended family, friends, neighbours, religious groups, participation in organised community activities, and active interest in current affairs. Such tools could be valuable in informing the effects of interventions on a specific population or cohort. However, Allianz recognises that a key indicator that demonstrates the positive relationship between mental health outcomes and social participation is engagement in a positive workplace.

GOVERNMENT FUNDED EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

Allianz is aware of the Australian Government Employment Service (DES) and has previously looked at utilising their service for job detached people with longer term disability in a workers compensation setting. We also feel it valuable to highlight some of the employment services Allianz has developed and utilised in a worker's compensation setting. We refer in this section to funded employment support through workers compensation both from a claims cost and Allianz investment.. We achieve this through developing relationships with industry experts and nationally-recognised health and rehabilitation entities to help ensure new initiatives and return to work practices are at the forefront of our operations.

These types of partnerships are aimed at preparing people to return to work with a new employer via a tailored pathway for recovery and work readiness. This includes measuring key motivation levels to help ensure that the right services are being delivered at the right time and in the right way.

Overall, such initiatives within the field of vocational support highlight the ability of insurers to provide oversight on assessments and thus reduce reliance on the scheme while encouraging participants to flourish within the community through economic participation.

Behavioural Insights (BI) and Motivational Interactions (MI)

Insurers recognise that innovation is vital for both efficiency of operations and the enhancement of our customer experience. Allianz and other insurers persist to strive for continuous improvement in communicating with our customers with a focus on integrity and empathy. Allianz's nationally recognised initiatives draw on theories from economics, psychology and neuroscience to understand human interactions, behaviour and day-to-day decision-making. Through partnerships with renowned research bodies such as Esher House, AP Psychology and the NSW Government's award-winning BI Unit, Allianz has been able to develop specific return-to-work (RTW), rehabilitation and job seeking programs that meet the individual needs of people. By adopting these unique perspectives (including MI – which adopts learnings from the field of psychology and human interaction), Allianz has initiated a holistic approach across all personal injury divisions. These holistic practices encourage active ownership of a plan and goals that benefit people and society. Most importantly, it creates independence by empowering people in decision making.

Our case managers are highly engaged with people who have a range of injuries and disabilities, and empathy and personalisation are pillars of best practice case management. The aim is to develop skills that not only build rapport, but also recognise individual motivations to ensure our customers feel respected, empowered and included in key decisions throughout the process. Employing these theories and BI/MI techniques in the training of case managers and support staff has allowed us to engage with and support people to drive positive outcomes.

One example of such a program is SeekSMART developed in partnership with Esher House who are behavioural economics experts. SeekSMART is an academically-evidenced based psychometric assessment tool and behavioural intervention program. It differs from traditional rehabilitation and return to work services that target job seekers who are considered ready to return to work because they had been certified by their doctor as having capacity. Instead it challenges the 'one size fits all approach'. SeekSMART provides a tailored approach to vocational counselling based on the individual's readiness to change so that we are able to assist long term job detached people find new employment opportunities and successfully contribute to their community again.

MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACES

Allianz's recently published whitepaper, 'Awareness into Action: A holistic approach to cultivating mentally healthy workplaces in Australia', is aimed at helping employers cultivate thriving workplaces. It also highlights the enduring stigma associated with mental ill-health in the workplace and the need for a perception shift to see mental ill-health treated like other physical illnesses.

The research found that eighty-five per cent of employees feel their manager is more likely to think their need for time off is genuine if they say they are suffering from a cold or flu rather than stress or anxiety. According to the paper, for a modern workplace to thrive, it is important that employers adopt a holistic approach that encompasses five key action areas to put the employee at the centre of the mental well-being equation. These areas are:

- **Physical:** Promoting the mental health benefits of physical activity and good general health;
- **Mental:** Encouraging awareness through training, mental wellbeing leave and encouraging transparent dialogue;
- **Space and Role:** Creating positive organisational design that directly influences employee motivation and happiness;
- **Culture:** Nurturing a positive workplace culture that is transparent and inclusive;
- **Ecosystems/Partnerships:** Developing partnerships and alliances between government, insurers, mental health professionals and other entities to improve communication, engagement and mental health recovery.

All of these areas must be addressed to achieve the goal of building mentally healthier workplaces.

Online access to support for employees has been investigated by Accenture with their 2018 report "Supporting mental health in the workplace: The Role of Technology", and revealed that respondents valued digital and mobile resources for the ability to access support outside of typical business hours and from home. Younger people entering the workforce resonated particularly strongly with the role of technology in providing support for the management of health and wellbeing, with 78% of Gen Y answering favourably toward digital resources compared to 51% of Baby Boomers (Accenture 2018).

For smaller organisations, the Mental Health at Work website (<http://www.mentalhealthatwork.nsw.gov.au/>) provides employers with advice on mental health awareness training for line managers and provides guidance on how best to structure a full program of support.

More broadly, when designing initiatives, policies and programs to promote workplace mental health, Allianz believes employers can optimise participation rates to get the best outcomes for their employees by taking an approach centred on behavioural insights. This approach is informed by behavioural economics, psychology and human-centred design to understand how subtle changes in the way decisions are framed and communicated can influence individuals towards making choices that are best for them and intern society.

Risk management in a workplace is no longer seen as just identifying, eliminating or managing hazards. An employer has a duty to provide a workplace that promotes employee well-being and provides an environment where employees can actually improve their mental health in the workplace. By forming strategic partnerships with appropriate stakeholders, such as insurers, employers can deliver a range of initiatives powered by behavioural insights that foster mental well-being.

We also believe employers must foster an environment where an employee who is experiencing symptoms of a mental illness can disclose this to their employer without fear, and be supported and encouraged to maintain work while they are able to do so. This also involves managers and or colleagues being able to identify the signs and symptoms of mental illness and have access to the tools and resources they need to support employees.

In our experience, we often see situations where an employee has an existing mental illness that is aggravated or exacerbated by work, as either their employer was not aware of the condition or was not equipped to support the employee to remain at work. It can also be the case that employees suffer a physical injury at work and as a result of this and the impact on their life develop a secondary psychological illness. We find symptoms of mental illness often manifest in the workplace in interpersonal conflict, decline in performance or an increase in absenteeism. We

want to share this experience and discuss the benefits for employers in providing environments for their employees that foster good mental health. We would also like to discuss our findings in relation to a biopsychosocial approach to our claims management and how we can prevent secondary psychological injury in the claims process by supporting employees on their journey back to work.

Workers Compensation Claims Experience

Exposure to a rise in mental health related claims and associated costs across our Workers Compensation and CTP operations in recent years, validates the concerns raised in the Issues Paper around the subject of mental health and the cost to individuals, society and the economy.

Within Workers Compensation schemes, the distinct nature of mental health related claims drives a need for specific psychological claims teams. In respect to Allianz's operations, we have utilised this specific team structure in our dealing with the NSW Department of Education (DoE). We have been able to work in conjunction with the DoE to help them achieve their goal to create and provide the best mental health and wellbeing program for staff working with students with disabilities and challenging operating environments. This program has been critical in schools located within purposefully connected communities (for example, rural communities or schools with a high Indigenous population). Feedback gathered by Allianz and selected service providers has further helped equip the DoE with the required intelligence to cost-effectively tailor a suite of interventions specific to the needs of each local school.

In Victoria, our workers compensation division was a Gold Sponsor of the Arts Wellbeing Collective (AWC). This one year Mental Health and Wellbeing Pilot Program aimed to affect better mental health and wellbeing for Victorian Arts workers. The program focuses on prevention and early intervention of mental health concerns. Allianz's collaboration with the Arts Centre is an example of how insurers can work collaboratively to drive initiatives that have a positive effect on individuals and communities.

Adding further complexity to the workplace mental health picture are secondary psychological conditions. These may occur after a primary injury or incident and typically impact the longer-term mental health of individuals. These might include lack of financial assistance, process of submitting a workers compensation insurance claim, or feeling isolated from the workplace.

Initiatives that are easy, attractive, social and timely will have the most success in transforming how employers can support their employees in achieving positive outcomes. With this in mind, Allianz has worked to improve the claims process to support employees by:

- Using new channels and creating resources to disseminate important claim information, including via email, SMS and interactive videos
- Using commitment devices and goal setting for better recovery and service outcomes
- Transition towards the development of work health plans for injured employees from using injury management plans to foster greater collaboration
- Improving written communication with all stakeholders to keep them informed of the claims process

Allianz internal programs

Internally, Allianz Australia encourages its managers to seek advice and coaching from the Employee Relations and Work Health Safety Team on the best approach to employees with mental ill health. The Manager Support Program is also a channel for specialist coaching for people leaders, allowing leaders to develop the strategies and confidence in addressing challenging people management situations which may involve emotional responses and wellbeing.

Allianz has also introduced "Mental Health First Aid Officers", trained to have the skills to recognise changes in emotions, thinking and behaviours and the confidence to approach colleagues to provide early intervention support and encourage professional support where required.

Internationally

Accenture in the United Kingdom has introduced the "UK Mental Health Allies", a group of trained ambassadors and trusted, accessible resources for people seeking support or information on mental health. These allies are people within the workplace; they may be the colleagues and friends of people who are looking for support, thus reducing the perception of stigma for the affected employee. The intention of the program being to leverage the familiarity employees have with their co-workers, and allow them to comfortably approach them for trained support.

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) has been found to be the most effective initiative in finding people with mental ill health employment, and ensuring they remain employed. The Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) has been commissioned to provide IPS to individuals with severe and enduring mental health conditions to secure and sustain paid employment. The SAMH IPS report of 2016 has indicated that IPS service users were twice as likely to secure employment, with 55% of users working for at least a day against only 28% for traditional vocational schemes. They also spend half as much time in hospital over the 18-month period following their initial employment as their counterparts in other vocational schemes (SAMH IPS 2016).

COORDINATION AND INTEGRATION

As participants in the personal injury ecosystem, employers, insurers, healthcare professionals and government organisations all have an important role in ensuring their contributions are making a positive difference. To achieve such collaboration we need to rethink the system.

The traditional medical approach to supporting mental ill-health and an employee's recovery process in mental injury claims is flawed. It has typically focused on the competing interests of the stakeholders in the employee's recovery rather than prioritising the needs and wellbeing of the employee. This approach has been acknowledged as one that is excessively simplistic, over-emphasises impairment, and incorrectly assumes a direct causal link between impairment and disability, as well as failing to take sufficient account of the person and social dimensions of disability

CONCLUSION

All Australians, whether directly or indirectly, are affected by the high personal, social and economic costs of mental ill-health. As already discussed here, finding positive ways to effectively address the complexities involved must be a priority if we are to reduce these costs. To achieve this, we need to put mental wellness higher on the workplace agenda.

Allianz would welcome the opportunity to further elaborate on any points in our submission and to participate in any forum which may be formed to review the economic impacts of mental ill-health.