Long Lives Healthy Workplaces

A toolkit for anaesthetic departments

Why you need this

The medical profession has a high level of stigma around mental health in the workplace and this is often compounded for anaesthetists.

A range of risk factors can impact health professionals' mental health and wellbeing at work with anaesthetists facing a number of unique risk factors which can result in mental ill-health, poor general health and an increased risk of suicidal behaviour:

- Anaesthetists work in a highly stressful occupation and are exposed to trauma and death.
- Anaesthetists have high work demands and may or may not feel a sense of belonging to a particular team in the health service where they work.
- Anaesthetists work long hours, experience fatigue and are exposed to on-call stress.

The Long Lives Healthy Workplaces Toolkit is designed for anaesthetists to help create mentally healthy workplaces so they can:

- Reduce risks and stress load in the workplace.
- Improve mental health and general wellbeing.
- Build social connections among peers.
- Develop action plans to support good mental health and the prevention of suicide.

Long Lives Healthy Workplaces is a locally designed, open access wellbeing framework that was developed with the Wellbeing of Anaesthetists Special Interest Group. It was funded by the Australian Society of Anaesthetists and The Prevention Hub. The toolkit was progressed by Everymind, who have the expertise to develop such mental health frameworks for specific industries.

What it offers

The strategies outlined in the Long Lives Healthy Workplaces toolkit offer you a range of actions and suggested activities for your department with tips for what you can do, tools to share with staff and resources available.

The tips, tools and resources all focus on:

- Reducing individual risk factors.
- Reducing environment risk factors.
- Identify and respond to problems early.
- Provide support for mental ill-health.
- Support recovery from illness and return to work.
- Support good health.

A strategic and co-ordinated approach can offer effective workplace mental health strategies with a range of approaches including:

- **Primary prevention** – proactive programs that aim to prevent mental ill-health and promote wellbeing by reducing individual and workplace risk factors.

- **Secondary prevention** – programs that aim to identify risks and problems early and manager symptoms when they become evident in the workplace, including strategies on coping with stressors.

- **Tertiary prevention** – programs that minimise the impact of diagnoses mental ill-health on the individual and workplace.

- **Mental health promotion** – programs that focus on increasingly healthy behaviours.

How it works

Five strategies to long lives and healthy workplaces:

- Improve the culture of medicine to increase wellbeing and reduce stigma.
- Improve the training and work environment to reduce risk.
- Improve capacity to recognise and respond to those needing support.
- Better support anaesthetists and trainees impacted by mental
- ill-health and suicide.
- Improve leadership, co-ordination, data and information on the health and wellbeing of our profession.

You don't have to work on all of the strategies at once.

Pick one to start with and check out the actions and activities you can take.

Add to the list other ideas that may help your workplace.
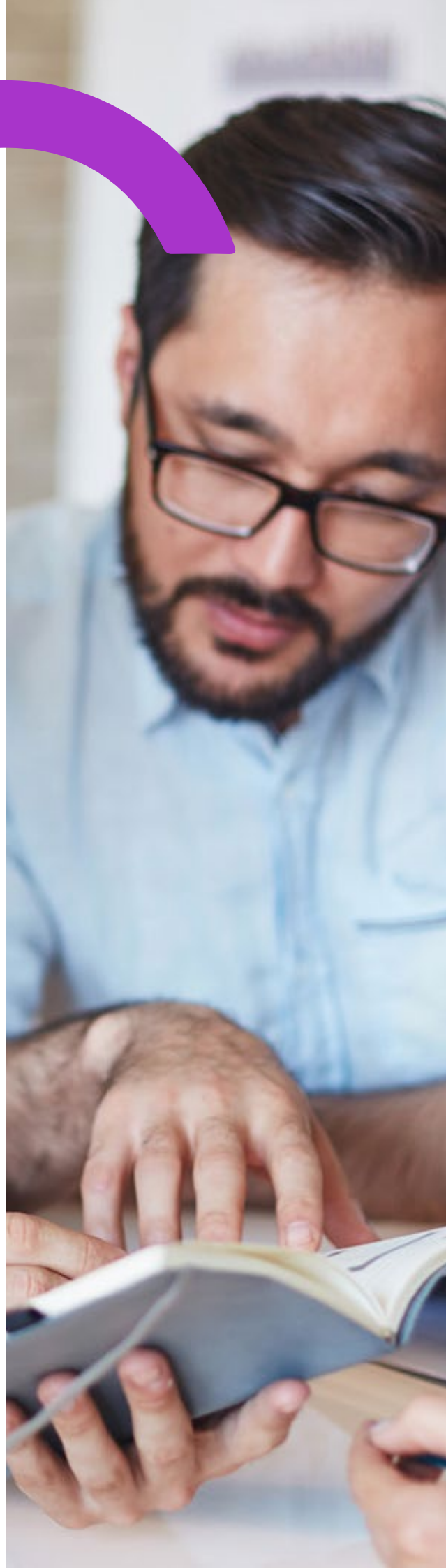
Improve the culture of medicine to increase wellbeing and reduce stigma

Implement strategies to improve the health and wellbeing of all staff:

- Identify mental health and health promotion programs for the workplace.
- Promote digital platforms for improving individual wellbeing such as mindfulness, meditation, sleep and coping strategies.
- Promote a healthy lifestyle including diet, exercise, sleep and relaxation, quit-smoking assistance, responsible intake of alcohol and substance control.
- Include health, wellbeing and risks to health on the job in routine training and orientation.
- Encourage activities that focus on mind, movement and nutrition including walking or standing meetings and healthy food options in the workplace.

Increase connectedness and peer support

- Promote networking among staff and trainees as well as mentoring.
- Establish peer review groups to network with co-workers and review complex cases.
- Identify social media networks for staff to connect.
- Connect with the Australian Society of Anaesthetists for ASA events.
- Prioritise time together as a team and social activities.
- Develop a social calendar and link activities to national health awareness days.

Improve the training and work environment to reduce risk

Ensure job design, rosters and individual workloads are reviewed to reduce risks for mental ill-health

- Review rostering practices and develop safe working hour policies and practices.
- Encourage flexibility with working hours and options to leave early on non-clinical days.
- Provide staff with a physical space for breaks that are away from public areas.

Design and manage a work environment that minimises harm

- Ensure all staff understand safe handling drug practices and review policies around access.
- Provide opportunities for staff to contribute ongoing suggestions for improvement.
- Educate and support staff on changes to mandatory reporting.

Ensure adequate and structured access to training and professional development opportunities

- Provide mental health support for anaesthetic trainees during examination periods.
- Explore opportunities or events that will provide professional development to staff.
- Develop a professional strategy plan and schedule regular development and training.

The Long Lives Healthy Workplaces Toolkit includes best practice guidelines and checklists to review.

Improve capacity to recognise and respond to those needing support

Improve the capacity of staff to recognise and respond to mental ill-health and suicide

- Provide education and training on mental ill-health and supporting yourself and colleagues.
- Provide training for leaders and managers with a focus on mental health first aid, suicide prevention and debriefing practices to help create mentally health teams and identify staff members who may need additional support.
- Ensure that orientation for new staff contains information about mental health and wellbeing as well as mental ill-health.
- Include mental health literacy training as part of the orientation process for new staff.

Improve pathways to care for those who need support

- Create and promote a list of GPs and other external supports who understand the nature of the medical workforce.
- Promote early help-seeking and encourage staff to take action.
- Promote access to the ANZCA Doctors' Support Program for free confidential and independent counselling service for ANZCA fellows, trainees and immediate family members.
- Educate staff of their ability to access a Mental Health Care Plan through their GP.
- Raise awareness of support services such as the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- Promote the availability and use of online treatments.

The Long Lives Healthy Workplaces Toolkit includes information and training opportunities to enhance mental health literary as well as tools for self-awareness and assessment.

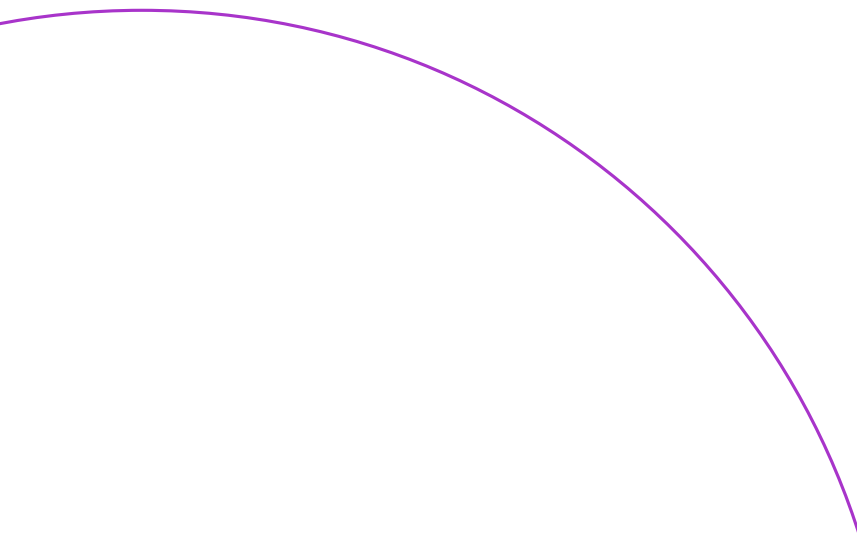# Better support anaesthetists and trainees impacted by mental ill-health and suicide

Ensure effective processes to manage staff to stay at work or return to work

- Identify and train one or more welfare advocates for your department who junior staff and colleagues feel comfortable approaching – someone non-judgemental who is accessible and available with a sympathetic ear and who can maintain confidentially.
- Develop stay-at-work or return-to-work plans for staff who have been diagnosed with mental ill-health.

Ensure the department has policies and services available to support those impacted by suicide

- Have a protocol in place that advises how to notify staff in the event of a suicide that may impact on them and ways to communicate and provide support.
- Ensure all staff have resources to support conversations about suicide. People who are vulnerable to suicide or bereaved by suicide can be particularly impacted by language.
- Ensure that services are available to support those who need specialist intervention after a suicide death to provide guidance and support to impacted staff.
- Provide staff with opportunities to support each other.

The Long Lives Healthy Workplaces Toolkit includes links to suicide prevention resources and information to assist people after a suicide has impacted them (postvention).

Improve leadership, coordination, data and information on the health and wellbeing of our profession

Improve leadership capability

- Provide education for leadership including mentors and supervisors.
- Improve education about workplace bullying, mental health and ill-health, suicide prevention, communication about suicide and debriefing practices.
- Offer specific training for leaders and managers that focuses on people management skills, mental health and ill-health, identifying staff at risk and supporting those with mental ill-health, as well as suicide prevention in the workplace.

Improve data collection on the health and wellbeing of the profession

- Use existing staff surveys and results for your department to review and prioritise actions.
- Consider supporting or collaborating on research trials and programs.

The Long Lives Healthy Workplaces Toolkit includes all the tips and tools needed to show leadership in creating mentally healthy workplaces.

Tips and resources for individual anaesthetists

Long Lives Healthy Workplaces can also be used by individual anaesthetists who may work as consultants across many departments.

- It offers suggestions, tips and resources to improve your own mental health and wellbeing:
- Reduce risks and stress loads in the workplace.
- Information and advice to prevent bullying and harassment in the workplace.
- Training and professional development opportunities.
- Ways to maintain or improve your mental health and general wellbeing:
  - o Enhance your understanding of mental health and ill-health.
  - o Find Australian mental health resources and services.
  - o Self-care for health professionals.
  - o Self-awareness and assessment tools.
  - o Self-care resources.
  - o Tools and information for building a healthy physical lifestyle.

- Building social connections among peers:
  - o Team building and workplace activities.

- Accessing help and responding to mental ill-health and/or suicidal behaviour:
  - o Medical specific support lines.
  - o Find a GP or mental health professional.
  - o National support helplines and other supports.

- Understanding mandatory reporting requirements.
- Education and training to recognise and respond to mental ill-health and suicide:
  - o Effective processes to stay at work or return to work after and event of mental ill-health.

- Information and services available to support those impacted by suicide:
  - o Resources to assist people after a suicide has occurred (postvention).
  - o Resources to support conversations about suicide.