



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Employment,  
Skills, Small and Family Business**

# Small Business Mental Health Working Groups

## Outcomes Report

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## Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to outline the status of work undertaken by the Small Business Mental Health working groups.

The working groups were established to progress work identified at the Small Business Mental Health Roundtables in December 2018 and February 2019.

## Small business operators have complex and busy lives



Small business operators:

- Are subject to a high degree of 'situational stress' that comes with running a business, as well as the challenges of everyday life
- Engage with a range of people and groups throughout the business lifestyle
- Are required to fill multiple roles
- Are an integral part of their local communities and the economy.

## The Government has a role in supporting small business mental health

Australian small business operators have higher rates of depression symptoms and lower rates of help-seeking behaviour.

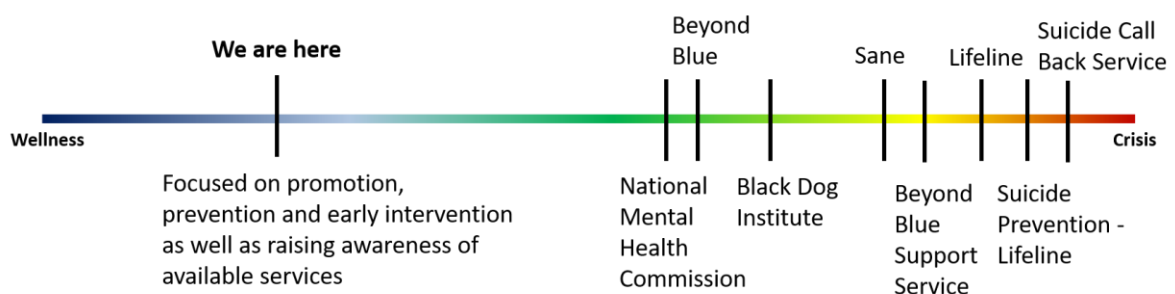
The focus of the Department is on supporting stakeholders in this field and increasing the focus on promotion, prevention and early intervention as well as referral to existing acute mental health and crisis support services as appropriate.

## The mental health ecosystem

There is a lot of work in the mental health space, including the Department of Health's National Mental Health Strategy

Along the continuum from wellness to crisis, there are more services available towards the crisis stage and fewer towards the wellness stage.

We are working closely with the National Mental Health Commission, Department of Health, Australian Taxation Office and Safe Work Australia to ensure that our initiatives complement, and don't duplicate, existing work in this space.



## The working groups

On 9 December 2018 the Small Business Mental Health Package was announced. Following this the First Small Business Mental Health Roundtable was held on 12 December 2018. In January 2019 the Thinkplace heatmap was delivered and on 13 February 2019 the Second Small Business Mental Health Roundtable was held. Following this between March and April 2019 the working groups were established and the development of the My Business Health portal commenced. Between May and June 2019 the working groups met to progress work. Further discussions were also held out of session and user testing and review of the My Business Health portal was undertaken.

Four working groups were established following the Roundtables:

- 1 Common Policy Principle working group
- 2 Leveraging Communities working group
- 3 Language and Messaging working group
- 4 Web-accessible information working group.

# Common Policy Principles Working Group

Policy makers need a common understanding and shared direction to address the needs of small business operators.



## The discoveries

1. Policymakers have a key role in making it easier to do business and also empowering small business operators to help themselves
2. Principles focus on policy design and implementation, highlighting small business operator needs that should be considered at every stage
3. Guiding principles will build a shared starting place and goal for policy makers working with small business operators.

## The aims

The aims of the Common Policy Principles working group were:

- Normalise discussion of mental health for small business
- Integrate mental health and business health
- Build capabilities of small business operators to manage their mental health
- Mitigate risk.

## Next steps

### Toolkit for policy makers

The working group recommends that a Guiding Principles Toolkit be developed and distributed to policy makers, both Government and non-government, and key stakeholders working with small business operators, to facilitate:

- A common understanding of small business needs
- Innovative collaboration between stakeholders
- Focused research to deliver an evidence base for future policy direction.

## Leveraging Communities Working Group

Many small business operators feel isolated, which is a key contributor to mental ill health.

### The discoveries

1. Small business operators are unlikely to engage with government on their mental health
2. Small business operators are more inclined to accept advice from their peers
3. Leveraging existing peer networks and organisations such as industry associations, and local councils will be more likely to capture all stages of the business lifecycle
4. There are a number of resources already in the pipeline, which we can leverage.

### The aims

The aims of the Leveraging Communities working group were:

- Reduce stigma associated with mental ill health
- Take a flexible and collaborative approach
- Facilitate peer support networks
- Consider diversity of small business operators.

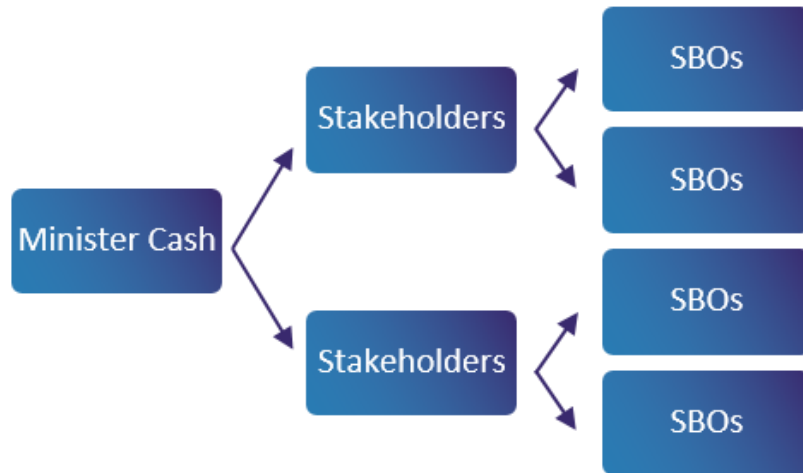
## Next steps

### 'Wellbeing in Business' Toolkit

- The working group recommends developing a toolkit that is short, practical and easily consumable. This should be distributed through established organisations to leverage off existing relationships and capture a wider range of SBOs across the business life-cycle.
- The toolkit will include information on the risks of isolation, value or peer support, key indicators of high stress, available resources and guide on how to set up a peer support network.

## Reduce stigma

The working group recommends coordinated communication through regular messages coming from government and stakeholders, as well as engagement of small business wellbeing champions to speak with their peers and share learnings from their own journey.



Above: Influence discussion using a top down approach.



Above: Facilitate a bottom up approach to sharing information amongst SBOs.

# Language and Messaging Working Group

Small business operators hear inconsistent messages about their mental health from many different sources.

## The discoveries

1. Language specifically targeting mental health may be alienating to small business operators
2. Many small business operators do not equate stress with mental ill health
3. At the early preventative stage use stress-focused terminology, then introduce more mental health and wellness language.

## The aim

The aims of the Language and Messaging working group were:

- Messaging should emphasise the link between business health and wellbeing
- There is no one size fits all approach – language should be tailored to the context
- Language and messaging must be developed with the end-user in mind
- Messaging should promote that personal health is good for business health.

## The product

### **Context Dependent Language Sets**

The working group develop language-sets to give guidance to policymakers on language usage according to context and provide a bank of terminology to refer to in future policy development.



**Table 1**

Assistance language	Seeking support	Promote wellbeing	Crisis Point
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Here to help</li> <li>◆ Guidance</li> <li>◆ Support</li> <li>◆ Reach out</li> <li>◆ Work with you</li> <li>◆ Ask for help</li> <li>◆ You aren't alone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Stress</li> <li>◆ Feeling overwhelmed</li> <li>◆ Lack of control</li> <li>◆ Falling behind</li> <li>◆ Confused</li> <li>◆ Unsure about what to do next</li> <li>◆ Starting to withdraw</li> <li>◆ Mapping out next steps</li> <li>◆ Difficulty coping</li> <li>◆ Going through a difficult time</li> <li>◆ Seek business advice early</li> <li>◆ Understand that running a small business isn't easy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Mental health</li> <li>◆ Wellbeing</li> <li>◆ Balance</li> <li>◆ Planning for the future</li> <li>◆ Looking ahead</li> <li>◆ Wellness</li> <li>◆ Resilience</li> <li>◆ Easing stress</li> <li>◆ Positive, healthy, functioning</li> <li>◆ Personal wellbeing</li> <li>◆ Mental health support services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Mental ill health</li> <li>◆ Anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts</li> <li>◆ Mental health issues</li> <li>◆ Mental health concerns</li> <li>◆ Withdrawn</li> <li>◆ Drug and alcohol dependency</li> <li>◆ Socially withdrawn</li> <li>◆ Trouble sleeping, physical illness and constant fatigue</li> </ul>

## Web-accessible Information Working Group

Small business operators are often reluctant to seek help and find it difficult to navigate available support and services.

### The discoveries

1. There is a lot of mental health support out there, but small business owners are not aware of services available to them
2. Small business operators more often need help with their business. Good business health support good mental health
3. Small business operators experience scepticism and stigma about seeking help – especially for mental health.

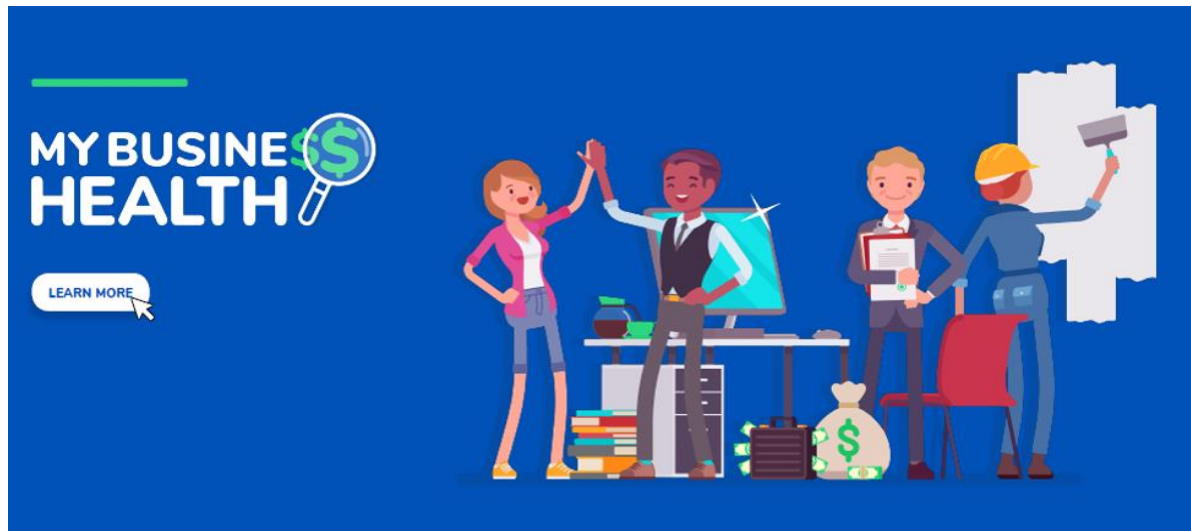
### The aims

The aims of the Web-accessible Information working group were:

- Need to integrate business health and mental health support
- Connect with those who are not likely to reach out for mental health support
- Provide small business operators easy linkages to existing resources
- Attach to an existing website that small business operators are already using.

## The product

1. Development of a website that focuses on business health with referral for mental health
2. User testing of concepts and content has taken place, and final review of page is underway
3. Next step is to launch on ASBFEO's website and promote.



The content on My Business Health will be divided into four categories:

1. Cash Flow
2. People Power
3. Business Toolbox
4. Recharge and Reach Out.

## Forward work plan

The outcomes of this report have been incorporated into our forward work plan for small business mental health:

- Launch and promote My Business Health Portal
- Develop and distribute Guiding Principle Toolkit
- Include Language sets in Guiding Principle Toolkit
- Develop Wellbeing in Business toolkit and Wellness is good for business campaign.

# Thank you to everyone who has been involved.

Australian Finance Industry Association  
Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman  
Australian Taxation Office  
Beyond Blue  
Catalysr  
Council of Small Business Australia  
Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business  
Entertainment Assist  
Everymind  
Institute of Public Accountants  
Julie Muir Celebrancy  
New Perspectives Business Coaching  
NSW Business Chamber  
Office of the NSW Small Business Commissioner  
Pracademia  
Precision Taxation Accounting & Management  
Safe Work Australia  
TT Architecture  
University of Queensland  
Victorian Small Business Commissioner